The Quantum Particle Of Love

by IllusiveWritings

Summary

Fix-It for Wonder Woman (2017). Even heroes have breakfast. And they tell stories. Sometimes they cry. And then someone tries to fix mistakes.

Notes

Well, well, well. With a little hint from a friend, who was so kind to also make the cover art for this story - the static thing was spot on - here's a way to bring back Steve, in a way that sort of makes sense in the DC Comics universe. Set after the Justice League movie, it acts like a sort of extended post-credit scene. I kept the details about what could happen in JL intentionally vague, since up to now we don't know much about what will happen. Also, this story is not betaed and I'm not, I repeat, I'm not a native English speaker. Please be kind, I know I make mistakes, but English is not my first language. I try my best though. Many thanks for Shipsnthenight for the inspiration and the cover art

By the way, Wonder Woman was awesome!

Here, enjoy.
"You know Master Bruce, if you had told me we'd have guests this morning, I would have prepared myself to welcome them."

Alfred's scolding tone didn't fall to deaf ears, though the four heroes gathered around the table in the Manor's kitchen didn't seem inclined to reply to the butler's sarcasm. He took a quick peek at the group and shook his head, trying to hide the sardonic smile curving his lips.

Bruce, cowl-less and gloves forgotten God's knew where, was sagged in the chair holding a mug of steaming coffee, his hair wet with sweat flopped on his forehead. Arthur sat on the chair straddling it, arms crossed over its back, eyes circled with dark shadows and beard and long hair all messed up with rubble from the fight sticking out of his mane. Barry didn't seem to be even marginally affected by the gruesome battle they had just endured, his suit didn't have a single scratch while theirs were torn and dented. Diana, like the true princess she was, was more composed, but she was just as tired as they were. She had fought nail and teeth and she had been the main reason they hadn't all lost their lives, even with Superman's recent return from the world of the dead.

"Uh, silence. I guess I should have expected it. Should I keep the coffee flowing, while I fix you something to eat?"

"Thanks, Alfred," she replied with a warm smile. "It would be great."

He nodded. "The guestrooms are all ready to be occupied, in case you prefer to sleep here, rather than return to your homes. This night was awful, you deserve some rest. By the way, may I ask where Mister Kent is? And Mister Stone?"

"Vic disappeared," said Barry. "He mentioned something about checking on some family, you know, because of the damage. Superman though, I have no idea."

"He went home to Lois," added Bruce. "He spent a long while in the realm of the dead, I assume he preferred to see the woman he loves more than a bunch of tired, dirty, sweaty superheroes."

"Hey, I'd love to see my wife too, but I didn't want to dump you like that, wouldn't be polite," Arthur spoke for the first time after a long while. "You're a bunch of funny guys and gal, I like you!"

"Feeling's mutual, Arthur," replied Diana.

"Sorry to interrupt, I hope chocolate chip pancakes will do, for now. You must be starving, I have enough for bacon and eggs for all of you, maybe I can fix you some waffles too," stated Alfred as he set the plates, then he placed a fresh pot of coffee, sugar and creamer in the center of the table.

"Pancakes will be great, Alfred. Don't fret too much."

"Oh Master Bruce, preparing breakfast doesn't make me fret. Repairing the Batmobile after you wreck it does, though."

Everyone in the room laughed, softly.

"Hey, now that I think of it… I have a girlfriend, Vic has family. Superman has a girlfriend and you Arthur are actually married to the Queen of Atlantis, right… but you two?" he asked looking between Bruce and Diana. "What about you?"
"Bruce Wayne has a list of exes long enough to run around the Equator line, Mister Allen," Alfred answered instead of Batman. "There was a girl, a long time ago, but it didn't work out. Too bad, she was smart, beautiful…"

"And the daughter of a mass murdering ecoterrorist. It would have never worked out."

Alfred sighed. "Yes sir, I know sir. But let me tell you, that woman had the gall to keep up with the Batman and the sass to keep up with Bruce Wayne. You two made a great pair. What about you, Miss Prince? Anyone special in your life?"

She sighed and a sudden, invisible weight made her shoulders sag. "Yes, there was someone, a long time ago."

"He's not in the scene anymore?" asked Arthur as he mixed his coffee and the creamer.

She shrugged her shoulders and wrapped her fingers around her own mug, as if to draw courage from it. "No he's… it's a long story, boring even. You don't want to hear it."

"Try us," said Bruce. "Hey, I'm the king of broodiness, but I learned from my mistakes. I can listen. And I'm too tired to sleep anyway. With Barry and Arthur's permission, I think you can fire away."

Then Alfred came and set a huge pile of pancakes beside the now empty coffee pot, before he retrieved it to prepare some more. "Go on Miss Prince. They're like children during recess, if you don't tell them, they'll pester you until you do. Or snap their necks."

Again, she sighed. "Sometimes I miss Themyscira." She traced the brim of the mug with her finger, then gently tapped her closed fist on the table. "Well, so be it. Time to explain where I come from."

They let her speak, as they chewed on the lush breakfast Alfred was serving them, and she paused only when she ate a bite or drank some coffee. A couple of times, towards the end, her voice broke with bottled up emotion, as she relieved her memories of her first steps as Wonder Woman, as people called her.

And when she got to the part where Steve boarded the plane, well, everyone in the room stood still as she recounted the explosion that tore the sky and described what she called the worst pain you can feel, but not in your body, in your heart, as if someone had ripped your very soul apart, like a piece of paper, and threw it in the trash can, like it meant nothing to anyone.

Barry felt horribly, for having brought up the subject. Bruce deflected the question, but Diana was honest with them, in a way that made him hurt for her. Even after nearly a century, she still hurt for Steve Trevor, the american spy that literally crashed in her home, brought havoc and wreck there and then proceeded to steal her from the place she had grown up in, only to show her the worst of the world right before he had died, saving the day, but leaving her heartbroken. A heartbreak that still she didn't seem to be able to fix.

Tears fell freely from her eyes and her shoulders shook with the effort of containing the hiccups.

"You know what's worse?" she added after a long moment of silence. "That I never had the chance to say goodbye. I couldn't hear, the explosion had deafened me, and my last words to him were… they weren't kind. I left him hanging, we had just argued… twice, over something I had been wrong about. And here I am, knowing that he died unaware of my feelings and… well, after an argument. Makes it even worse."

"I'm sorry Diana…" said Barry, rubbing her naked shoulder in sympathy. God, he really felt like he had murdered Steve again, making her relive it just to satisfy their curiosity. "I shouldn't have asked."
"God, that's…" Arthur's voice was gruff, but broken. "That's tough."

"Yeah..." murmured Bruce. "Now I understand why that photo meant so much to you."

"What photo?" asked Barry.

Out of nothing, a sleek black tablet appeared in Alfred's hands. He tapped on the screen a couple of times and then he handed him the device. "This photo," he explained. "Master Bruce found it last year, before the Doomsday incident, in Lex Luthor's personal files. Along with files about all the metahumans he had gathered."

As grainy as it was, Barry could clearly see Diana and four men around her. One looked like a First Nations man, big and burly. Then there was a shorter guy with a scoped rifle and a kilt, probably a Scot from the British army. A shorter guy with dark skin and a thin, well kept beard and a fez. Then, right by her side, there was a young tall man, his eyes were bright despite the grainy quality of the photo and they seemed to pierce through the screen. And Diana... well, she looked badass then as she had looked the night before.

"That him?" he turned the tablet towards her and pointed at the man beside her.

She nodded. "Yes, that's him. Captain Steve Trevor."

"And he died on November 6th, 1918?" he asked.

Closing her eyes, she shook her head. "Yes. Yes he did. Thanks for the bluntness, anyway."

Barry gave a good look to the photo again, then grunted. "Yeah, I can make it. Excuse me one second..."

The whole room was submerged in white statics and Barry disappeared. Everyone froze in their place, as the room was filled with an eerie silence broken only by the crackling of the residual electricity left by Barry's faster-than-light movements.

"Where the fuck did he go?" asked Arthur.

"No, fucking, idea!" exclaimed Bruce. "What the fuck did he run outside the house through the walls?"

He seemed flabbergasted, there was no other word to describe him.

"Seems like it, Master Bruce."

A second later, a larger, brighter electric charge exploded in front of them. When their eyes adjusted to the sudden blinding light, they saw Barry standing just inside the kitchen, carrying a man dressed in a heavy grey jumpsuit with fur-lined collar, a grey military uniform beneath that and a still smoking gun in his right extended hand.

"This your boy?"

Only then, the man Barry was carrying seemed to register the sudden change of setting. He blinked, once, twice, and then he turned his head and looked at the group in front of him. "What the fuck..." he screamed, suddenly jumping on his feet. "Where am I?"

"Better question is when, my friend," answered Barry. "Welcome to 2017!"

"But... the plane... the poison... I should be dead and..." he stopped in his rambling when he
finally noticed a very distressed, speechless Diana Prince sitting just feet away from him, mouth open in total disbelief and shock. "Diana?"

She startled in her seat. "Steve? But…” She stood up and walked towards him. Her hands instantly grabbed the open lapels of his jumpsuit, touched his chest, his neck, ran her fingers through his messy hair, along his stubbly cheek. "How? You should…"

"Be dead? Yeah, I know! What the fuck happened?"

"I don't know…” she declared. "And I don't fucking care!" And she kissed him. Better, she climbed on him and he dropped the gun to the floor to wrap his arms around her and keep her close to him. Talk about enthusiasm.

Barry sat in his chair again, smiling. "Woof, caught him just in time."

Arthur threw him a mean look. "Is this the guy she was talking about earlier?"

"Considering the length of her tongue down his throat, I guess he is!" added Bruce, and that prompted a quick slap on his shoulder from Alfred. "What? It's true!"

"Please Master Bruce I raised you better than this. You don't go throwing lewd comments about two long lost lovers that have just been reunited. Mister Allen, I suppose your talent of travelling through time is due to your ability of making the quantum particles of your body vibrate at a certain frequency, am I right?"

"That and a knack for keeping the vibration constant for a certain amount of cycles before… oh man, it's complicated. But yes, I can travel through time. It's tiring and it's not an exact science, but I can. I actually had to go back and forth a couple of times before I got the timing right. First time I got there too early, he hadn't boarded the plane yet. Second time, it had already exploded and… guys… you don't know how bad it was to hear her scream her lungs out. No… just… no. Third time's the charm and I grabbed him just a moment after he had shot the bullet that made the plane blow. And here we are.” He threw a quick look at Diana and Steve, now locked in the a tight hug, tears of joy streaming both their faces, still unable to believe they were finally together. Chuckling, he smiled again. "There, look at that! The quantum particle of love."

The four men lacked words to describe the scene in front of them. They were locked in their little world, as if a bubble surrounded them, and nothing else mattered anymore.

"Good thing quantum particles never change, they only aggregate together, into something bigger. Stronger," said Alfred.

"And that creates us all," added Bruce.

"Should I bring him some clean clothes from your wardrobe, Master Bruce? He looks about your size, if only a little shorter."

"That would be a great idea. While you're at it, show them to a room. One very far from mine, thank you."
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Things start settling down

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I still can’t believe you’re here. For real.”

The room was filled with the glowing light of the early afternoon, and Steve, baffled beyond belief himself, couldn’t help but notice how the bright light made the contrast between the stark white sheets and her bronze skin even more prominent. “Don’t tell me, a few hours ago I was ready to die and now… what year is it again?”

“2017. November. We’re just outside Gotham City.”

“And those guys downstairs were your friends?”

Diana raised her head from his chest and held herself up on her elbow. “Well, yes. Friends and colleagues. The guy that brought you back is Barry Allen, also known as The Flash. The big man with long hair and beard is Arthur Curry, King of Atlantis and also called Aquaman. The man that gave you coffee and brought us here is Alfred Pennyworth, he’s the butler of the last one, with the black and gray costume. He’s Bruce Wayne, also known as Batman.”

“Wait, Bruce Wayne of the Wayne family?”

She shrugged. “I guess so. Why?”

“Nothing… I think I knew of his… grandfather I guess. And you all do… what? You looked pretty battered.”

She chuckled then set her head back on his chest, wrapping her arm tight around his torso. Ever since Barry had reappeared in Bruce’s kitchen, in a literal flash of static energy and electric lights, she had barely managed to take her hands off him just to leave him room and time to get his clothes off before they showered. It seemed like she feared he would disappear, if she stopped touching him.

“It’s nothing, really. Anyway, yes we sort of work together. You see… When I killed Ares, things didn’t get better. The last one hundred years were torn by wars even worse than what you saw. Then things from other worlds came to Earth and… that’s what we do. We protect people, and they call us superheroes.”

“And I thought I was going to end the war,” he murmured.

“Oh but you did! The armistice was signed not a week after…” She stumbled a little bit over the words. “After you died. Well, after the plane exploded now, because it’s quite clear to me that you didn’t die!”

“I guess not.” He smiled and ran his fingers through her hair. “So, they call you Wonder Woman
“Yes. It was actually a friend that gave me that name, last year after I... came out of retirement. Things were bad, last year. Not that they weren’t these last few days but... last year it was worse. One of us died.”

“Sorry to hear. Was he a friend?”

“Not exactly. He was someone I admired from afar, for a while. Then things got really, really bad and to stop a creature from his world from destroying Metropolis and Gotham alike, he sacrificed himself to save us all. I tried to... to help him but...”

“He had to do it on his own. Yes, I know the feeling. All too well.”

Diana stretched against his side and groaned. “He didn’t stay dead for long. He’s a resilient alien. We thought we had buried him for good, and he popped up alive. He’s got a lot of explaining to do, but he disappeared before we could ask questions. Bruce thinks he’s home with his fiancée.”

He sneaked an arm behind her back and held her tight. “Well, coming from a similar experience, I can’t say I blame him.” He kissed the crown of her head and lost himself in the sweet scent of her hair. “What now?”

“Now... I don’t know? I mean... you’re here now and that means, Gods that means... What does that mean? I haven’t thought about it.”

“That we have more time, and it’s more than I could have ever wished for.”

He cupped her cheek and kissed her, like the first time in that room above the tavern in Veld, after that crazy, marvelous, terrifying day where she had singlehandedly held the fire of the whole German line and helped them cross No Man’s Land by sheer force of will, determination and selflessness. God, it felt so good... she felt so good, naked and warm against his body, real and alive, not one last thought crossing his mind before he pulled the trigger, but the most... wonderful woman on the planet.

And of course, when things were about to get heated once again, someone knocked on the door. Diana startled back away from him. “Yes?”

“Miss Prince, Captain Trevor,” called Alfred. “Master Bruce has come down, wants to know if he can do something to help you insert Captain Trevor in this time.”

Diana shook her head, then turned around and hurried out of bed. Swift and graceful, she grabbed the bathroom Alfred had gently provided earlier that morning, secured it around her and opened the door. “You mean documents and such?” she asked, bluntly.

“Exactly, Miss Prince. With what happened in the past few days, it’s highly probable that the government will tighten security measures. He can’t go anywhere without valid means of identification.”

She gave him a curt nod. “Yes, you’re right. Let us get dressed, we’ll be down in a minute.”

“Of course, Miss Prince. Oh, by the way. I was taking a look at the Batmobile to see if it was salvageable and I found this. You have a lot of missed calls from work.” He handed her a sleek rectangular object. She seemed to press a button and it suddenly lit up in her hand.
“Thank you again. Give us a moment.”

“Good. Join him in the kitchen, I’ll be there to prepare lunch in fifteen minutes or so.”

When the butler left, she closed the door behind her and looked down at that thing. “What’s that?” he asked.

“This?” She showed him the device. “This my dear, is a phone.”

“What?” He was astonished. “So small? And wireless?”

“Oh yes, they have been around for more than twenty years. But this one makes so much more than just phone calls!” The phone emitted a bright light and he heard a strange click. “Here, look.”

She handed him that thing and it showed him… him! Right then, in the bed, head propped on the pillow and messy hair. “Wait, is this…”

“A photograph. Yes, even photos have evolved. You don’t have to wait minutes to take them and you can see immediately.”

He gave that thing back as she sat on the bed. “I have some catching up to do.”

The smile that bloomed on her face made his heart burst with happiness. “Wait until you see a computer! No, better, wait until you see the magical world of the internet!”

“Alright, that sounds like a bad word.”

She threw him a pair of jeans from the neat pile of clothes set on a chair beside the bed. “Get dressed, I’ll teach you.” She gave him a quick peck on his lips. “Like you taught me.”

Earlier that morning, Steve was so stunned by everything that had just happened that he hadn’t really noticed where he was, but now as they headed towards the kitchen he took a moment to look around. Wayne Manor, that was how Diana had called the place, looked like a place filled with history, a place that had been built around his own time and hadn’t been changed too much through the years. “Wow, this place is huge!”

“You should see the space beneath. Bruce’s a little bit of a maniac, when it comes to the vigilante thing, he has a gadget for everything. And those take a lot of room.”

“How about you?”

“Oh, I don’t need that much space. Lasso, shield, sword and armor. Nothing else.”

“No, I mean… where do you live?”

“Paris, most of the time. I have an apartment in Metropolis too, though.”

“Paris?” he asked her, baffled. “Wow! You got a job there or something?”

“Yes,” she replied, candid as she opened the door. “I’m one of the curators at the Louvre.”

She didn’t give him the time to react that they entered in the kitchen and found Bruce sitting at the table, a glass of water in his hand and what looked like Diana’s phone in the other. “Hey, good afternoon,” he exclaimed when he saw them. “Slept well?”
Diana chuckled, because his tone didn’t really imply they had slept. “Yes, Bruce. You?”

“Like a rock. Arthur and Barry have gone home, but they say hi. Please, sit down.”

Steve felt completely out of place, like the proverbial fish out of water. That room was so different, with all the sleek, shiny furniture so different from anything he was used to consider a kitchen. Even the table and the chairs, they were… strange. Suddenly he had a very good idea of how Diana had felt, when he had brought her to London.

“So…” the man extended his hand. “Nice to meet you, Steve. I’m Bruce Wayne and welcome to the twenty first century.”

“Steve Trevor. And thank you.”

They sat down and Bruce resumed speaking. “Now, pleasantries done, I suppose Diana told you about our little… group and what we do.”

“Not much, but enough to understand that you guys are way out of my league. I understand you are a bunch of people with extraordinary abilities and you do extraordinary things.”

Bruce made a puzzled face and looked at Diana. “Never heard anyone accept anything like it this fast.”

She shrugged. “He didn’t question anything about an island full of immortal women, I guess he’s pretty open minded.”

“Do I need to remind you that up to eight hours ago I thought I was going to die in an explosion and now I’ve traveled ahead of time, landing almost a century later than the last time I saw you?” He pointed at Diana. “Aliens looking like humans? Extraordinary people with extraordinary powers? Pffff, please. Did she tell you when she crossed No Man’s Land, in Belgium? Hell, I remember it as if it was yesterday.” He paused. “Wait, it was yesterday!”

“Sure, if you don’t count the ninety nine years in between for her, yes, it was. Anyway, she told us, but I guess she was downplaying it a bit. She tends to be overly modest, about what she’s capable of doing. I owe her my life, she saved me on multiple accounts, in the past year.”

“Know the feeling, all too well.”

“Oh come on boys, you’re talking like I’m not even here!”

Alfred burst in the room right in that moment. “Oh Miss Prince, you should hear how Master Bruce talks about you when you’re not present! It’s like everything you touch turns into gold, like Earth turns because you say so. Diana did this, Diana did that, Diana’s the best hand to hand fighter I’ve ever seen, I wouldn’t want to go against her for all the money in the world … if I didn’t know better, I’d say he has a crush on you!”

She laughed, that sincere laughter that made his heart swell with love. “Come on Alfred, you can’t be serious!”

“I am. Dead serious. Anyway, is pasta alright for everyone?”

A couple of hours later, Bruce had pulled enough strings to have all of Steve’s bureaucratic needs settled and a pony express delivered a full set of brand new documents right at the Manor door. Alfred was kind enough to drive them to Diana’s apartment and at the last minute, Bruce decided to
join them as he wanted to see how the salvage operation after the past few days’ disaster were going.

Half of the car ride was spent with Steve stuck in a nearly constant state of stupor as he witnessed so many things that were alien to him. From the massive growth of the city in the past century to the technological advancements that were unthinkable in his time, Steve was like a child in a candy shop, wide eyed and mouth gaping as he took it all in.

Diana had a hard time trying to keep a straight face, because now she understood how it was for him, dealing with her, grown stuck in a world that lived like it was still 1000 BC, suddenly thrown in the Man’s World during wartime.

It was now her time to struggle with explanations, especially when it came to how women dressed. His face was as red as a tomato.

Then, the other half of the ride, as they got closer to Metropolis and the destruction that had wrecked a city that still had to recover from Doomsday last year, struck him like a kick in the balls. He suddenly became very somber, quiet, still wide-eyed but not in childlike fashion, more like a soldier witnessing the destruction of a battle he had just missed, like he had arrived too late.

“What happened?”

“A shitton of crap,” said Bruce. “Aliens have started falling from the sky, and they’re bad. That’s what happened.”

“I’ll explain better, just… don’t worry about it now. There’s not much we can do about this. Bruce, are you going out tonight?”

He nodded. “Yes, I’m going to keep an eye out for scavengers and anyone desperate enough to attack rescuers and firefighters, in case anything like this happens. Stay home and rest, they did a number on you yesterday.”

“You sure?” she asked, just as Steve asked her what had happened to her.

“It’s nothing Steve, I’m fine.”

“Diana, please, I thought you had broke your back. I had it easy, you stay home. It’s an order.”

Reluctantly, she nodded. Yes, she was a little sore here and there, but nothing that could keep her from going to work and help with clearing rubble and stuff. Bruce was cutting her some slack because of Steve and while she understood the intent, she didn’t exactly agree with it. She took a quick look at him and saw the spark of worry in his eyes, so she grasped his hand and held it tightly in hers. “Really, I’m fine Steve. Just a little sore. Nothing that a good, full night of sleep can’t cure.”

“That is an excellent idea Miss Prince,” added Alfred. “And here we are.” He parked the car right in front of her apartment building.

“Thanks Alfred. Bruce, call if you need help. I mean it.”

“No worry about me, I can handle myself. Steve on the other hand, he’s going through some major readjustments. Help him. I’ll be fine.”

Steve and Diana stepped off the car, but before they could head upstairs to her apartment, Bruce stopped them for one last thing. “Could you check in with Lois? She wrote a quick piece on today’s Planet, but I’d like to see if Clark made it back safe and sound.”
“Why don’t you do it yourself?”

“Eh, since last year, she doesn’t exactly like me. She’ll be more inclined to listen to you, I’m sure of it. Say hi from me!”

Then Alfred speeded away, and they were left alone on the curb. “Come, I need to change and then we have to get you some clothes.”

He nodded. “Seems a little bit of a deja vù.”

She elbowed him in the ribs then pushed the call button of the elevator. “Yes, only difference is that men’s fashion hasn’t changed that radically. Pants, shirts, jackets… it’s all there. Our clothes? Now they’re comfortable!”

He shrugged. “Neat.”

She was fumbling with her phone when they arrived at the correct floor. She didn’t even have a key for her apartment, she just swiped some kind of card near a black box close to the door and it unlocked. “Make yourself comfortable, I’m just going to make this call, get changed, then we can go. Bruce’s clothes don’t really fit you so well.”

He looked down at the saggy ends of his jeans. “Yeah, he’s taller than me.”

With a quick kiss on his cheek, she left him at his own devices as she made her way towards her bedroom. Lois picked up quickly. “Hey Diana, everything alright?”

She punched the loudspeaker button on and placed the phone on the bed. For a brief moment, she thought about the very first phone call she had ever witnessed. “Hi Lois, yes, everything’s fine. I just wanted to check on you,” she lied. Tried to, at least.

The journalist laughed on the other side of the line. “You sure you didn’t want to check on Clark too?”

She sighed. “Yes, that too.” She heard him talk in the background. “I guess he’s fine.”

“Well, finer than the last time I saw him. Don’t worry, tell Bruce we’re okay.”

Diana opened her wardrobe and pulled the closest pieces of clothing she could find which colors wouldn’t clash. “Will do. Uhm… Lois, can I steal you for a night, next week? Just, quick drinks. Nothing fancy.”

“Yeah, sure. You’re staying in Metropolis that long?”

“Let’s say I have… reasons to stay. At least a while longer.”

Lois paused for a moment. “Oh. Alright. You didn’t hook up with Bruce in a moment of desperation, did you?”

Diana was halfway through pulling up a pair of skin tight jeans and she laughed so hard she fell on the bed. “No, please… No,” she gasped. “As much as I admire him, he’s not my type. Too serious for my tastes. Anyway, call me when you know you’re free.”

“Sure thing. Hav… Clark what are you doing?” she shrieked. Diana heard some rustling on the line, before Clark’s deep voice thundered through the loudspeaker. “Sorry Wonder Woman, this reporter’s gotta go!”
The call was closed just as she donned a white shirt over the black bra. She was buttoning it quickly when she noticed Steve watching her from the doorway. It took her a moment to realize she wasn’t hallucinating, like all the times it had happened in the previous ninety nine years.

“Even this Amazon has got to go,” he said, calm.

She quickly brushed her hair and tied them in a quick but neat ponytail. “Yes. And the time traveling spy will come with her. Just let me get my coat and purse, time to get you a whole wardrobe.”

Chapter End Notes

Guess what? This story just got out of my control, as usual. It's not a two-shot. It's more. Still don't know how long, but more than two chapters.
"Diana, are you sure this is what people wear nowadays?"

Steve walked out of the changing room, dressed in a pretty tame pair of jeans, a blue shirt and a casual jacket, but he looked like he felt like those clothes weighed a ton over his shoulders.

"Yes, and you look great!"

"Really?" he twirled in front of the full frame mirror. "I don't know… it feels…"

"Strange? How do you think I felt when Etta made me try all those clothes back in 1918?"

He stopped, looked down at his current attire, and shrugged. "Well, I was going to say they feel lighter than what I was used to, but yes, I think I now see your point. Do we need more? I mean, I think I have enough clothes for a lifetime!"

Diana looked at the pile of clothes they had decided they liked and that they would buy in that particular store, then thought of the already consistent amount of clothing they had already purchased and that was now stored in the trunk of the car she had rented and nodded. "Yes, I guess you have. Come on, let's pay and head home."

"Good idea. I'm kind of hungry, you know." He took off the new jacket and handed it back to her, before moving to the changing room and proceeding to divest himself so they could pay for the items.

"Want to eat something before we had to the apartment?" she inquired.

"You think there's a restaurant open after the mess of the past few days?"

"Uhm," she was thoughtful for a moment. "Maybe take out places. Those seems to be always open."

Of course, for the umptenth time that day, Steve felt like the fish out of water, and she could read it in his eyes as he unbuttoned the shirt. "Don't worry, you'll get there. It took me a good while to get used to your time, but you'll get there. Believe me, been there done that."

"Yeah, well… it's kind of a shock, you know?"

She chuckled. "Don't I know it?"

They ended up on the couch in the living room with thai take out and beer, and Steve struggling with the chopsticks, while he enjoyed the new tastes he was trying. Only halfway through, Diana had the idea of turning on the TV screen in front of them and watch the news. Steve nearly jumped out of his skin. "What the hell is that?"

"Calm down, it's like a movie theater, only smaller, and in color. It's called television. It was a pretty big deal, back when it came out."

He stood, carton in one hand and chopsticks in the other, and walked closer to the flat screen. "It's incredible! Movies were all black and white and so grainy… Look at this, it's so vibrant, like I'm seeing this with my own eyes! But… how does it work?"

"It's not different from a radio. They discovered a method to transmit images together with audio and here we are."
"Wow!" he exclaimed. "It's amazing!"

"It's kind of dull, after the novelty wears off. There's a lot of trash going on, quality is often considered less than quantity. It's quite useful for the news though. You wanted to know what happened yesterday, right?"

"You mean, this is what happened yesterday?" he asked, as shaky images of the battle that had occurred just twenty-four hours before, probably short videos taken with mobile phones, flashed on the screen in front of him. He visibly shivered, when they showed a small segment of a video of herself being hurled yards and yards away before abruptly stopping her flight against a concrete building, crashing through the wall. That had hurt, and she was still sore from that ruinous fall.

"That hurt."

"You say it like it's the most normal thing in the world!"

She shrugged her shoulders. "It doesn't happen so often, but it happens."

Steve shuddered, then walked back to the couch and sat beside her. "Shit! You really are superheroes!"

Again, she shrugged. "Super… maybe. Hero? The real heroes are out there helping clearing the rubble we leave in our wake. You should have seen…" she paused, closed her eyes and let her head fall on the back of the couch. "You should have seen last year."

He placed the container and chopsticks on the coffee table in front of them and wrapped her shoulders with his arm, pulling her close to him. She snuggled closer to him and reveled in the warmth radiating from his body through the fabric of the brand new shirt he was wearing. "Why don't you show me?" he asked, a soft whisper in her ear.

With a groan, she grabbed the remote and opened the YouTube app from the smart TV control panel, then searched one single keyword: Doomsday. There were tons of videos to choose from, so she just picked one of the longest from the first few on the list, then pressed Enter. As the images moved on the flat screen, she felt his breath hitch multiple times. It was a collection of many videos, both amateur and professional, that showed the fight against Doomsday from different perspectives and angles, but all exhibited the magnitude of the damage done to the docks of Metropolis and the violence of that alien creature made by Lex Luthor unleashed against the three of them.

"So… that's what happened?" he asked, when the video reached its end.

"Just the end. This was the peak of a struggle that involved Bruce completely misunderstanding Clark's intentions and nature, his attempt to kill him and a third person, a certain Lex Luthor, exploiting this rivalry to achieve his personal goals. And there we were, fighting a monster that fed on energy, which made him stronger and stronger."

"Shit… what did you do?"

She found another video, one she knew showed, from far away, the way they had managed to kill Doomsday, with a coordinated attack that, unfortunately, led to Clark's death. At least they had managed to stop the Kryptonian monstrosity in front of them.

"How many dead?"

"No more than a couple hundreds, if you include the villagers in Africa Luthor had murdered to deliberately start a war against Superman," she explained. "Mostly collateral damage, mercenaries
hired by Luthor to push forward his plan."

He took a deep breath. "I don't like this guy."

"Me either. He's a slimy psychopath, with a tendency to manipulate people and play cruel pranks on them. He blew up the Capitol building, just because he wanted Superman gone."

"Alright, I suddenly feel like this guy is worse than Ludendorff."

She nodded. "He is. But Bruce… Better, his alter ego, Batman, had him imprisoned. He's out of the way."

"People like that are better off dead," he stated, bluntly.

Diana sighed. "I wholeheartedly agree. But Bruce… he once had a no-kill rule. He abandoned it for a while, but following Clark's death, he went back to the old ways. I told him I had no qualms with killing him, but he wouldn't let me."

"Aside from Ludendorff and Ares have you killed anyone else, in the past ninety nine years?"

"No," she murmured. "Though some people probably deserved it more than they deserved mercy. After Ares, I promised myself I would have never killed anyone else, if I could avoid it, that I would avoid violence at all costs, if I could. I was tempted, multiple times, but always managed to avoid it. Even during World War Two, I… But this time, I have never seen anyone as bloodthirsty, ruthless and devoid of morals as him. On Earth at least."

Doom and gloom, as always it seemed like their relationship was destined to be on the dark and twisty side.

"Alright, enough of that." With a grunt that sounded like a chuckle, Steve pulled her until they were both lying on the couch, wrapped in each other's arms. "We had funny movies in 1918. I'm pretty sure you still have them. Come on, find one with that… thing of yours, show me the funniest movie you can think of. I was planning to make love to you all night long, but all this talking about death and psychos is making my libido drop."

Diana laughed and he soon followed. Gods, it felt so good, laughing again. Better, having a reason to laugh again! Not that she had spent the past ninety nine years in a constant state of grieving, but his death had cast a very dark shadow over her immortal life that had dimmed every chance of happiness she had ever had. Now, everything was different. There was no war to end all wars, no alien threat hanging over them, like the Sword Of Damocles from the myths. Sure, considering her line of work, something would pop up sooner or later, but in the immediate future, it was just them. And her quest to recover as many ancient artifacts as she could.

Gods, she had to call work too. If she still had a job.

Anyway, she did as he said. For once, Some Like It Hot never failed to make her laugh. The mix of good music, great actors and a stellar screenplay was a killer combination for bad mood. Also, being black and white and set in an period closer to Steve's own time, though six years after his death, it made it easier for him to enjoy it.

"Well don't you understand? I'm a man!"

"Oh, nobody's perfect!"
With that last line, they almost fell from the couch as they laughed, so hard their ribs hurt. A heap of tangled limbs, they were so entertained by the old classic that when the last, legendary line rolled in, they burst in such a boisterous and sincere laugh that they shook and convulsed on the couch, to the point that they nearly fell, literally, like the figure of speech. They only managed to stop the fall when Diana, quick to react, placed a hand on the floor and kept them both up.

"God!" he sighed. "Are movies all so funny in this century?"

"Well, this was released in 1959, it's not exactly this century, but there are both old and new movies that are this funny. This was just the first one that popped up in my mind."

"Hell, I've got a lot to catch up with. How about music? How has it changed?"

"A lot! Listen, first thing in the morning, I'll teach you how to use a computer, and a tablet. That way, you can do all the research you want to do. The moment you learn how to use Netflix, Spotify and Wikipedia, you're going learn so much faster! I'll be here of course, but as soon as you get the hang of nowadays technology, you'll be halfway through adapting to the twenty-first century."

"If you say so..." He pressed his lips on her forehead. "As long as you're with me."

"You're not going to get rid of me so fast, Captain Steve Trevor!"

Much to her surprise, with a swift move, he wrapped his arms around her and stood from the couch, carrying her like she weighed nothing. "And you're not getting rid of me anytime soon, Diana, Daughter of Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons." He then moved towards the bedroom. "By the way, how's your mother?"

"Just fine, I suppose. I haven't seen her in a while." She kissed him. "But enough of my mother, didn't you have plans for tonight?"

He nodded, quite solemnly. "Yes, and I intend to go forth with them."

He reached the bed gently dropped her over the thick duvet that covered it. Her memory showed her flashes of their one night in Veld, images that had haunted her for nearly a century but that now could be recalled as a happy memories, not a regretful memento of all the time they never had.

Time that now was given back to them, in the most fortuitous way.

Gods, she had to thank Barry properly, before she headed back to Paris.

"Hey, everything alright?" he asked her, kneeling on the bed.

"Yes, absolutely, I was just... I was just thinking about Veld."

Steve's eyes suddenly darkened. To him, it had been a couple of days, but for her, it had been decades, and he knew it. Earlier that morning, they had no time to think. When Alfred had led them to the guestroom he had chosen for them, with the adrenaline pumping in their bodies, they had no time to think about their past, and how long or little time had passed and sex had been fast, loud and almost brutal, a life-affirming carnal act of need to possess one another, body and soul, to reconnect after cheating death.

But now... things were catching up with them.

"Want to stop?" he proposed. "You had a rough night and... I can't even imagine how you feel now. For me... it was hours. For you, it was decades, I get it. You grieved my death, while I just thought I
was going to die and while I was certain I would have never stepped off that plane, watching someone die and thinking you’re going to die are not even comparable. Getting used to 2017 is nothing, compared to grieving someone for so long."

Gods, Steve Trevor was and will always be the only one that could read her like an open book.

"No, I don't want to stop. Just… go slow?"

Suddenly, the shadow was lifted from his eyes and a bright smile appeared on his face. "Slow, yes! I like slow! Slow is good!"

Diana smiled herself, then started unbuttoning his shirt. "Then let's go slow."

And slow it was.

No longer hindered by the complicated system of buckles and straps of her armor, which made him fumble a lot that night in Veld, Steve took his time divesting her, taking each article of clothing she wore off, one by one, his lips always on hers in a languid kiss that had her swoon and feel light-headed.

As his hands roamed over her skin, his palms calloused by hours handling planes and firearms made, quite literally, in another century, it felt like no time had passed, at all. Alright, they had sex just hours before, multiple times, but not like this. Like that night in Veld, Steve was worshipping her as the goddess he didn't know she was, sweet and dedicated, but rough when he needed to be. The stark difference between his soft lips on her neck and the scruff of his stubble made her shiver and moan, and he hadn't pulled her jeans off yet!

"Breathe, Diana," he murmured against her sternum, the soft vibration of his voice echoing in her aching lungs. He smiled, as she gasped for air. "Glad I can still make you forget how to breathe."

The very same thing had happened, ninetynine years before, in Belgium.

"No one else could," she tried to say, but it came out more like a moan mixed with a whine, when he finally flipped the button of her jeans open, pulled down the fly, and skimmed them off her hips and down her legs. "Not before, not after."

He chuckled and rested his chin over her hipbone. "I knew about before, but after?"

Trying to muster the best scolding gaze she could, Diana pushed herself up on her elbows and gave him a good stare down. "You were dead. It was ninety nine years for me. Everyone has needs!"

"Hey, I'm not complaining, I'm actually glad you didn't renounce to live because I was dead. I was just curious."

"There will be time later for such curiosity, but right now let's just say that no one ever matched. And you're overdressed."

He gave her a playful bite on her hip. "Greedy… I like that!" Then he finally pulled her jeans off all the way, leaving her with only her underwear on. "You know what also I like? Underclothes have gotten so much skimpier!"

"You should see certain lingerie I have."

He stopped in his tracks, hands on her thighs, fingers hooked over the hem of her knickers, but he didn't move. She noticed a vein pulse in his temple and the tendons in his neck became rigid and
thick as rope, but after a moment, much faster than she could have predicted, he had managed to take off all his clothes and get her naked too. "What happened with going slow?" she murmured.

"I can still go slow," he huffed. "But you made the mistake of mentioning lingerie and if this is normal female underwear, I have a pretty good idea of what lingerie might have become, I just got distracted thinking about how it would look on you."

Diana wrapped one hand behind his neck, her fingers slipping through his soft, blond hair, and pulled him close to her. "It looks great. But it also looks good when I'm not wearing it."

He blushed and she smiled as she imagined what kind of lewd thoughts were going through his mind in that moment. "A matter for another moment, now, let me love you."

Gods, she had missed this. Not just the sex itself, but the intimacy, the closeness, the kinship with someone that meant more than a passing encounter just to blow off some steam. Yes, she had lovers in the past years, more than she could count, sex was always easy to find, but no one ever matched him because she was not in love. She had cared about them, yes, but love? That overwhelming feeling that had brewed in her from the moment she had dragged his unconscious body on the beach had never come back, for anyone.

With Steve he just felt… safe. And loved. There was just something more between them, something she had never found anywhere else, in anyone she had crossed in Man's world, male or female, to the point she had given up. Better alone and serene than in a void relationship with someone you care about but didn't love.

And that was the trick.

Suddenly the soreness from the battle against Steppenwolf was replaced by another, more than welcomed, kind of soreness. And she couldn't be happier about it.

It took them a good while to come down from the high.

"Man, I like slow…" he murmured at some point. "I like harsh, fast and loud, but slow? You can't beat that."

"Admit it, you just like sex."

Steve chuckled. "Guilty as charged, but can I say that I love sex with you and only with you?"

Snuggling closer to him, Diana slapped his chest. "Flatterer."

"Hey, you just said the same thing a moment ago, just different words. Damn, Father Robert would be so disappointed," he mused. "I've given up my soul to the pleasures of the flesh."

"Strange. Where I come from, the pleasures of the flesh are integral part of life, they're cherished and encouraged, once someone has reached maturity. In yours, it was shunned and banned as sinful."

"Never understood that myself, nor I ever abided those rules much in my life, but my parents wanted me to attend Sunday School, I guess it stuck with me in the end. How are things now, on this subject?"

Diana smiled against the skin of his neck. "Much closer to the concept of sexuality I grew up with. Some people are still sticking to your rules though, and they're currently ruling the United States."

Steve tried to suppress a yawn but failed miserably. Weariness was catching up with him too, as the
surge of adrenaline that kept them going finally ended. They were both running on fumes and sleep seemed like the most marvelous thing. "Hell, I'm exhausted."

"Technically, you haven't slept much that night in Veld."

He kissed her forehead. "Neither have you. And you did so much more than me, fighting Ludendorff and then Ares…"

"Steve, you stopped the war!" she exclaimed.

"But I didn't fight against a power-hungry bastard and a god!"

She chuckled. "My half brother."

Beside her, she felt Steve's body go rigid. "Excuse me?"

"My mother… she lied to me. I wasn't sculpted out of clay and brought to life by Zeus, my conception involved more… biological meanings. Zeus is my father. And that made Ares my step brother."

"That's… neat. I think. That makes you… what, exactly?"

"A demigoddess. With half my family feuding each other. But believe it or not, Hephaestus is actually a nice guy. About thirty years ago he got me a nice new set of sword and shield, and tinkered a little with my armor too, to make it more durable. His works are truly on par with the myths."

"Alright Diana, I think this is too much to take in for one day. You'll tell me more tomorrow morning."

"Will you still be here, tomorrow morning?" she asked.

"I don't plan on going anywhere, except the bathroom, if need arises."

"Excellent." She briefly rolled away from him, just long enough to turn off the already subdued light, before she returned back to him. "Good night."

"Good night, Diana."

It was a moment later, bathed in the soft light coming from the city through the window, that it dawned on her that she had the chance to rectify what had caused her so much pain in the past century or so.

"Steve?" she whispered. He was already almost asleep, and he replied with an unintelligible mumble. "I'm sorry."

"For what?" he groaned.

"For being so obtuse. You were trying to help me, to make me understand that the world wasn't black and white as I thought. And I didn't trust you. Had I been more open-minded, maybe things would have gone differently."

He shrugged his shoulders, making her shift a little at his side. "Water under the bridge. Your reasoning made sense, from your point of view. It wasn't wrong, just a little.. Outdated."

She sighed, suddenly relieving ninety nine years of grief. "One more thing."
"Uhm?"

"I love you too."
The light was different. There was something odd about it, it was brighter than what he was used to, it disturbed him way more than what it was supposed to to. Halfway between wakefulness and oblivion, he tried to find a reason why, but his mind was groggy, each thought sticky like maple syrup and thick as tar. What was going on? His body felt rigid, tendons and muscles wound tightly, like violin strings. He was sore all over, like after a battle.

A battle.


“Diana!”

He woke up screaming her name, throat hoarse and panic coursing through his veins like molten fire. His fist were clenched, holding handfuls of soft, white sheets, and the room around him wasn’t familiar. Where the hell was he?

Then he saw her, on the doorway of the room. Her hair was still tousled and she wasn’t wearing much. “Steve!” she panted, walking inside and kneeling on the bed to reach him. “Steve, I’m here. Are you alright?”

Blind and needing the physical contact, to feel her presence real and tangible against his body, he wrapped his arms around her lithe body and held her tightly against his chest. “Yeah, I’m fine just… just a little confused. The last couple of days have been…”

“Hectic?” she prompted.

“More like a complete wreck. For a moment I thought I was… I thought I was dead. Sorry I scared you.”

“It’s alright, Steve. No harm done.” She kissed his temple and held him as tightly as he was holding her. “Come with me, I was making breakfast.”

“Oh…” He sniffled the air. “Wait is that…”

“Coffee, chocolate chip pancakes and croissants from the boulangerie down the block. It’s not that good compared to the real deal in France but… hey, better than nothing!”

“God yes! And… I’m actually starving! Breakfast seems like a great idea.”

Diana let him get dressed - if underclothes were considered being dressed - then led him to the kitchen. Much like the kitchen at Wayne Manor, he didn’t recognize any of the appliances except for the table and the chairs, so he simply sat down and watched as Diana moved swiftly between what looked like a stove and a sleek, chromed… thing that stored food in it.

“What’s that thing?” he asked her.

“That is a fridge. It keeps foods cool so they last longer.”

The idea wasn’t new to him, but it was cutting edge, and expensive, technology when he was alive. “Cool! Quite literally.” She placed a ceramic mug in front of him and poured coffee from a pitcher, then she offered him a small jug of milk and a container full of sugar. “I had no idea you could
cook.”

She gave him a puzzled look. “Of course I can cook! I’m more versed in dishes from the Mediterranean sea but I can cook. I could cook even when we left Themyscira. Once Etta got me up to date with modern technology, it was easy to adapt to modern means of cooking.”

“You stayed with her?”

She nodded. “Not for too long though. I didn’t want to impose. We met regularly though, for years. She got a good job at the British Secret Services after you…” She kept stumbling on words every time she mentioned his death, in the past. He couldn’t help but feel sorry and hurt for her. “After you died.”

“Her children?”

“One died during World War II. Another became a nuclear engineer. They both had children on their own and so on. One of her greatgrandchildren actually works for me in Paris.”

He grabbed one of the croissants from the plate in front of him and took a bite. “Wow! You kept tabs on each of them?”

“I tried. I lost some, but I’m quite sure it wouldn’t be too hard to find any relative right now. I completely lost the Chief after the Armistice was declared. He disappeared and I never managed to track him down. Sameer managed to become a full time actor, a successful one too. Charlie became an instructor and stopped drinking.”

“What about you?” he asked when she finally sat in front of him, placing a plate of neatly piled pancakes on the table between them. “What did you?”

“I studied, I caught up with the times. I found my place in Man’s world. I kept a low profile and I did my part in society, as best as I could.”

“Armor, shield and all?”

Diana ran her fingers through her hair. “When it was required. It didn’t happen so often, but when I was needed, I donned the costume.”

“I see. And now? What do you do for a living?”

It was strange, he was more curious about her day-to-day life rather than all the superheroine status she had got herself, nickname included. He knew what Wonder Woman was capable of doing, but how did the idealistic amazon he had torn away from her life had adjusted to life in the Twentieth Century?

“I told you, I’m one of the curators at the Louvre Museum, in Paris. I’m specialized in artifacts coming from the Middle East and Ancient Greece.”

“Ah, right up your alley then, you grew up with them!” he exclaimed, stirring the coffee in his mug.

“Yeah, well, some colleagues don’t appreciate the way I treat some of the artifacts I get, most of all the weapons. I tend to get lost in memories and wield them around the warehouse.”

The mental image made him laugh, loudly. “I bet you scare them to death.”

She shrugged as she cut through the piled pancakes in her plate and took a bite. “Not to death, but
they tend to look at me like I’m weird or something.”

“Well, if I worked in a museum, I would love to test the things I get in my hands, before putting them in a box for people to see them. It’s like a soldier that doesn’t test the sights of his rifle when he gets a new one!”

Diana nodded. “That’s what I think too! To get a precise dating you need to feel the weapon, the craftsmanship and the quality! Of course I need to test them! I’m not going to behead my colleagues, of course, but let me wield a sword when I get one!”

The earnest in her voice made his heart swell. The wide-eyed, idealistic girl he had met was still there, beneath the stoic, solemn mask she wore when in public. He wasn’t sure if she did it on purpose because that was how society nowadays required women to act, but he had noticed she was extremely posed and elegant, in everything she did. Well, the elegant part had always been there, there was finesse in her movements, an innate grace that disappeared only when she was really upset, but there was something more, something artificial in her too.

It was probably a method of self-defence, like Charlie’s drinking to forget the people he killed or his own smugness in front of the dangers of war.

“God, you’re so beautiful...” he blurted out, completely engrossed in his thoughts that he had forgotten what they were talking about.

“I could say the very same about you,” she replied, softly.

He was smitten. Completely head over heels over her, every minute more that the one before. He’d better make the time they have together worth it, considering that, one day or another, he’ll grow old and he will age, and eventually die, while she’ll live on, like the immortal demigoddess she was.

Heck, that sounded both depressing and amazing at the same time.

“Well, I guess I would look better if I shaved.”

“Not necessarily, but if you want we can always go shopping some more. Yesterday we got the bare necessities, I didn’t think about shaving supplies.”

“Oh, don’t worry. It’s not an immediate need. Come on, tell me more of 2017. What do I need to learn to be considered a functioning member of society?”

Diana was an amazing teacher, patient and caring. She didn’t object when he repeated the same question twice or three times in a row, trying to get the detail right. He tried really hard and by noon, he could at work around household appliances with ease. He discovered that, in the end, things hadn’t changed that much, it was the exterior that had changed. He even had got the hang of using the television. He knew how to use radios, and the buttons of the remote had simply replaced the knobs, it was a matter of pushing rather than twisting.

“Hey, I thought it would be harder!” he said at some point, as he surfed through the different channels on the TV, as he familiarized with the device.

“We haven’t got to high tech stuff yet,” replied Diana, sitting beside him as her fingers ran across the flat screen of her phone. “Give me a moment, I need to call the museum and check in with them. They know I’m in Metropolis, but they don’t know I’m still alive. They must be worried out of their minds.”
Were they worried, last year?"

She nodded, vehemently, and brought the device to her ears. "Out of their minds. I forgot to call them, they thought I was dead." Someone must have picked up on the other side of the line, because she suddenly switched to French. He wasn’t well versed in French as he was in German, but he could understand enough to get part of the conversation. It was very formal and extreme polite, and the voice on the other side sounded really relieved to hear from her.

She pushed her thumb over the device and evidently hung up, as she placed the phone on the coffee table. "Et voilà. Vacation extended for four more weeks. I don’t have to be back until next month. Just enough time for your passport to arrive."

"Nice. I think I can get the hang of it, in a month."

"You’re doing good enough. So, now you’re up to date with kitchen equipment, fridge, dishwasher, toaster are good, microwave needs improvement. Bathroom, you’re set too. We’ll get to laundry when we need to. You seem to handle the TV quite well... ready to tackle a computer?"

That was a completely different matter. The notion that something so small could contain almost all the knowledge of humankind was so alien to him that he couldn’t really believe it, thus her instruction fell to deaf ears. Television, he could understand. As she had put it, it was an evolution of the radio, that transmitted images and sound together, but a computer? That was just too far from his knowledge he couldn’t really believe it.

Diana tried and tried again, to get him to maneuver that tiny slab of... plastic, she had called it, with a glass wall very similar to the television, but the idea just wouldn’t stuck. Everything she did... it made no sense.

"Oh come on, Steve!" she laughed as she watched him struggle with the bare concept. "Think of it as the evolution of a book, only it’s interactive!"

"Diana, come on, you watched the technology grow! This was... dumped on me!" he whined as he stared at the screen in front of him, one hand fisted in his hair and the other that tapped on the keyboard. That, he recognized. It looked a lot like a typewriter, and he was familiar with that thing.

"So let me get this straight. A computer is a device that, through complex mathematical systems, is programmed, to do things?" Diana nodded. "But what can a computer do, exactly?"

"Well, first and foremost, it’s capable of calculating very fast, algebra and stuff like that becomes very easy with a computer, it works on its own. Second, you can type things through the keyboard. You can write a novel, save it and read it on that thing, without printing it. Or you can write a message and send it, like normal mail, only it runs from computer to computer. Without having to actually write it and post it. Then it does so much more than that!"

He grimaced. "Damn, it’s all so complicated."

"Alright, let’s try this way. Don’t think about how it works, think only about what it does. You can use it to find information."

She basically broke it down to the very basics and moving from the very bottom and up, she managed to make him understand what he could do and have him perform some very basic research through the search engine. She also explained that she wouldn’t insist so much about computers if they weren’t so important and their use so widespread those days.

"No, Diana, I understand. It’s just... it’s so different from what I know that... I feel like a fish out of
She wrapped her arm around his shoulders and hugged him tight. “I know. It’s what happened to me when you brought me to London. Not only the technology, but the society too… it was so different from the way I was brought up… a time when women didn’t have a voice, when they existed but weren’t allowed to live their lives the way thought was better for them? How do you think I felt?”

“Disoriented?” he proposed.

“Terrified describes it better. I was just good at hiding it.”

He leaned closer to her and pressed a kiss on her lips. “I’m sorry. I keep forgetting you went through this already.”

“Hey, it gets better. Come on, let’s start all over again. Try a quick research. Whatever you’re curious about.”

He did his best, and after a bit of trial and error, he managed to open the browser. The blinking bar, which Diana called a cursor, was now staring back at him. “What can I research?”

“Whatever you want.”

Groaning, he thought about it for a moment, before coming up with an idea. Slowly, he typed Wonder Woman and pressed enter. In the corner of his vision, he noticed Diana arched an eyebrow, evidently not pleased. “Oh come on, you know I’m curious!”

“Do as you please. Now, move the arrow over the words in blue and tap your finger on the touchpad. Here. This article was written by a friend.”

When he saw the good old fashioned logo of the Daily Planet, unaltered from the times he used to buy the same newspaper, he drew a relieved sigh. Some things hadn’t changed at all. “Lois Lane? Is this the woman you were talking talking on to, yesterday?”

“The one and only.”

He read, slowly. He had to say it wasn’t too bad, reading a newspaper like this. No loose pages falling over and cheap print ink on your hands. “She’s quite generous with her words. She’s describing you like… I don’t know, like I would have described you after Veld.”

“I seriously hope you wouldn’t mention everything about Veld.”

“Oh no, don’t worry. Some details will forever remain for us, and for us only. Alright, I read this, is there anything else?”

She gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. “Just the whole world at your fingertips.”

By the end of the day, Steve had learned a lot more about the amazing world of information technology, most of all its history, about how it all started as a way to automate the process of decrypting messages from Nazi Germany during World War Two. And from there, it was all a matter of opening link after link and learning new things after new things.

At one point, he realized he was laying on the couch, with a tablet - a much simpler version of a computer that looked like a book - that Diana had procured him and the sun was already setting behind the skyscrapers. And Diana was nowhere to be seen.
He set the tablet down on the coffee table and stood. In the distance he heard the sound of running water. He guessed she was probably taking a shower, but the closer he got to the closed door of the bathroom, the stranger the sounds coming from behind it got, until he realized that beneath the noise of the rumbling water, she was crying.

Panic jolted through him and, without thinking, he burst into the room. “Diana!” he called.

She was sitting on the floor of the room, still fully dressed and with her arms wrapped around her legs. She was curled over herself, shaking as she sobbed for whatever reason. “Diana…” He knelt beside her and placed his hands over her trembling shoulders. “Diana, what’s going on?” he asked her, softly. “God, you’re making me worry, is everything alright?”

She gave him a quick, rushed nod. “Yes…” she murmured, through quivering breaths. “Yes, I’m fine, it’s just…”

“Just what? Please Diana… I’ve never seen you like this! Is there anything I can do for you?”

She launched forward into him and wrapped her arms around him. Her grasp on him was incredibly tight, enough to constrict his breathing. “God, Diana…” he gasped as he embraced her. “I’m here, just tell me what to do,” he murmured in her ear. “I’m here, Angel.”

“Don’t go.”

“I’m not going anywhere, Diana.”

“No I mean…” she gasped for air, between the quivering sobs that wracked her. He had seen this, in soldiers coming back from the front. It was shellshock. “Don’t go. Don’t die, please. I can’t stand the thought of losing you again, I…”

“Hey…” he ran his fingers through her long, soft hair and sighed. “Diana, I… I wish I could tell you that I won’t die, ever, but I’m here now, and that’s what matters most. Your friend gave us a second opportunity and I’m grateful for that, but now… I know I will die, some day in the future, but that doesn’t mean we can’t make the best of the time we were gifted.”

“What if it’s not enough?”

With a constricted sigh, Steve sat on the cool, tiled floor and pulled her to him, pressing her ear on his chest so she could hear his beating heart. “We’ll make it count. We’ll get the best life has to offer in this century, and we’ll…” He felt the tears sting behind his eyelids and he tried to push them back. He needed to be strong for her, in a moment she couldn’t be. “We’ll have breakfast, read the newspaper and go to work, we’ll have a boring day to day life and you’ll kick ass around the world fighting aliens and super-bad people. We can have a family, the American Dream type of family if you want to, just say the word and I’ll do it, just… don’t think so far in the future. Let’s enjoy the time we have, I’m quite sure that with all the technological advancement, people can live well beyond the average of my time.”

Diana sniffled against his chest, but she seemed to relax in his embrace. Thank God, he thought to himself. “It’s not fair,” she murmured.

“I know, I know it’s not fair, but we can make it work. We’re stronger than that. We can be great together, no, we are great together. Nothing can stop us, not even death. I’ve cheated it once, we can find a way to make me cheat it twice. And if we can’t… well, at least I would have lived my life fully, at your side, knowing that you’re happy.”

“What about you though?”
“Hey, a couple of days ago I was sure I was going to die in a terrible explosion of mustard gas. Look at me now!” he laughed. “Diana, don’t worry about me. I assure you, I’m the happiest man in the world, just being able to hold you like this. I thought we would never get the time together I wished for, but look at us! We can make it work. We will make it work.”

“Are you sure?“

“Absolutely. And you know what I’m sure about? That a hot bath would do wonders right now, and it looks like your bathtub has more than enough room for two. Want to share?”
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

You're probably going to read things that you may find out of character for Diana in this chapter but there's a reason for them. First and foremost, we don't see much of Diana in present day, we see her at work in Wonder Woman and at a fundraising event in BvS, so there's not much of her character as a person coming out of those scenes, we don't know how she evolved, how she is in her private life. Second, being a long time fan of Wonder Woman I have read tons of comics about her, so I tend to have bits and pieces (more like whole chunks) of her characterization in the comics transported in this story, so what you may perceive as OOC it's actually not so OOC, but part of a bigger spectrum of a character that has had 75 years of evolution. So... yay, it's a bit of a mess.

Diana’s sudden, but not unexpected, emotional collapse was a short lived one. Feelings bottled up for too long had just burst, she needed that melt down and with a couple of tricks up Steve’s figurative sleeve like that wonderful neck massage he had just given her, it was quickly forgotten. They moved over it fast, and the long, warm bath they shared helped them both relax, forgetting the panic attack, and the time spent lazing in the tub got them the chance to talk about more stuff that had happened while he was gone.

“Tell me about your mother,” he whispered in her ear. “How are things going on Themyscira?”

Shrugging a little, she pressed her back against his chest to get more comfortable, “Same old, I guess. I told you, I haven’t been there in a while. They’re still secluded, guarded by any interference from Man’s World by the Gods’ protection. Each time I return, they make a big fuss about it, but I just want to go home for a while, breathe some fresh air and forget. Instead they want to hear what it’s like out here.”

“And Hippolyta?”

“She’s more understanding. Ever since Antiope died… she’s more thoughtful and careful when she talks to me. She knows I know, but she doesn’t want to talk about it.”

He shifted a little, behind her, and he grabbed her right hand and entwined her fingers. “You mean you never talked about your father, with your mother?”

She shook her head and watched as the movement caused soft ripples on the surface of the steaming water. “She seems to be ashamed of it, for some reason. I’ve talked to the senators, to my tutors, to Menalippe and they were all aware of it. They didn’t know the details of my mother’s arrangement with Zeus, only that my mother got pregnant and nine months later, I was born. That’s it.”

“I’m sure one day or another you’ll find a way to talk about it. Does she know about me?”

“She does. And she wasn’t exactly happy, when I told her about you. What I felt… feel, for you. She thought you were a distraction, that I would have found Ares faster, if I hadn’t left my heart numb my mind.”

“We were both fooled by Sir Patrick. Who would have guessed he was behind everything?” he
asked her, his free arm wrapped around her shoulders and his thumb tracing ghostly lines over the wet skin of her arm. “Did you go back to Themyscira, after the war?”

“Not immediately. I got used to Man’s World, with Etta’s help, then I went back. I stayed for a while, then I went back to London. I did things, here and there. Worked a lot, during World War 2, helped smuggle Jews and others away from Occupied territories so they wouldn’t be killed and… ended up working at the Louvre, six years ago.”

They slipped in a comfortable silence, just enjoying each other company and vicinity, until Steve posed a question she was expecting, ever since she ended up mentioning the event the other day. “What happened during World War 2?”

That sparked a lengthy conversation, the description of the horrors of the war and Hitler’s Final Solution, the invasion of Russia, the middle eastern front, Japan’s involvement and Pearl Harbor. She provided photos and videos and used her own memories to tell him the story of the war that, barely twenty one years after the end of the Great War had wrecked the world tore half of it to the ground again. He listened and asked questions from time to time, but as a veteran of the Great War, a person that was fought to end it, with as little victim as possible, he was furious. He had sacrificed his life to end that war, and people just started it all over again, even worse the second time around. More victims, more brutality, more efficient, and systematic, ways to kill as many people as they could.

“Is there any literature I can read, about it?” he asked, when she finally reached the end of her gruesome tale, just as they finished their dinner.

“You’re more interested in the general history, the socio-economics of World War II, military history and tactics or anything else? Because there’s enough literature about World War II that it would take you your whole life to read them all.”

“Let’s start with military and socio-economics. I want to know how and why they fought. Then I’ll move forward with every major conflict of the century, up to now.”

She grabbed her phone and did some magic on it. “Alright, let me see. Here, these should be a good place to start. You should have your books tomorrow morning.”

“Wait, what?” he asked her, puzzled to no end.

“Ah, the magic of online shopping. That’s a whole new level of technology, you need to grasp the basics before you get there.”

He didn’t ask, he just helped her with the dishes. And after that, they spent the evening watching a movie on Netflix. Like a normal couple. Hell, Diana found herself smiling for no good reason, just enjoying the domesticity of it.

“Is this what you meant, that night in Veld?” she asked. “When you tried to explain to me what people did when there was no war?”

He sighed. “I don’t know. I said so many things that night, most of it was gibberish. You see, in my time there was nothing like this. I grew up in a farm, in the middle of nowhere. We didn’t have electricity, or running water, or any commodity of the sorts. My father was a farmer, my mother was a seamstress. They worked hard, rose with the sun and went to bed very early. Their lives was dictated by the rhythms of their job. My brother and I… we had school, a job here and there… and then came the war, we were conscripted in the army and such. I… I really don’t know what it means to live in a normal family when there’s no war raging on. What did you do on Themyscira, before going to bed?”
“The eldest told stories, most of the time. Some went to their quarters earlier than others, alone or with someone else,” she explained. “It was quite boring, after a while, but sometimes someone found a book that had been forgotten, so we would read it altogether. Philosophers, historians… a play here and there. We had ways to keep us entertained, but after a whole day working the fields or in the pastures, and training, most of us went to bed early.”

“What do you do, when you come home from work?”

“I read, most of the time. Sometimes I watch a movie, if I can find something that strikes my mind, but I tend to use the TV mostly for keeping up with what’s going on with the world than for entertainment. Sometimes, but it’s a rare occasion, I would go out with a colleague or two for some drinks. I’m boring.”

“You’re not boring, just reserved.” He kissed her temple.

Her phone buzzed on the coffee table. Slightly irritated, she reached for it and checked the message. It was from Bruce. *I’m doing a fundraising gala to gather funds for the rebuilding effort, next week. You and Steve are welcome. I’ll text you the details as soon as Alfred has them.*

“Oh great, Bruce is doing a gala, next week. Want to go?”

He shrugged. “Why not? As long as he doesn’t plan to bomb a nearby village with mustard gas, I’m. I need a suit though.”

“And I need a dress. Guess we’ll go shopping some more, tomorrow. And maybe I can fix that girls night out with Lois. Let me text her quick.”

She knew he was observing every move she made with her phone, so she was deliberately slow with each press of her thumbs on the touchscreen, to show him how the thing worked. They hadn’t tackled smartphones yet.

*Bruce just texted to invite Steve and I at a fundraising gala next week. We need suitable clothes for it, I was thinking of hitting the shops tomorrow. Want to go out tomorrow night? She typed quickly, then sent the text.*

Lois’ reply didn’t take long to come. *Who’s Steve?*

Gods, she didn’t know. *Remember the man I told you last year, about my time during World War One? That guy.*

*But you told me he blew up with that plane! Then came a lot of angry emojis.*

*He did! But Flash went back in time and brought him back!*

*You’re shitting me!*

Lois was one of the few people she had shown the photograph that had been taken after the battle in Veld, she knew how he looked like, so she had an idea. An idea she found extremely uncharacteristic herself, but in that moment, she thought it fit. She climbed closer to him and extended her arm away from them. “Smile!” She snapped a quick selfie and sent it to Lois. It was a nice photo, she noticed, both of them were smiling bright, though Steve’s looked a bit dopey, between the scruffy beard and a little bit of weariness from the day spent learning new stuff.

*Crap, it’s really him! What’s going on, a resuscitation mania? First Clark, now Steve. Wow! Anyway, about going out tomorrow, yes, I’m all for it. Where are we going? That place we went to*
last year?”

Yes, the barmaid was good with drinks. I’ll text when we’re done shopping?

The next text from Lois was filled with little hearts. You know, now that I look at him better, Steve looks really good, nice pick! Anyway, come straight here when you’re done. Clark wants to meet this guy, the could go out for drinks on their own.

“Uhm, you think you’re ready to go out for drinks with a humanoid alien that could lift the moon if he wanted, that just got back to life?” he asked him.

“You mean your friend Clark? Yeah, why not? We have something in common, I bet we can find enough common ground to start a conversation.”

Steve would love to. Says that since they both cheated death, they can find common ground. Sounds like us last year.

Yeah, only this time they’re alive and we’re celebrating it.

Absolutely yes! No room for dark and gloom, we’re going to have so much fun!

Can’t wait! See you tomorrow, Diana!

Unconsciously, Diana smiled at the phone. Sure thing. See you, Lois. Say hi to Clark.

“A good friend?” asked Steve.

She set the phone back on the table. “Probably my only friend. She’s curious, smart, and she knows how to keep a secret. She’s great, truly.”

“Can’t wait to meet her then.”

The next day, the hunt for the perfect suit and dress didn’t last as long as they had thought. Steve was built in a manner that made sizing easy, and most of the suits he tried looked perfect on him. They settled on a black tuxedo, pretty basic everything considered, but the simplicity of the cut made it look great on him.

Her dress, that was another matter. She had lots of dresses that would be great for Bruce’s gala, but she had left them all in Paris, finding one that fit her was a bit tricky. But as she finished trying them and settled for a simple but very elegant strapless black gown, worried out of her mind that Steve would get bored out of his mind, she realized she had underestimated him. When she finally decided on a dress she liked, she came out of the dressing room only to find him sitting on one of those posh armchair as he waited for her, tinkering with her phone.

His face was scrunched in concentration as his thumbs tapped the screen. She wondered what he was doing, since it looked like he was typing some kind of message.

“Hey, what are you doing with my phone?” she asked.

“Chatting with your friend Lois,” he replied, tongue sticking out a little bit as he typed. “She’s a fiery one!”

“Don’t I know it? So, how are you doing with smartphones and touchscreens?”

“Buttons are too little for my fingers, but I can manage. How do you send photos?” She touched a
button on the screen and the chat screen was replaced with the view from the frontal camera. “Heck, this thing is fantastic! Say hi!” The subsequent selfie he took was one of the dorkiest she had ever seen, with both of them sticking their tongues out and Steve going cross eyed for a moment. Diana thought about chiding herself, as taking selfies like this wasn’t exactly her modus operandi, but ever since Steve was brought back into her life, she felt like a huge weight had been lifted off her shoulders, and that she could more carefree with the way she acted. Not that she was a complete ice queen, most of all when she was among friends, but she had that feeling that maybe she could let go of the high society persona she had created, to keep herself from hurting again the way she had with Steve.

Barely ten seconds after he had sent the picture, Lois replied with another selfie of her and Clark. From the little background she could see, Diana guessed they were in the living room of their apartment, actually not that far from there. They looked very happy if a little tired, but she could easily guess why.

“You’re having fun, uh?”

“Yeah, kind of, I mean… I was bored waiting for you and this thing buzzed and… it’s easier than I thought!”

“I’ll get you one of your own, if you want. Come, I’ll pay for these then we can go and meet Lois and Clark.”

“Aren’t you splurging a little too much on me these days?” he asked, picking up the box with his own suit.

Diana hooked her arm around his and shrugged. “I kind of used all your money to settle down in Man’s World. It’s time I pay you back.”

“You don’t have to, you know? I mean, I saw the price tag, I get it that things now cost more but my suit alone costs more than what I earned in my whole life in the army! And I had a pretty dangerous job, with lots of bonuses!”

“I earn a lot to, more than enough to afford this and even more. I’ve lived alone for so long, with no reason to spend money… allow me to splurge a little, now that I have a reason to do so now.”

“Alright, but the moment I get a job, I’m going to splurge a little on you. You still like ice cream right?”

She chuckled. “Or, now more than ever.

Despite the damage done by their battle against Steppenwolf, Metropolis was quickly going back to normal. After all, most of the battle had taken place in the area that had already been damaged the previous year, they had done a good job with damage control, but some commercial and residential building had been harmed and police and firefighters were having a hard time keeping scavengers out of the area.

As Diana drove, Steve stared outside of the windows, wide eyed and shooting question after question. Most of all about how cars had evolved. He seemed to like the sleek look of the Mercedes she had rented for the day.

“Man, everything improved with the years, right?”

“Yeah… except humanity. That remained pretty much the same.”
“Encouraging. Anyway… how does it work, these days, going out with a friend?”

“If it’s only among friends, people usually gather at a pub or wherever they serve drinks or where you can have something to eat, you get a table or you sit at the bar and talk. That’s it.”

“And if you want to go out with your wife or fiance?”

“Same thing, only you go to a different, less casual type of place, like a good restaurant or a place with a different atmosphere. I have to be honest I haven’t dated in a long while so I’m kind of out of the scene, I don’t know what people do these days on a date,” she explained as she looked for a parking place close enough to Lois’ place. “Why? Want to go out on a date?”

He shrugged and smiled. “Why not?”

“I guess we can come up with something. Ask Clark! Lois always told me he was great with dates.”

“Yay! More things to talk about with the other guy that came back from death! Tonight’s looking great!”

Diana laughed, hard, and she had to slow down in order to not impact with the car right in front of her because she was distracted. “We’re going to have some fun. You sure you feel up to it?”

“Hey, I have to start somewhere, right? Getting to know more people, reintroduce myself in society… Why not start with your friends?”

“Well, Clark isn’t exactly a friend, we haven’t even spoken that long, but we work together. We’ll have time to become friends, I guess. Oh, finally, parking!”

A couple of minutes later, they were in front of Lois’ front door. “Alright, now I’m nervous,” he whispered when she knocked.

“Oh don’t be You’ll do great.”

When the door finally opened, they found Clark’s massive form filling the frame. His hair was messy and his face scruffy with the dark stubble that covered his cheeks and chin. His blue eyes shined when he saw them. “Hey, finally! Come inside, Lois is nearly ready to go.”

He gently hugged Diana and shook hands with Steve. “It’s good to see you, Clark. And not in battle gear.”

“It’s good to see you too. Lois filled me in, seems like a lot has happened in the past year.” His deep voice had a jolly note as he spoke, he seemed relieved of a weight, something that kept his broad shoulders curved. He was now standing tall, filling the dark plaid shirt to its fullness. “And you must be Captain Steve… Trevor, right?”

“Yes, but call me just Steve. Clark, right?”

“Most people know me as Superman, but yes, call me Clark.”

“Diana!”

Lois’ scream echoed down the hallway where she came from as she ran towards the friend. The shorter woman crashed against her in a bone crushing hug. “I missed you so much!”

Diana laughed and hugged the friend back. “Me too, Lois, me too!”
Lois let her go and turned towards the two men. “Oh and you must be Steve!” She hugged him too, much to his shock and disbelief. “Welcome to the twenty first century!”

“Well, thank you. You must be Lois, right?”

She nodded and finally shook his hand. “Lois Lane, pleased to meet you. So? Everyone’s ready to go? I so need a drink tonight, Perry had me write non stop about this Steppenwolf thing, my fingers are cramping. I presume Wonder Woman is not willing to give us an exclusive interview?”

Diana smiled. “You presume right. Wonder Woman doesn’t give interviews.”

“Duh… Perry’s gonna kill me. Revenant Superman? Easy, I live with him. Batman’s a recluse, it’s easier to get an interview with his alter ego. Wonder Woman? She lives on the other side of the Atlantic, most of the time!”

“Hey, don’t look at me, I’m a pilot turned spy from The Great War, I’m not material for the press,” joked Steve.

“You may be surprised, we print anything that could be even mildly interesting these days, I could always write you off as an historian writing a book about World War One.”

Clark intervened then. “Come on Lois, stop talking about work. I know you’re hyped and stressed, tonight is time to decompress. Take good care of her, Diana.”

“I will, don’t worry. Take good care of him!”

Clark shrugged. “Alright, I’m not going to let him get smashed.”
They left the boys to their own devices and quickly made their way to a small and secluded bar three blocks down the road where they usually went out for drinks when Diana was in town. It was an old school place, where the barman, or barmaid in their case, didn’t ask too many questions outside *what you’re having? And need a refill?*

It was one of the main reasons they went there, because patrons and employees alike minded their own business and couldn’t care less about what people around them were saying.

“You look different!” said Lois as they found a couple of free stools at the far side of the bar, close to the corner.

“I had a rough couple of weeks, thank you.”

“I didn’t mean that way! There’s… something else in you.”

As soon as they sat, the girl behind the bar, a short blondie with long hair tied in a ponytail, sporting a tattered t-shirt with a faded quote from Moulin Rouge! printed on it and frayed jeans, came to their service. “Hey girls, no time no see! What can I get you?”

“Whiskey and soda on the rocks for me,” said Lois. “And for my friend Scotch with water on the side, right?” Diana nodded, as Lois had got the order right.

“And a teaspoon. The usual then. Coming up!” The girl disappeared as she ducked beneath the bar and prepared their drinks, just a few steps away.

“You know, for someone of Greek origins, I always thought you were an ouzo type of girl.”

Diana smiled. “As much as I like it, it’s more something to close a meal, not to start a night. I could tell you of countless of terrible hangovers, caused by too much ouzo!”

“Yeah well, I could tell you the very same with whiskey, we have a long history.” Their drinks arrived just then. “Most of all during the last year.”

“I told you, the first year is the worst,” said Diana, adding a couple of teaspoons of water to her Scotch. They raised their classes and took a sip of their drinks.

“And after that, it becomes bearable, I know, I know. I remember it quite well, though I also remember that hangover. Girl, it’s hard to keep up with you!”

“And I don’t even drink that often! I haven’t touched alcohol since the night we went out, last year.”

Lois made a weirded out face. “Come on Diana, you’re telling me you live in France and you don’t drink? Not even wine?”

“Not that much, I tend to avoid anything that numbs my mind. I doubt I’ll drink more than this one, it’s more than enough for me.”

The redhead smiled. “You drank too much, back then uh?”
Diana shook her head, as she ran the tip of her finger on the slightly wet rim of the glass. “No, not that much. I just don’t like the feeling. The buzz, that initial tingle… that’s something I like. Blinding drunkenness? No, it’s not for me. I’ve seen too many friends lost, or nearly so, in the bottle after the war.”

“Yeah, you warned me about that too. So, tell me. What happened?”

Diana shrugged. “Wish I know. One moment we were having breakfast after defeating Steppenwolf, in Bruce’s kitchen and I was telling them the story I told you last year and the moment later Barry disappeared into thin air, leaving only a bang and a flash of lightning behind him. Before we could realize…”

“Wait a second, we who?”

“Off the record?” asked Diana.

Lois nodded. “Absolutely. This is strictly confidential, it’s Lois and Diana, not Reporter Lane and informer during an interview. Whatever you tell me now won’t leave this place.”

“ We as in Bruce, Arthur, Alfred and me. Clark had already disappeared, came home to you I suppose, and Cyborg… who know where he went. The moment Steppenwolf went back through that Mother Box and was gone for good, Alfred called us back to the manor and prepared breakfast for everyone. Anyway… Barry disappears and we barely have time to even see him disappear that he comes back, hold Steve like he was a baby. The gun he had used to ignite the mustard gas back in 1918 was still smoking. And…”

“And?” poked Lois.

“And the rest is history. I mean, he’s here, he’s alive… breathing and talking to me… I had gotten used to the hallucinations, seeing him when he wasn’t there, knowing all too well that I had lost him even before we could begin to be something… and now he’s here. What do you think happened?”

“Lots of tears, lots of joy and lots of sex?”

“Guess my last couple of days weren’t too different from your couple of days.” Diana took another sip of the amber liquor and relished the slightly burning sensation as it crepted down her throat.

“What about you? How’s Clark?”

Lois smiled, but it was strange, almost weary and shadowed but something that wasn’t sadness or grief, but something even darker. Regret, maybe? “He has vague recollections of your fight with Doomsday. He says he was conscious, on and off though, for a long while, He remembers bits and pieces here and there, but says he spent a long while just wandering around, not remembering anything about himself. He said he flew back here the moment he remembered everything.”

“And now?”

“He’s… quiet. I mean, Clark has always been a quiet guy, a good listener and wise beyond his age but… it changed him, being dead. And amnesiac. In some ways, he’s the same that died that day, in others he’s a completely different man. I know it’s been just a couple of days but… it’s different.”

“Are you sure it’s him? Couldn’t it be that after a year you had come to terms with his death and that changed you?” proposed Diana.

Lois sighed and downed the rest of her drink in one single gulp. “Could be. What did you say last year? That after a while it becomes…”
“Bearable. You never get over the loss of a loved one, most of all if it happens violently. It just becomes bearable.”

“Yeah, maybe…” Lois agreed. “Or maybe I’m still grieving and I haven’t realized he’s back for good.”

“Could be. How about you though? How are you coping with Steve being back after… a century?”

“Ninety nine years and sixteen days. Nineteen, if you count the days he’s been here.”

Lois gave her a mirthless smile. “You’ve kept track of the days, uh?”

“I kept track of the days we’ve been robbed off. The time he wished we had, the time we were supposed to have together, so he could show me a world I had no idea existed, so yes, I’ve kept track of the days.” She took another sip and grimaced. “And now I’m keeping track of the days we have, because there’s a levy to pay.”

“What do you mean?”

Diana sighed and ran her fingers through her hair. “I’m immortal. He’s not. If we can’t find a way to cheat death a second time he will age and eventually die. And I will not, unless I’m killed in battle.”

A long moment of silence fell between them, until Lois broke it with a sigh. “Oh… that’s… that’s horrible!”

“Don’t I know it?” She took a deep breath and locked her gaze on a droplet of whisky barely hanging on the surface of the glass, before she swirled the remaining liquid and swallowed it with one single sip. “I had a panic attack yesterday, just thinking about it.”

“Gosh, I wish I could tell you I understand but… I can’t. How’s Steve coping with it?”

She chuckled. “Way better than me. He said that he had already come to terms with dying that night on the airstrip and that this time we’ve been gifted is our second chance and we should make every second count.”

Lois nudged her with her elbow. “Wise guy.”

“Yeah… it just sucks though, you know? How can I live by his side, watch him age and grow old, and not let it ruin the moment? I just wish… I don’t know… my father’s never done anything for me. I got rid of Ares for him, when he had failed. He had nearly one hundred years to do something, to help me after centuries of absence. You think he moved a finger?”

“Uh, Clark’s father, in the form of an AI, saved my life at least ten times, years ago.”

Diana chuckled again. “What can I say, there are fathers and fathers.”

Suddenly, two tall hazy glasses filled to the brim with a clear, sparkling liquid appeared in front of them. “It’s only tonic water girls. It’s too early to get drunk, have a break with these, before you head for larger quantities of stronger stuff,” explained Melanie, the barmaid. “I’m sorry to interrupt you but I couldn’t help but overhear the last part of your discussions. Is anything wrong with your fathers?” she asked.

“Oh no,” intervened Lois. “Except for high blood pressure, my dad’s just fine. Diana’s on the other hand, he’s a bit of an asshole.”
Melanie sighed. “You’re preaching to the choir girl… my father was never there. Never! And then he was always fighting with my brother about this and that, it was like living in under a dictatorship. There was never a quiet moment home, it’s one of the reasons I left and came here.”

“I hear you…” mumbled Diana. “I never met my father. For ages my mother lied to me about him, but a while ago I learned that he was always fighting with my older step brother and they almost killed each other a number of times. Nice family, uh?”

The barmaid gave them a weary smile as she poured a smaller glass of tonic water from the extendable spigot they used for soft drinks. “Seems like we could be relatives.” She raised her glass and waited for the other two to do the same. “To absent fathers, and those with high blood pressure! Cheers!”

“Cheers!”

“I truly hope the rest of yours lives are better than this though. Been together long?”

Diana smiled, while Lois laughed out loud. “Oh no, I’m sorry! We’re just friends!”

Melanie seemed a little dismayed. “Oh my god I’m so sorry! You two always come down here together, I just assumed…” She shook her head and wiped a rogue strand of hair from her face. “I’m sorry, really.”

“Hey,” said Diana in the softest voice she could muster. “No harm done.”

“Yeah well… sorry, anyway. I hope your love life is going better than your family, though. Last year, the first time I saw you… you both seemed a little desperate, like someone had died.”

Taken by surprise by the sudden, yet polite, intermission, Diana didn’t really know what to say, but Lois’ quick wit saved them both from a rambling rush for an excuse to justify their behavior - and slight state of inebriation - the previous year.

“Oh yes, well… our partners are both in the army and they… well they were declared missing after the transport they were on exploded because of an IED. They actually… they were kept prisoners and they have been recently released. They’re recovering at Ramstein’s base in Germany, they’ll be home in a week or so.”

Thank Athena for her quick brain and quicker mouth. Lois Lane was a lifesaver, when it came to disengage from a tricky situation only using words.

“But that’s fantastic!” Melanie nearly screamed. “So you’re celebrating! Oh come on, you can’t let your family’s bad history tamper with such a joy! A loved one returning from death… wow! I’ll crack open the good stuff!”

The young girl disappeared in the backroom, much to their disbelief, and she returned just ten seconds or so later, carrying a sealed bottle of… something in her hands. “This comes straight from another century, one of the few things that despotic father of mine left me. I was waiting for the chance to open this and I think I’ve found it.”

“Oh please Mel, don’t!” pleaded Diana. “There’s no need we…”

“Come on, aren’t you curious?” the girl asked as she removed the wax seal that covered the cap with a knife and then pulled the cork with a strong pull. The potent, smoked and oaky aroma filled their nostrils as the alcoholic vapors wafted up from the thin neck of the bottle.
“Wow, that’s really strong!” said Lois, her eyes tearing up a little bit.

“Yeah, like love. And there’s nothing stronger in this world, I firmly believe that.” She grabbed three glasses and gave them a quick rinse the poured. Diana smiled, briefly, suddenly feeling a strange sense of kinship with the girl in front of her and her belief. “Now girls, a toast to… true love?”

“Long lost and found love?” prompted Lois.

“I’ve got a better one. To love, new and old. Lost and found. Immortal in our memories.”

They clicked their glasses together and, after having banged lightly them on the surface of the counter, they downed the liquor together, in one quick sip.

*Gods this is strong!* Thought Diana as the liquor burned her tongue and throat, but settled in her stomach with the briefest, but most pleasurable warmth. Whatever it was, it was sweet, almost like honey but not as thick and overwhelming. It also carried a strong, tangy aroma of wood and smoke, and a hint of licorice and vanilla in the back. It coated her tongue and filled the back of her nose, and her mind was instantly brought back to the nights around the campfires with her sisters Amazons, with Menalippe telling the grand deeds of their queen Hippolyta and her second in command, her lifelong partner Antiope, or one of the magisters that recited the verses of ancient poets from all over the world. Scenes from her childhood replayed in front of her eyes like a movie, and she felt the same warmth from the alcohol spreading through her whole body, but most of all her mind felt suddenly at peace, like that liquor, whatever it was, had been able to calm all her rambling thoughts and clear her doubts about whatever the future had in store for her and Steve.

And then the warmth was transformed in a sense of security, safety and calm that washed over her like a languid wave on the shore, a slightly singing sensation on her skin that was strangely nice. No alcoholic beverage, no matter how strong, ever had that effect on her.

A sudden idea stroke her mind, she looked at Melanie and, hiding her mouth with her hand, she mouthed one word. “Afrodite?”

Melanie shrugged her shoulders and winked at her. “Everything will be fine,” she replied, in a whisper. “We’ll take care of you. And Steve.”

Diana’s shoulders sagged as she immediately realized that, unwillingly, Flash had done something she had never thought would happen: the Gods, her extended estranged family, were doing something for the first time.

And she had no idea how to deal with that!

Chapter End Notes

One of the names attributed to Afrodite was Afrodite The Black, Afrodite Melainis in Greek. At least ancient Greek, the only Greek I studied in school. Melanie isn’t a name I chose at random.
As they watched the two women walk towards their designated watering hole, all long legs and high heels, the two men, one super, the other just above average, pushed their hands in the pockets of their jeans, almost at the same time.

“Now?” asked Steve.

“Now, there’s a nice place just down the corner, at this hour it’s typically a bit crowded, but that’s not a bad thing.”

Steve shrugged his shoulders and they started walking in the opposite direction than where the girls went. “Less people that could hear us. I mean, I know that some crazy stuff has happened ever since… ever since my time, but I highly doubt people would take people talking about resurrection and time travel that kindly.”

“Eh, I don’t think so. Too many strange things have happened here, between Metropolis and Gotham, and people don’t take these things that well, these days. They never did, actually.”

Clark led him to a simple wooden door with a plaque reading *Cluricaune Irish Pub* hanging right at eye level. “Uh, literally around the corner!” he exclaimed as they entered.

“Yes! Lois doesn’t like this place that much, she thinks it’s too crowded, but I don’t mind. Sometimes the white noise relaxes me.”

They found two seats at the bar, the last two stools at the end of the long counter. The place wasn’t exactly packed, but there was a decent number of patrons enjoying a cold one after a day at work, while waiting before moving somewhere else for dinner or going home altogether. It was warm enough that Steve took off his jacket and rolled up the sleeves of his shirt above the elbows.

They had barely sat down when the barman, a tall, lanky guy with long hair pulled up in a bun and a long, thick beard so long he had braided it on the chin, arrived to serve them. “What’s your poison?” he asked them with a bright smile on his face.

“Uhm… beer?” proposed Steve.

“Yeah, a beer would be nice. Two pints, thank you,” replied Clark, unbuttoning the first button of his shirt.

“Two pints coming up!” The barman left to get them their orders in a hurry, but not before he produced two bowls of peanuts from beneath the counter.

“Uh, nice. Back in my days, places like these were shady and barmen were usually grumpy, toothless sons of bitches that wouldn’t speak a word. At least where I came from.”

The barman came back with two pints of frothy, amber beer and left them on the counter in front of them, before throwing them a couple of coasters. “I just waxed the counter!” then he went back to serve other patrons.

“Cheers,” they said at the same time and clinked their glasses together. Steve found himself thirstier
than he had thought, and though the taste was very different from what he was used to, the pint of amber ale was more than welcome to quench that thirst.

“Ah, this is so different from the dishwater I was used to during the War.”

Clark chuckled. “We still have a lot of dishwater if you want. But I kind of prefer this kind, than something closer to carbonated water than actual beer.”

“The Germans knew how to make great beer. I’ve been undercover in their ranks for so long that I grew fond of their lagers.”

“One day I’ll fly there and try them. Now tell me, how are you holding up? Being shot ahead in time of ninety nine years seems quite a lot to take in!”

Hunched over the counter, Steve shrugged his shoulders and smiled, for a moment. “It is. But Diana’s been helping me a lot. Way better than what I did when I was the one that should have guided her into a world she knew nothing about. She’s changed so much…”

“For the better?”

He nodded. “Yeah… when I met her, she was headstrong, naive and reckless. Now she’s more poised, quieter, but I can still see that fire in her, that steadfast will to do good, to be the bridge to a better understanding … whatever made me fall head over heels in love with her one hundred years ago is still there, it’s just… harnessed into something that… I don’t really know how to describe her, I have to be honest with you. She’s just… wonderful.”

Clark smiled too. “Yeah, she is. We haven’t talked much but I’ve seen her fight. She’s fierce, I tell you!”

“You should have seen her in Belgium. All alone, she drew the fire of an entire platoon of German forces hidden in the trenches, she crossed No Man’s Land faster than a bullet and then some. She destroyed a machine gun with a swing of her shield and when they managed to disarm her, she fought nail and teeth with her lasso. It was magical.”

“It’s the same word that Lois uses to describe her. Magical.”

“Hey, I had the chance to text with Lois a little bit this afternoon. She looks like a fierce one too!”

It was Clark’s turn to smile and getting lost in his thoughts for a moment. “Yeah… she can be a handful, when she wants to, but there’s something in her… like a fire, that’s the right word, a fire that burns in her, guiding her to seek the truth and never settle for anything else but the truth. But she’s also thoughtful and caring. She’s not against stepping on someone’s toes to reach the truth, but she taught me to always consider that whatever scoop we make, there’s a chance someone innocent could get hurt, someone that’s not even involved, but whose lives could be endangered by what we write. And that we should consider carefully, which paths we choose to take.”

“It was something I learned on the battlefield. In boot camp they don’t tell you that every bullet you fire can end someone’s life. They don’t tell you that ninety nine percent of the time, you’ll be facing someone that didn’t want to join the army, that would prefer to be back home, breaking his back in the wheat fields. We’re sent over to the front, we’re handed a rifle and we’re told to kill as many as we can, but who are we killing?”

“Yeah… it’s crazy but for, for example, for each corrupted government agent we manage to uncover, there are at least ten others ready to take his place, and they are ready to cut some throats and spill some innocent blood to get there. They don’t care, it’s just cannon fodder for their crooked
ends.”

“That’s something I wouldn’t be surprised to hear coming from Diana.”

Clark shrugged his shoulders. “I guess we’re more alike than what I thought. Out of curiosity, how did you two meet?”

“I was a spy, during the war. I was infiltrated in a German weaponry plant in the Ottoman Empire and I had stolen important intel, so I… borrowed an Eindekker and flew away from Turkey. Problem was… I was shot down. I crash landed in Themyscira, in the sea just fifty meters or so from the shore and… she saved me. I was sure I was going to drown in that cockpit, I looked up one last time towards the surface and there she was, standing on the wing of the plane, one of the few things that were still floating. It was probably the lack of oxygen but in that moment, blurry and unfocused, she looked like an angel, ready to take me home, wherever home was. Instead she dove, she pulled me out of the cockpit and dragged me ashore. That’s how I met her, on the rocky beach of Themyscira, wearing a German uniform that didn’t belong to me, and Diana looming over me. The rest… I guess it’s history.”

“A nice history indeed. Meaningful. Definitely beats mine. Blowing up in a giant ball of flammable mustard gas, before Flash came to your rescue of course, is more… heroic, in my book.”

“From what I saw on TV and what Diana told me, yours was pretty heroic too. I mean,” Steve took a short sip of beer. “I mean… you owe us nothing, from what I saw, you could be a God among us.”

“I owe you guys everything. You adopted me, gave me a home, loving people that cared after me,” said Clark with a sad smile twisting his face, almost to a painful grimace. “Thing is, I don’t want to be a God. I crash landed on this planet, like you did on Themyscira. For all I know I’m the last one of my kind, with a biology that would allow me to draw energy from the sun and become… and become Superman. It’s the sun that gives me superpowers, I’m not like Diana. Take me away from a yellow sun and I’m like anyone else. I was brought up in Kansas, my mom still lives there, my dad died in an accident with a tornado and… for a while I thought I was just a freak, that I had no reason to be here. But then I saved someone from certain death. And someone else after him. Then I allowed people to safely evacuate an offshore oil plant surrounded by flames and… I never stopped, and people started talking. The cape and the costume, the name… that came only by accident. I never intended to be the hero the people want me to be. I don’t want to be a hero, I’m the son of a farmer from Kansas and the fiance of a Pulitzer worth reporter, then and only then I’m Superman.”

Steve barely managed to contain a mirthless laugh. “That makes me the unsung hero and you the reluctant one? Nah, it doesn’t work like that. You believe in what you do. Last year you could have flown away, instead you went on, you charged that… monster. You knew you were going to die, like I knew I was going to die when I left Diana on that damn airstrip. I didn’t want to go, but I had to, just like you did. We believe in what we do, that’s it.”

“And that makes us what?”

“Heroes. Sung, unsung, reluctant or willing… We’re heroes. But the people out there… they don’t need to know that we are. I don’t care if my name isn’t printed in history books as the guy that sacrificed everything to end the Great War, I don’t care. I did it because I believed I could make the difference, and it broke my heart to do so, but I did it nevertheless. Did you do anything different?”

Clark shook his head. “I guess not.”

“See? The cape, the costume… the superpowers… they don’t matter! From the son of a farmer to another, the true hero is the boy from Kansas.”
Three pints each later, Steve felt a buzz in his body, a pleasurable tingling sensation in the tips of his fingers and his head swayed from time to time, but the moment he finished a glass, a new one came to quench a thirst he had no idea he felt. Clark was a nice guy, if a little broody, but hey, he had just come back from a rough year of roaming around the world completely amnesiac after a terrible, experience of prolonged near-death.

Had it happened to him, Steve thought he would be kind of broody too.

“Speaking of merrier matters…” he mumbled, a little confused for a moment. “I truly hope you haven’t been moping around the last couple of days I mean… To me Diana is the most beautiful woman in the whole universe, but hey, Lois’ a nice catch too!”

Clark laughed so hard he had to set the glass on the table, or he risked to pour the remains of his bear on the newly polished counter, or break the glass altogether. “Of course not Steve! Come on, I come home to the woman I wish would marry me, what do you think happened?”

“Let me guess, you two have left the bed only to eat and go to the bathroom?”

“Close enough. She had to go to work too. I guess it wasn’t too different for you.”

“Eh, there were other things in the middle but yes… it has been an interesting couple of days now, if it wasn’t for…”

He trailed off, as he suddenly recalled Diana’s panic attack the night before. It had hurt him, deeply, to see her like this. He wished she could have all the joy in the world, and he was ready to do the unthinkable to make sure she was safe and happy, but God yesterday… never in his wildest dreams he would have had imagined that she would fear mortality, his own mortality to be precise, so much.

“For what?”

“Nothing it’s just… Yesterday Diana had a little bit of an emotional meltdown when she realized that one day I would grow old and die. You know, normal things that happen to us humans.”

“Oh man, I imagine she didn’t take it well!”

Steve shook his head and sighed. “No. She had a full blown panic attack in her bathroom. It was stuff from my worst dreams of nights in the trenches, with fellow soldiers crying in their sleep or crambling in the mud during guard duty, wrecked by hallucinations and stuff like that. it was… horrible.” He shivered at the memory. “And I fear it will happen again, somewhere down the line. And it breaks my heart to even think about see her like that again.”

“And you don’t mind? Knowing you would die, one day or another?”

He watched a droplet of condensation fall down the glass and onto the cardboard coaster. “I already died Clark, and someone literally moved back in time to rescue me just because he thought it would be nice to bring me back to Diana… I know I’m going to die, I already came to terms with it. But Diana’s immortal, she can only be killed in battle. She grieved my death for nearly a century and as it is now, she will have to do it again, somewhere down the line. And it breaks my heart, knowing that she took my death so badly she still hurt, after so long.”

Clark said nothing, they just remained in silence for a long moment and they finished their beers.

Almost immediately, two freshly pulled pints were presented in front of them. “Hey guys, why the long faces?” asked the barman. “You two were laughing your asses off a moment ago!”
“We’re pondering the inevitability of death, my friend,” said Steve, in a gloomy tone.

He shrugged. “Ah, a staple among conversations, past a certain degree of inebriation. What happened? Close friend died recently?”

Clark shook his head. “No, it was us. Big car accident, we nearly blew up… crap like that. I banged my head so bad I had traumatic amnesia for nearly a year. We’re coming out of it just now.”

Steve couldn’t help but admire Superman’s quick thinking.

The barman grimaced. “Ouch… that’s bad! You should be celebrating life, not brooding over death. Come on, let’s revive the night a bit.”

The man, with a wide, jovial smile printed on his face, produced three shot glasses and a bottle of an unidentified liquor, still capped with a thick red wax seal. “Your girlfriends should be happy you made it through in one piece,” he said, uncapping the bottle and pouring the liquor. It looked like whisky and surely the powerful oaky scent that came from the bottle made Steve think it was indeed some kind of whisky, but there was something else in the mix that he couldn’t really pick up.

“Yes,” he replied. “They are. They’re out partying on their own, they hadn’t seen each other in a while and they wanted a girls only night out.”

The barman smiled again. “That’s the spirit. I’ve heard of way too many men not allowing their girlfriends and wives to go out on their own, almost stalking them with their control freak attitude. Heck, that’s the best way to fuck a relationship up. Look at me! My wife lives in Europe half a year, we’ve been married for decades!”

Clark’s face scrunched up in a puzzled face. “Decades? How old are you?”

The barman laughed, stroking his long beard and twirling the tip of the braid between his fingers. “Way older than I look. I don’t know if it’s the little sun exposure I get or the great beer I drink that keeps me young, but I’m way older than I look.” He poured the liquor in the shot glasses. “This is on the house. To cheating death!”

“To cheating death!” they exclaimed as they clinked their glasses together.

The strong spirit nearly singed his nostrils, when Steve brought it to his lips and inhaled, before he drank it in one single gulp.

If the scent was strong, the taste was even stronger. Sweet, woody, with the tangy note of smoke to complete a bouquet that had also some vanilla in the background and a hint of licorice. It was strange, but not unpleasant, thing is it burned like hell. He coughed and sputtered a little bit as the liquid settled in his stomach, burning his way down his throat down to a pleasant warming sensation in his gut.

“Goddammit what is this?” he asked, gasping a little.

“I have no idea but it’s great!” replied Clark.

The man behind the counter chuckled. “Technically it’s moonshine and it’s very illegal. My brother makes it, and I keep a bottle behind the counter for special occasions. Up to now, I haven’t found a reason to break the seal, and I opened this bar fifteen years ago. But you two, I think you deserved it.”

Steve shut his eyes tight as his head started spinning. “What the hell…” he murmured. “Oh God
Diana will be so pissed…”

“About what?” asked Clark.

“You promised her I wouldn’t get smashed drunk. You failed, and she hates when someone breaks a promise!”

The barman groaned. “Oh, don’t worry about my niece, she’ll be just fine.” He poured himself another shot of liquor and, completely unfazed, downed it. “It’s time we did something for her, after she got rid of Ares in our stead.”

“Excuse me?” grunted Clark as he tried to keep a now very drunk Steve Trevor sitting up on the stool. “Your niece?”

“Wait a sec…” Despite his numbed brain, his memories of elementary school and Greek Mythology were still quite vibrant. “If Diana’s your niece, that means… you’re either Poseidon or Hades!”

“My seafaring brother has a great seafood restaurant on the coast of Amalfi, in Italy. You should try it, I bet he’s gonna give you a consistent discount.”

“Holy flying fuck!” Both Steve and Clark gasped when they realized who they were talking to. Drunk as he was, Steve thought it was funny, considering he was a pilot and Clark… well, Clark could fly on his own.

“Hey, don’t worry about me. Worry more about your girls, they’re drinking at the bar owned by Afrodite, I wouldn’t be too surprised if they’d come back completely smashed tonight.”

Right on cue, Clark’s phone rung. To Steve, the otherwise melodic tune sounded like the shriek of an anti aircraft alarm. “Hey Lois how… Oh Diana, everything alright? What? Crap, even Steve is soaked. Alright, I’ll see you home.” He slid his thumb over the screen and closed the call. “That was my niece, my fianceè is smashed drunk, after a shot like this, what the hell was that?”

“Just something that will solve a little problem. Nothing dangerous, just… strong. He’ll have a bad hangover tomorrow, nothing that a gallon of room temperature water and some Tylenol can’t cure. Same goes for Lois. Let’s say Diana won’t have panic attacks anymore.”

“What?” Steve shrieked. “You mean I’m immortal?”

Hades hesitated. “Eh, not really. You’re more… unable to age? I mean, you can die, you know, if you decide it would be a good idea to pilot a damn German bomber full of cans of mustard gas and blow it up, with you still inside it, yes, you can die. You just won’t age, at least until you and Diana are together. This thing… it’s powerful stuff, but it’s no miracle worker, it works in different ways and in this case we thought it would be best if we sort of tied your fate to Diana’s,” he explained.

“But… how does it work?”

He twisted the tip of his beard again. “Listen, it’s weird stuff. This comes from an age when Gods and Goddesses had children with mortals and they wanted their kids to have an edge. We can’t make him a god, but this is the thing that made Achilles nearly immortal, if only Peleus had let Thetis do her friggin’ job with that child! Damn those heels. Sorry, I digress. Boy, we would have done this ages ago, if only there had been a full body to use as a vessel for your soul. You can’t remember it now, but when I saw your soul on my domain’s doorstep, I freaked out. My brother… I mean, Diana’s father, he was really rooting for you two and then all that crap happened, my nephew was an idiot we all know that… and you were blown to pieces. It took us decades, literally, to find a way to make this work, to get someone that would look just like you to pour your own soul into him, then
your friend… Flash, goes back in time and solves the issue. No reincarnation crap needed! Now boy, listen to me.” Steve had a hard time swallowing a thick lump that had formed in his throat. “Go home, nurse that hangover, and make my niece happy. She’s seen some bad crap through the years, and she deserves everything you can give her and then some. Got it?”

“Yes sir!”

“Spare the sir for my brother. Now go, before he passes out and he’s dead weight in your care. And yes Clark, I know you’re superstrong and stuff, just… be careful!”

“But how do you…”

“Oh for Tartarus’ sake, who do you think kicked your butt out of the Underworld and back into your body? Dude! Give me a little credit! I might look like a hipster, but I can kick some major ass when I want to!”

Clark nodded. “Alright, I’ll take him home. Let me just…”

Hades grabbed his wrist before he could reach for his wallet. “On the house. The whole thing. Just go home and keep a bucket close to him.”

Chapter End Notes

A very quick rundown on Greek Mythology mentioned in this chapter. First, forget the Hades from Disney’s Hercules. As fun as it was, Hades has never been like this, in Greek Mythology. He’s always portrayed as quiet and even kind. His rule over the Underworld, also known as Hades itself, is stern and just. He has no cruel inclinations, contrary to his younger brothers Zeus and Poseidon. So… yeah, no James Woods-like character, Hades is kind of altruistic, despite modern more fearmongering characterizations. In the Wonder Woman comic book canon, characterizations of the gods vary from writer to writer. Azzarello has most of the gods act like rebellious, spoiled children, others, like George Perez (my favorite Wonder Woman author) wrote them as a closer counterpart to the original mythology, while being heavily influenced by the Victorian concept of the Reaper. I’m mixing a little bit of original mythology and comic book canon, while leaning heavily on the mythos because reasons.

As for Achilles and his immortality, there are different myths about it. First, the most common and widely spread, has his mother Thetis dip him as an infant in the River Styx, holding him by his heel, so it becomes his only weak point. The second, less known but more interesting on my part, has Thetis bathing him in ambrosia and then “cooking” him over an open fire to “harden” him and give him immortality. Peleus, his father, sees what she’s doing and, scared to death, stops the process before the last part, his heel, is made immortal.

And suddenly 5 years studying ancient Greek don’t seem like a waste of time!
Whatever Aphrodite had given them, it affected Lois so quickly she had gone from totally sober to smashed drunk in the span of a couple of minutes. Her sister had warned Diana, it would give her a bad hangover the next day but no harm would befall her, or at least nothing that lots of water and a painkiller couldn’t cure. And evidently, Steve was in the very same situation.

The Gods only knew what the hell was going on, and Diana felt the sudden urge to go home and collect her thoughts about it, but before that, she had to get Lois home safe and sound, and retrieve Steve from Clark’s custody.

“Gods Lois, one foot in front of the other, we’re almost there!”

“He’s coming home too, I called him. Oh, there he is!”

Diana shook her head. Damn, she was as drunk as a sailor on shore leave. “He’s coming home too, I called him. Oh, there he is!”

The hulking figure of Lois’ fiance turned a corner, not fifty meters ahead of them, holding up Steve’s limping body as he walked to the front door of their building.

“Hey, Diana! Thanks for calling, how is she?” he asked when they both reached the door, fishing in his pocket for the keys. Steve hung limply from his shoulders, but he seemed to be able to make some steps. In the dimly lit street, his face looked flushed and sweaty, and his eyes unfocused. For a moment, she had a clear idea of Dionysius’ parties could do to a mortal.

“Talkative and rambling. The standard drunk. What about him?”

Clark opened the door and they slipped inside. “Talkative and rambling. Whatever your uncle gave him, got to his head really fast!”

Diana jolted. “My uncle?”

“Yeah, Hades, the God of Underworld or whatever he does when he doesn’t run my favourite bar just around the corner! Want to hand her over?”

She nodded. “Yeah, why not? She gets handsy when she’s drunk.”

He chuckled. “Don’t I know it?” he replied as they carefully moved Steve and Lois from one support to another. The moment she moved her arms around Steve’s torso, he immediately sagged in her arms and hid his face in the crook of her neck. “God you smell so good,” he whispered, his voice slurred by intoxication was a complete far cry from the sultry tone he had clearly attempted.

She groaned as she tried to keep him upright. “Come on Steve, not now.”

In the corner of her vision, she noticed that Clark was having a bit of a hard time himself as they waited for the elevator, with Lois being all handsy and flirty. It took them both a good deal of effort to get them inside Lois’ apartment. With little ceremony, Clark picked her up and deposited her on the couch, slipping her heeled shoes off and unbuttoning the first two buttons of her white shirt. “Stay here, I’ll get you a bucket in case you need to throw up.”

Diana instead set Steve on an armchair and tried to straighten him in his seat, but ended up sitting in his lap with him nuzzling her neck and tickling her to no end. “Oh come on Steve you were born
two centuries ago, show some good ol’ manners of your time!” she laughed when he did bite her neck, albeit playfully.

“Hey guys get a room!” laughed Lois. “Hey, where’s my Superman?”

“Here, Lois. I’m here!” Clark came back from wherever he had gone with a bucket in each hand. “Nice to see you made yourself comfortable.”

Diana chuckled. “I tried, but he seems like one of those misbehaving drunks.” She accepted the bucket from him and held it close in case he needed to empty his stomach. “What happened?”

He shrugged. “Wish I knew. One moment we were pondering the inevitability of death or something like that, the next he was smashed drunk after one single shot of whatever the guy gave us and we’re told he’s sort of immortal and the owner of my favourite bar is Hades. Does that make sense?”

“With her,” interjected Steve as he pointed at Diana. “More than you may think. I mean… flying on an island full of immortal women, hidden somewhere in the middle of the Mediterranean sea? Makes no sense right? Well, I did!”

Diana slapped his chest. “Hey, that’s where I grew up!”

“I know, I’ve been there, and it beautiful!” he slurred, making a wide gesture with both hands. “And the food… don’t get me started about the food. Never eaten better in my life.”


“Yeah, tell me. I’m curious. Oh by the way, are you hungry? I mean, we can order in or I can cook something.”

She shook her head. “No, I’m perfectly fine. Anyway, yes… Themyscira. As Steve said, it’s an island magically hidden in the Mediterranean sea, between Cyprus, Greece and Turkey. If you get close to it you’ll find the thickest fog you’ll ever see in your life and if you’re brave enough to push forward…”

“…you’ll see the greatest beaches of the whole world!” added Steve. “The coast is… God it’s just so freaking beautiful! Can we go back? You know the way, right?”

“Of course I know the way.” She kissed his cheek and he blushed a little bit. “We’ll see as soon as you get your passport. We’ll need a boat though, or you plan to crash land there again?”

“I think I’ll choose sailing over crashing every day!”

They all laughed hard, and Lois was gasping for air when she finally managed to get a grip on herself. “God, he’s good looking and has a sense of humor,” she said, climbing over Clark’s lap and nestling herself beneath his chin. “You picked a good one!”

“Oh look who’s talking!”

Lois giggled a little. “You know Steve… I’ve never seen her smile. Not like this at least.”

Steve’s fingers flexed against her side. “Wait what?” he looked up at her, lips parted in an O of disbelief. “No come on it’s impossible! This giggly girl here?” He gently tickled her on the sides and she did giggle, right on cue.

“Now, but before you came back?” She shrugged. “She’s always been… I’m not gonna say you
were cold, you’ve never been cold, just… distant? I mean… when this guy here,” and she pointed at Clark. “When he died she was there for me, from the first moment, I would have probably done something stupid, if it weren’t for her last year. But in more than a year I never saw her laugh. Smile? Yes, but always brief, halfway there. Look at you now!” she exclaimed and nearly lost her balance, if it hadn’t been for Clark holding her upright. “Alright, it’s probably that thing Melanie gave us but… you’re glowing! You sure you’re not pregnant?"

Used to Lois’ lack of filter when she was inebriated, Diana laughed the last remark off as a joke, but Steve wasn’t used to her and most of all wasn’t used to making jokes about certain subjects at all, and given his own state of inebriation, he startled in his seat as electrocuted. He moved so fast Diana felt like he was pushing her away from him. “Hey Steve calm down it was just a joke!”

He shook his head, like a puppy shaking off excess water off his pelt. “Sorry, sorry… I just… I was caught off guard.” He cleared his throat and settled back against the padding of the armchair. “I just need to get used to this century. God, my head hurts like hell.”

Clark smiled. “Don’t worry, she’s not always like this. Whatever you’ve been given, it’s potent, I’ve never seen her like this! By the way, I’ll go grab some water. You two need to drink something or tomorrow you’ll wake up more rigid than a wood log.”

“Clark, stay there, I know where you keep things. You need anything?”

“A glass of water would be nice, thanks, Diana.”

She gathered four glasses from a cabinet and filled a pitcher of fresh water, then she returned to the living room and set everything on the coffee table. “There we are. How much did he drink?”

“Not much. Before the shot of whatever your uncle gave us, four pints. He surely couldn’t drive, but he was way more sober than he is now. And he doesn’t look even half bad, at the moment! You should have seen how fast that thing got to his head.”

“Even mine!” added Lois, with a high pitched chirp.

“The buzz is nice though,” said Steve. “Back in the day we had crappy alcohol that made you forget everything for hours and made you do the most stupid things and then you threw up even your first turkey roast.”

Lois groaned. “Sounds like college parties!”

Clark wrapped his arms around her waist. “Calm down, we can hear you!”

Diana handed her and Steve a glass of water each. “I so fear the hangover tomorrow…” she murmured.

“Won’t be the first,” replied the former pilot. “And I fear it won’t be the last.” Clark was right, he was sobering up quite fast, she had to give his liver some credit. He downed the glass of water and set it on the table in front of him, his movement way more coordinated than before. “Diana, if what Hades said is true, whatever was in that shot was made by your father!”

She rolled her eyes. “Yes, so what?”

“What do you think was in there?”

“No idea. Has Hades said anything about it?”
Clark shook his head. “No, except that his brother made it and that it would link his fate to yours and that as long as you two are together, he won’t age. He also said something about the Gods having tried to find a way to bring him back for quite some time, before Flash solved the problem by bringing him forward in time altogether.”

“But why will he be immortal only if they are together?” asked Lois.

“In case I die, he won’t be forced to be immortal and watch everyone around him, people he cares about, die of old age while he remains thirty years old forever,” explained Diana. “Believe me, I’ve been doing this for quite some time and… it hurts, way more than you may think.”

“Makes sense…”

“Hey, it’s way more than I could have hoped!” he exclaimed. “I was content enough with twenty or thirty years, anyway.”

“Life span’s got a lot longer than that, Steve,” Lois told him. “You look like a healthy guy, I bet you could have lived way beyond eighty years of age, splendidly.”

“And be the creepy old guy with the smoking hot girlfriend, young enough she could be his granddaughter? Please, no!”

“That’s a good point!”

About an hour later, Steve’s head had cleared enough so they could go home. They said goodbye to Lois and Clark, with the promise of meeting again at Bruce’s fundraising gala, the next week.

As they walked back to the car, Steve leaned heavily on her, but his steps were safe on the ground. “You think you can take the car ride back home?”

He gave her a brief nod. “Just don’t go too fast.”

In the end he fell asleep in the car. When she parked in the designated spot in the garage beneath the building complex where she had lived when in Metropolis - one that rented cars to the tenants who came to the city only for short business trips - he was sleeping soundly against the glass panel at his right. He even snored a little bit. For a moment, she lost herself, looking at his rugged features finally relaxed after the long day and even longer night they just had. Did she have the heart to wake him from his slumber?

Unfortunately, she had to. She almost dragged him to the elevator, but during the ride up, he fell asleep again against her. Shaking her head, at that point she simply picked him up and carried him towards the front door, when they arrived at their floor. Given the late hour, she doubted she’d see anyone, coming or going. That building was used pretty much as a fancy hotel by rich people that lived out of town when they needed to be in the City, much like herself. Most of her business were in Paris, she lived there, her things were there, but Bruce had insisted on buying her the three room apartment when they had started working on their little project nicknamed Justice League. She had no idea who lived across the floor, or in the apartment right beside her own.

Still holding Steve in her arms, she managed to swipe her purse close to the RFID keypad and the received picked the radio signal coming from the card inside her wallet, and the door opened with a soft click.

“Here we are,” she whispered as she walked in and shut the door with a swift kick of her heel. “Let’s get you in bed., shall we?”
He groaned when she set him down on the mattress and started taking his clothes off. “Hey greedy girl, no need to rush things!”

She managed to refrain from bursting into a boastful laughter. “Steve, you’re still drunk and you can’t sleep with a shirt and jeans on. There’s nothing greedy in taking them off.”

“You say that because…” he groaned again, louder this time. “You say that because you’re not on this side of the scene.”

Smiling, he pushed him until he was flat on his back and moved to take off his pants. “See? Greedy.”

The funny thing was that he wasn’t really awake, only on the verge of consciousness, enough to sustain a conversation he would not remember and next morning she would have a lot of fun retelling all the nonsense he had said. When she was finally done he curled beneath the duvet and she proceeded to fold his clothes, before stripping herself and changing in her normal sleeping attire. She quickly took care of things in the bathroom before moving back in the bedroom. He was curled on his side, one arm beneath the pillow and the other extended to her side of the bed. “Come to bed…” he mumbled.

“Just a moment,” said Diana as she set the alarm on her phone, then she slipped beneath the covers herself. “Here I am.”

With a grunt, Steve turned on his back and immediately pulled her close to him. “Is it true?”

“What?”

“What Lois said, about you never laughing before I came back.”

Diana took a deep breath and settled comfortably with her head on his chest. “Could be. I have no idea.”

“Was it because of me? Of what I did that night?” he mumbled against her forehead.

Taking a deep breath, Diana wrapped her arm around his torso. “Really, I don’t know! Maybe I… I don’t really know. I didn’t take it well, that’s true. Etta tried her best to cheer me up but there was like a dark cloud around me and I couldn’t really get out of there, it was like a cage and… maybe I never managed to get out of that cloud. It thinned, it dissipated a little, but… yeah, I guess Lois was right.”

He sighed. “I’m sorry Diana.”

“For what? For saving the world from at least another year of war? For sparing countless soldiers an atrocious death? You had to, no need to be sorry about it.”

“Still, I’m sorry. Whatever happened after I blew that thing up… you didn’t deserve it.”

She lazily skimmed a thin, faded scar on his chest with her finger and he shivered beside her. “I just… I trusted you to be my guide in a world I didn’t know, but that I wanted to know… and you weren’t there. And then so much crap happened, between the rebuilding, the Great Depression then the War. I lost hope in humanity, maybe that’s why I stopped laughing. Everywhere I looked, every person I met… I only saw the potential evil they could do. For a long while, most of all during World War Two, when I spent years getting people away from the Nazi’s concentration camps or trying to save them before they even arrived there… I lost hope. That’s what made me stop laugh. The humanity I once wanted to save.”
“Strage,” Steve groaned. “Sounds like me when I landed at your doorstep. I… I had seen so much shit during the war, heard even more home with my dad being in the army too before he settled and became a farmer… It was you, you gave me hope. Your absolute trust in humanity’s ability to be intrinsically good…” How could he use such a word while half asleep and drunk was a mystery she was never going to solve. “That’s why I did it. You inspired me, Diana, you gave me back the hope I had lost… you motivated me to do the right thing.”

She chuckled, feeling a sudden blush heating her cheeks. “Would you think I’m selfish if I told you that, sometimes, I wished I wouldn’t have inspired anything in you, that night?”

“Not selfish. Human. Not exactly a bad thing.”

“And you really think of me as a human?” she asked. “Knowing who my parents are?”

“Who cares… Thanksgiving dinner will be a little awkward, but I don’t care.” He buried his nose in her hair and breathed deep. “God, you smell so good… I so wish I wasn’t this drunk…”

“Me too. Sleep now, Steve. We’ll talk more tomorrow.”

“Will I still be immortal tomorrow?”

“I daresay you will be. Immortal and hungover. What a killer combination…”

Steve laughed, softly, a drowsy sound that made her heart soar. “There’s only killer thing in the room. And no, I don’t mean you or your sword.”

“And what would it be?”

“Your legs…” he replied, his voice fading a little bit. “God, I love your legs… and don’t get me started about your ass I…”

As she barely stifled a boastful laugh, he fell asleep with a grunt and didn’t finish the sentence, but Diana had a very clear idea where he was going. And with a contented sigh, she let herself fall asleep herself, with a sense of calm she hadn’t felt in decades washing over her and lulling her to a fitful, restful sleep.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Not a fan of this chapter but I needed to go from point A to point B.

The night passed without an itch. Steve slept soundly, snoring a little bit but not nearly enough to be a nuisance for her. He moved a little bit at her side as dawn approached and grumbled a few incoherent words before falling again in the deep sleep of the weary and the drunks.

Diana woke early, Antiope’s training regiment still deeply rooted in her body clock, and took some time to just look at him as he slept. His face, pressed against the pillow, was slack as he was dead to the world. His mouth was slightly open and he puffed out some heavy sighs from time to time. His eyes fluttered as he dreamed, but whatever was inspired by Morpheus’ powers, he seemed pretty happy with it. She caught him smiling in his sleep and damn if it didn’t make her heart burst with joy.

The alarm clock set on her phone shrilled, and she quickly reached on the nightstand for it and turned it off with a swipe of her finger. Steve didn’t budge, undisturbed by the loud noise and the movement of the bed. Better this way. He had a long night, he needed to sleep some more.

With a sigh of resignation, she crawled out the warm cocoon of the bed and sat for a moment on the edge and ran her hands through her hair. “What now?” she whispered.

She threw a quick look over her shoulder as Steve moved until he was sprawled, face down, on the bed. She had a flash of Veld, of a very similar scene when she had woken up at first light while he had slept on. The light was completely different, the place was the complete opposite, but the sudden warm feeling blooming the middle of her chest was the same.

“Oh well, shower first,” she murmured as she stood. “Breakfast second.”

She took her own sweet time, letting the warm water sluice down her skin and relax her muscles. The Gods’ intervention, so sudden and out of the blue, gave her some thoughts. Never in her life, even before leaving Themyscira, she had heard of the Gods lifting a finger if they didn’t have some sort of personal advantage, what good could they earn from making Steve immortal?

Aphrodite had said that they were going to take care of her and Steve, but in her experience, albeit limited, when Gods dwelled in the affairs of mankind, nothing good could come out of it.

She was still mulling over a myriad of random thoughts when she decided to check the backlog of emails that had amassed in her mailbox, while eating something. She took her laptop in the kitchen and as it booted up, she prepared coffee and slipped a couple of bread slices in the toaster. It was then that she found a nearly forgotten jar of Nutella, still sealed, in the back of the pantry. “Oh Gods…” she exclaimed as she grabbed it and checked the expiration date. “What the hell are you doing here?”

According to Lois, Clark had always been very fond of the spread and she always kept a reserve of it, but Diana had no freaking idea how a jar had ended in her pantry. Oh well, who cared. She twisted the lid, broke the tin foil seal and dunked a spoon in it. It had been years since she had a jar of Nutella at hand, for a reason or another, and for once, she gave in and ate it straight from the
spoon. Nutella for breakfast, that was a first.

Then, with coffee freshly brewed and two slices of toast with Nutella in a plate beside the laptop, she started going through the emails. Most of them were work related emails where her address had just been added in the carbon copy string, a vast majority of them weren’t even related with her field. She gave those a quick read then deleted them, then she went through those that really mattered. New discoveries here, a new excavation there… More artifacts to catalogue and see if they could be added to the museum’s collection. Some emails had photos attached, but they didn’t show anything of great interest, not to the public at least. Every single artifact was important on its own, but not everything was interesting enough to be put on show, not in the Louvre Museum at least.

As she tapped on the touchpad to go through the pictures, she thought of the countless museums in the world that could benefit from such findings, and wondered where they could send them. Athens and London were out of question, they had so many artifacts from Greece and the Middle East they could easily build three more museums with what was stockpiled in the great warehouses that held everything they didn’t put on a show.

“Where do I send a piece of pottery with faded marks that maybe depict the Olympic Games?” she wondered, chewing on a bite of toast. “Maybe the department of restoration needs them…”

Sticking the slice of bread between her teeth in the less royal fashion she could think, she forwarded the email to a professor she had met years before and proposed an exchange. Free artifacts of little value that required restoration in exchange for said restoration done by students as an exercise.

She was halfway through it when Steve appeared in the doorway of the kitchen, rubbing his eyes and… half naked.

Diana felt a sudden warm sensation deep in her gut and the piece of toast still hanging between her teeth nearly fell. Damn those tight boxer briefs, those made him way above average. “‘Morning…” he mumbled then approached the coffee maker to get himself some coffee before sitting at the table beside her. “I’m never drinking alcohol again.”

“I seriously doubt that.”

“Well, then I’ll never drink alcohol offered by shady guys I’ve never met. Sounds better?”

She nodded. “Yes, that sounds more like you.”

With an inhuman groan, he crossed his arms on the table and lay his head on them, shielding his eyes from the light. “Work?”

“Yes. Lots of beautiful old things I don’t know where to put.”

Grunting, Steve shrugged his shoulders and straightened up again. “No room left in the museum?”

“Either that, or it’s not interesting enough to switch between what is already exposed and these. It’s mostly common pottery dug from a gravesite, nothing uncommon or that would draw much interest. I’m currently trying to contact an expert in restoration to see if he needs artifacts to use as teaching aids.”

“How kind.” He rubbed his eyes with his knuckles then drank some of his coffee. “I’d love to see the Louvre. I’ve been to the British Museum but never the Louvre.”

“I can take you on a tour, after hours. No one obscuring the view, empty halls, all the time you want to look at whatever you want…”
“The most amazing guide to show me around… heck, sounds like a dream. Maybe I’m still drunk!”

She ran her fingers through his hair. “Not drunk, just hungover. Drink your coffee, I’ll make you some toasts.”

“I think I’ll start with this.” He picked the remaining slice of toast and gave it a large bite. Diana watched as he chewed and then his eyes shot wide open as he realized it wasn’t the typical preserve he was used to back in 1918. “What is this?” He took another bite. “It’s amazing!”

“Just one of the many great things the Italians gave us after World War Two. It’s chocolate, hazelnuts and a few other ingredients you don’t need to know about. Like it?”

“I love it! Wow, this century has so much more than what I expected! The food alone is just so… awesome!” He finished the last bite and let out a contented sigh. “I wouldn’t mind if warmongering aliens wouldn’t pop up that often but, hey, I’m not complaining.”

Diana was waiting for the two slices to be ready when a question popped in her mind. “Steve, can I ask you something?”

“Sure! Anything you want.”

“How can you be so relaxed about this? I mean, when I came to your world, it was all so strange and I could barely wrap my head about the fact that beyond Themyscira there was such a different place and culture and other things I didn’t understand, but you… you never question anything you see or we tell you!”

He gave her a wry smile. “I don’t question what you tell me, because I know I can trust you. The rest… the rest is terrifying! I can barely fathom how deeply society has changed in one hundred years not to mention the technology! I’m being assaulted by all kinds of… novelties and I can barely keep up!”

She moved the toasted bread to the plate and placed it in front of him, with the jar of spread and a knife. “Kind of a shock, uh? At least I had those days on the boat when you told me all those things, but you? Nothing of the sorts. Are you sure you can keep up?”

He shrugged his shoulders and nodded. “Yes, I can! I mean, I learned how to use a smartphone and I can use a computer… sort of. I saw you driving the other day, it wasn’t too different from the cars I handled… how bad can be the rest?” He pushed the chair back from the table and turned towards her. “Aliens notwithstanding.”

“Well…” she climbed on his lap and wrapped her arms around his neck. “Aliens notwithstanding… can you imagine that in 1969 someone actually flew to the Moon?”

“Nah, try harder. There were planes already in my time.”

“It wasn’t a plane but alright, let me think… what could be harder to accept than aliens invading Earth, teams of superheroes fighting them and time travel… segregation is no longer effective and racism is actually sanctioned by law.”

“Finally! About high time!”

“You’re not making easy here! Ah, yes I’ve got one! Football is more popular than baseball!”

That made him tick. She recalled that day, on the boat during their long trip from Themyscira to London, that he had tried to explain to her the rules of baseball and that it was his favourite sport.
ever. “No way! How can it be? No, no I refuse to believe you!”

She shrugged and kissed him. “Suit yourself. Now, how about we finish breakfast, get dressed and take a walk around? Time to get acquainted with the city!”

A full bottle of water, a couple of Tylenols and a long warm shower later, Steve felt good enough to step outside the apartment. It was a cool mid-November morning, with the heat from the sun mitigated by a cold breeze coming from the sea. Far in the distance, Diana could still see the smoke rising from the rubble left by the battle. At least no stockpile of gas had exploded, so the acrid smell of the fires was less powerful.

They walked hand in hand, slowly so that Steve could look around and orientate himself in streets that he once had visited, before being shipped to Europe.

“So much has changed…”

“For better or for worse?”

“Uhm… the better I guess. Back in the day the sewers didn’t work properly, there were more horses than cars so you can imagine the conditions of the streets. There was no sidewalk, the majority of the streets weren’t paved. I mean, it wasn’t as crowded but I guess the city has grown.”

“Exponentially, like all big cities. Even in Europe.”

“It’s… kinda neat actually. I mean, with the sidewalks people don’t need to walk in the middle of the road but man… look at that I’ve never seen so many cars in one place!”

The conversation soon moved towards other subjects, be it how warm were the clothes she had gotten him compared to those he was used and how many people had immigrated to the United States through the years and had integrated in the society there. That was a conversation that had sparked when they stopped for a coffee and Steve noticed that on the other side of the street there were a bunch of take out restaurants from Asia.

“Well, you liked thai food the other day.”

“I think I need to get used to the spices but… yeah it was great. I bet there’s a lot more out there to discover.”

“Oh dear, a whole new world! You know what? Sushi, for lunch. I know a place just down the corner…”

“Uh, what’s sushi?”

“You’ll see tonight. Just trust me.”

He smiled. “Sure, I trust you, I’m just curious. Is there any other place you want to show me?”

The walked some more, roaming aimlessly in the streets of Metropolis, just talking and enjoying each other’s company. What Steve had wanted all those years before, they had it now, and it was completely crazy! Because they literally had all the time they wanted! Whatever he had drunk the day before, Hades had said his destiny was now tied to hers and as long they were together he wouldn’t age and… it was awesome!
“Oh, speaking of food…” The subject kept popping up in his mind. Maybe he was getting hungry.
“Your other uncle seemingly has a seafood restaurant in Amalfi.”

“Wait,” she jolted at his side. “My other uncle? You mean Poseidon?”

Steve nodded. “At least that what Hades said yesterday. You have a funny family you know? I had always envisioned Hades as a tall, slim guy, pale and somber, instead he’s… well, he’s tall and slim alright, but he’s funny, exuberant… the long hair and braided beard threw me off a little bit but… yes, he was nothing like what I expected.”

“You should have seen Aphrodite then…” she laughed. “Alright, I’m tall even by today's standards, but she’s short, tiny even. With long brown hair and more piercings that I could count. She’s… cute, I’d say, and she was really sweet with Lois, when she started rambling.”

“He didn’t allow Clark to pay. He said On the house! Like he was ordering him round. It was… strange, but he was really nice with us.”

“Now I’m wondering how many times I’ve met members of my family without knowing it.”

“You know, he said that your father was really rooting for us, back when we met, and that when he saw me in his realm he freaked out. Turns out they have spent the last century trying to fix this mess, that they would have done something sooner but when the bomber blew there was no body to use as a vessel for my soul and… they were trying with reincarnation too, but apparently that takes a lot of time.”

“They could have told me!”

“And ruin the surprise? Nah, this is way better.”

As they wandered around, they walked by the Metropolis Museum. “Hey, Diana, it’s kind of cold out here, want to get warmer for a while?” he proposed. “I know, you work in a museum, one that’s way bigger than this but…”

Diana leaned closer to him and gave him a quick peck on the lips. “Whatever you wish.”

Again, he felt nearly overwhelmed with everything he saw. The museum was mainly dedicated to ancient civilizations, with artifacts coming from all over the world. There were halls dedicated to pre-Columbian civilizations and First Nations, others dedicated to the Ancient Greeks, the Roman Empire and even older civilizations of Mesopotamia and the Middle East, and farther away, like India, Africa, Southeast Asia, China and Japan.

“Seen anything interesting?” she asked as he read the description beside a display case that contained a Hittite sword.

“Didn’t your aunt’s sword have markings like these?” he pointed at the hilt of the weapon.

Diana leaned closer and took a better look. “Hey, you’re right! It says… wow this thing needs a good restoration. Alright, I think I get it. Blade of the… No, the rest is too worn, can’t read it. Interesting though. Markings like this on hittite weapon’s are very rare, this was probably the sword of a member of royalty or something.”

They moved through the halls and ended in the area dedicated to Ancient Greece. “Is it very different from the Louvre?”

“It’s more modern, but in the end every museum looks the same. Glass cases with things inside and
plaques or panels beside them to describe what’s inside. Also this is specialized in ancient civilizations, the Louvre has even more.”

There was a class of children, from elementary school. They were sitting on the floor in front of a big case display that went from the floor to the ceiling. It contained the reproduction of the armor worn by a standard hoplite. The children listened to the guide as she explained them some basic military history of ancient Greece and the difference between a Spartan and a Greek soldier.

He took a moment to watch her as she moved from case to case, inspected every artifact, analyzing it quickly with a clinical eye she had acquired with countless hours in the field, both at Themyscira and then working in the field. She looked so at ease, so relaxed… like those days they spent on the boat sailing from the island to London. She exuded confidence with every movement, just like she did when they first met. She wanted to do something, she felt compelled to do it, and goddammit she did it and she did it with style!

And God he loved her.

“Feels like being home?”

Diana chuckled. “For Hades’ sake no! These… this is just a fraction of what we used. We had weaponry and armors from a lot of places. But I admit I had no idea they had such a collection. It’s nice for once to just enjoy history without having to actually be in charge of it.” She paused for a long moment to look at a round hoplite shield, shiny brass with faded inscriptions on it and her lips turned up in a brief but heartfelt smile. “Alright, maybe I do feel a little at home around these things. Come now, let’s finish the tour then to eat something.”

“Oh yes please I’m starving!”

Watching him deal with the concept of eating raw fish was a show on its own. His struggle with the chopsticks was even better.

“Alright…” he said at some point when the piece of sashimi fell again from the tip of the chopsticks in his hand. “You were right, it’s insanely good but… it’s slippery as a eel!”

“You’ll get better. It takes a little practice but it gets easier if you try long enough.”

“I just wish…” He fought again with the piece of tuna and managed to bring it to his mouth. “It wasn’t so damn difficult to eat!”

He watched her as she picked a piece of sushi from the wooden tray between them and studied her technique, then he tried to repeat the same movements she had made. “Try to grip the sticks a little closer to the tip, it’s easier that way.”

That little tip got him some improvements, but he often failed and tiny droplets of soy sauce splashed everywhere. At least he had a napkin to save his shirt. “Oh for heaven’s sake…” he groaned. “Well, I have a lifetime to learn how to use the chopsticks!”

“It takes less than that. Also, most of Asian cuisine uses chopsticks instead of cutlery so the more you explore it, the more experience you’ll get.”

His shoulders slumped and he pouted a little bit, a childish expression that clashed with the very adult man in front of her, long beard and all. Gods, he does look good with a long beard though… she thought.
“Just… something easier for dinner?”

“We’ll see when time comes. Be brave and conquer your lunch, we’re going for ice cream later!”
“Diana, are you ready?”

“I’ll be ready when I’ll be ready!” Her voice echoed down the hallway from the bedroom. “The town car’s not even here yet, be patient!”

Resigned, Steve rolled his eyes and sat on the couch, careful not to crease the awfully expensive suit and grabbed the remote of the TV, turning it on one the many news channels. It had been ten days since his arrival in the twenty first century and he was on the way of mastering lots of the commodities, TV, computers and smartphone above all, a device he now owned as Diana had thought he would need one. He used it scarcely, but as he learned how to use it properly, he discovered he could use it to satisfy any eventual curiosities that would come up when Diana wasn’t there to enlighten him. It didn’t happen often, she rarely left him at his own devices, but it had happened.

The anchorman on the screen was talking about the recent success of the joint efforts to retake Mosul from the Islamic State’s grasp in Iraq - one quick research told him the man was talking about an area of the world he once knew as part of the Ottoman Empire - when Diana finally appeared.

Steve felt his heart skip a beat and his lungs deflate when he saw her. He hadn’t seen the dress when they had gone shopping, and now… he felt a lump forming in his throat. The black fabric framed her body in the most delicious way, her makeup emphasized her natural beauty and damn he loved to see her with her hair down, with the silky smooth strands falling over and beyond her shoulders, like a drape.

Damn she was going to steal the scene at this gala too.

“Wow!”

Her smile, strangely shy, nearly killed him. “You don’t look half bad too. Come, the car has finally arrived.”

As they walked to the door, he noticed something rigid beneath her dress, when he pressed a hand to the small of her back. Also, he saw a large duffel bag near the door and he immediately realized that bag contained her weaponry, and that beneath the dress she was wearing her armor.

“Oh, Diana… why are you going out with…”

She didn’t let him finish. “A bad feeling,” she explained. “I don’t know why but I’ve had this feeling something bad was going to happen… I don’t want to go out unprepared.”

He picked the bag and let her open the door. “In that case, let’s trust your feelings. I just wish I had a gun though.”

The ride to Wayne Manor was quite a long while. The streets were packed with cars and the driver had a hard time sneaking away from the traffic. Diana spent most of the time giving him a quick round up of the people they would probably meet there, as Bruce had confirmed that the Justice League would be there, except for Victor who had previous engagements. She was telling him about Barry’s special abilities when they finally arrived at the Manor.
“Oh, great, I’ll have the chance to thank him properly.”

As they walked towards the rear entrance, as specifically instructed by Bruce, she gave him a quick kiss on the now shaven cheek. He smiled and blushed and shrugged. The movement made her weaponry clink in the bag he was carrying and he felt suddenly aware that something, that night, could go very wrong. He dearly hoped it wouldn’t, but if there was something he had come to realize during those brief but intense days in her company back then, it was that her gut feeling, while maybe a bit misguided, was nearly always right.

The door opened and Alfred, in an impeccable black tuxedo himself, appeared behind it with a bright but weary smile. “Oh, Miss Price, Captain Trevor! It’s good to see you. Please come in.” He let them in and Steve noticed a quick rise of an eyebrow in the older butler. “May I ask you what’s in the bag? Are you planning to stay the night?”

“Oh no Alfred, it’s just… I have a bad feeling, like something bad is going to happen,” explained Diana. “And I wanted to be prepared.”

He nodded. “Very well. Master Bruce said something similar earlier this afternoon. Yesterday during his patrol he caught word that something’s going to happen soon and I’m sure he’ll appreciate your help. He’s still a little sore in places, after battling Steppenwolf and his minions, he would never admit it but he’s getting old and it takes more time for him to heal.”

“And I’ll be happy to help him, in case it happens.”

“I’ll take your things quickly downstairs, safe and sound in the headquarters. You can join the others in the main hall, Master Bruce is already there, mingling. Have fun and in case you need anything, just look for me.”

As Alfred disappeared from their sight, Steve suddenly felt a lump in his throat. “Why do I suddenly feel so nervous?”

Diana hooked her arm around his and pulled him closer. “Don’t worry, this… type of thing tends to be pretty shallow. No one likes to talk about the current foreign policies or the humanitarian crisis in Europe. People are going to brag about their new cars or whine about how their new car got wrecked when they ran too fast going to their beach house in Long Island.”

“What if they ask me what I do for a living?”

“Try to stick with me, I can always divert the conversation. Or… maybe we could use your background… do you think you can pose as a historian specialized in World War One?”

He nodded. “Sure thing. Also, in the past few days I read enough about World War Two to keep up a conversation about that too. Korean and Vietnam war though…”

“Admit it freely, you’re no expert in those fields, but World War One has no secret for you. And in case someone asks you how we met, tell them it was work related.”

“Uh, a tryst on the workplace? Naughty girl…”

She planted a sharp elbow between his ribs. “Jerk.”

Despite some early awkwardness, Steve felt surprisingly at ease. The crowd around them seemed to be pretty tight, like they all knew each other. Seems like high society hasn’t changed a bit. They looked, spoke and acted the same way as the rich and famous would do back in his day, and Diana
was right about the conversations. Boring and terribly predictable, most of the times verging on the
new expensive car one had purchased - she had been awfully precise with her prediction - and the
latest exploits of the Metropolis stock market. Steve politely listened in silence as Diana led most of
the conversations with ease and fake enjoyment, while he could clearly see by the slight ticking of
her fingertip on the stem of her champagne flute that she didn’t really want to be there.

They were lucky, soon familiar faces started popping out. That tower of a man that was Bruce
Wayne found them and saved them from the most boring conversation about how high car insurance
had become and took them to a corner of the hall, where Lois and Clark were standing, talking to
another couple. He recognized the man as Arthur Curry, also known as the Aquaman. He had met
him the night he had been dragged ahead of time, but the other woman, a tall redhead with long
straight hair dressed in a gorgeous green gown, Steve had no idea who she was.

Turned out it was Mera, Arthur’s wife and…

“Queen of Atlantis?” he asked, completely baffled. He was sure he had the funniest look stamped on
his face but he didn’t care.

Mera smiled. “Among other things. But what about you, where do you come from?”

“From a German bomber flying off Belgium on a dark November night of 1918…” come a voice
from behind them.

“Hey Barry!” cheered Diana. “You made it!” She gave him a quick, polite hug. “You clean up
nicely!”

“When need arises… and you look gorgeous, as usual. Hey Steve, how are you holding up in this
millennium?”

“A bit overwhelming, but better than expected.”

The younger man smiled and nodded. “Great, that’s what I wanted to hear. Make this girl happy, she
deserves a break.”

“Oh, don’t worry, I already have her family making sure I do, I don’t need more encouragement than
that.”

Bruce startled. “What do you mean with her family?” he asked. “I mean, aren’t you…”

Diana stopped him with a hand on his arm. “Don’t, Bruce. Don’t bring this up, not tonight. Another
time, maybe, but tonight it’s about gathering funds for rebuilding what Steppenwolf destroyed. There
will be time for my family history, but tonight it isn’t.”

Clark, almost silent up to that moment, grunted. “Diana, just tell him you’re Zeus’ daughter and that
your uncle threatened him of bodily harm if he mistreats you. There, easy, isn’t it?”

If only looks could kill… thought Steve, trying not to laugh when Diana threw him a mean look.

“Thanks Clark.”

“Hey, it doesn’t happen every day that Hades serves you a pint. Or four.”

“Or Aphrodite, for the matter,” interjected Lois. “Anyway, let’s just say her extended family is kind
of big, kind of nosy and kind of powerful, alright?”

Arthur chuckled. “Hey, it might turn out we’re related. Who knows if somewhere back in my family
someone had a tryst with Poseidon or something!"

With a boastful, collective laugh, the subject was abandoned and they moved on to merrier stuff.

At some point though, the group separated and almost everyone went on with the evening, chatting with different people. Most of all Lois, she was a well known reporter and people were surprised to see her there, so she had a lot to tell people. Diana too, she managed to pull the socialite persona off like it was the easiest thing in the world, while Steve just couldn’t. He was good at smiling politely and answer questions when asked, but more than that, he didn’t feel like being too social. He was more than happy to remain in a corner, chatting with Clark and enjoying Bruce’s champagne. Steve felt a strange sort of kinship with the hulking man, but he had no idea why. Was it their similar upbringing, both of them sons of farmers? Was it the cheating death thing, or simply because he was an affable, kind man, he had no idea, but beneath his superhuman abilities there was a simple, humble man that didn’t want to impose and was probably too kind for the world he lived in. They had little in common, and yet, he felt like Clark could be a good friend.

There was music playing but no live band and Steve had to remind himself it wasn’t the 1910s anymore and tell himself that in 2017 the advancements of technology would allow to listen to music without needing a live band in the place you were in but most of all without going through the grinding white noise of a gramophone.

Diana was approaching him and Clark sporting a bright smile on her face when the song changed and she stopped for a moment, her head turning towards the source of the sound as if to listen to it, before finally joining them in their corner. “How are you two faring?”

Steve shrugged. “I wouldn’t mind being home but can’t complain.”

“Can’t complain either, but I would love to be home too. I don’t think I’m ready for social gatherings this big yet.”

“I understand. It’s not like we need to remain until the early hours of the morning, I don’t think Bruce would mind if we just go home at some point.”

“It’s not that,” he explained. “It’s just… Nothing, it’s nothing, just bad experience with this type of gathering.”

Her smile turned from bright to kind and compassionate. “Don’t worry,” she told him, with a gentle pat on his arm. “Things will sort themselves out. Lois told me you’re having some issues, but it’s just normal. You lost a year and half, a time she spent grieving you. It’s not easy, for neither of you.”

He gave her a quick, stiff nod and a wry smile. “You know… She is my ground, my favorite sound, my country road, my city street, my sky above…”

“... my only love, and the ground beneath my feet,” she completed the sentence for him. “Yes, I understand. Been there, done that. It’s like having a carpet pull from beneath your feet and suddenly you hit the ground so hard you don’t even remember how to breath.”

“Yeah, something like that.”

“Uh, when did you two started completing each other’s sentences?” asked Steve.

The pair chuckled. “Never happened, it’s just a quote from a book,” explained Clark. “It’s the song playing now actually. The lyrics… they’re taken from the same book and it reminded me of the book and that quote.”
“Oh, I see. I guess you too know either the song or the game,” Steve asked her.

“Both, actually. I’m actually rather fond of this song, well, the original, not this quite bland piano version. And the book too. You can read it, I have it back in Paris. You just need to learn a little more about the past century to enjoy it.”

“You haven’t started his musical education?” asked Clark.

“Not yet,” she revealed. “I guess I’ll set him a Spotify account and let him do his research.”

“Already did it,” he replied, half hiding behind his glass of champagne. I’m slowly moving forward the century. I’m in the middle of the sixties right now, I’m rather fond of Chuck Berry, I have to say.”

The baffled look on Diana’s face was priceless. “Bet you never thought I would catch up so fast, uh?”

A moment later, Bruce made his appearance bringing a tray of champagne glasses. “Enjoying the party?”

Everyone shrugged. “Sort of,” said Clark, quite rigid.

Wayne’s shoulders sagged and he suddenly looked much shorter than the usual. “Listen, about last year… I was a fool. I’m sorry I… I have no excuses, I should have listened to Alfred and just leave you be…” His attempt at apologizing was clumsy, but heartfelt. “It’s just… sometimes I can’t really reason and…”

“Stop that,” said Clark, quite harsh. “I understand your reasoning. I understand what you did and even why. Lois told me about you, about the Joker and how he killed your adoptive son. That’s not something you can erase. Just… don’t try to kill me again.” He extended his hand and Bruce shook it vigorously. “You saved my mother, helped her through this year, helped Lois too and made sure Earth would be protected even if I wasn’t here anymore. We’re more than even now.”

Out of nowhere, Alfred appeared behind Diana. “Sir, may I have a word? Commissioner Gordon just called on the direct line to the Batcave. It seems like Mister Sionis has broken into Gotham Central Bank and is holding numerous hostages there. They’re at a standoff and things are stalling, they fear his temperament will get the better of him and he’ll soon start killing the hostages.”

Bruce sighed. “Gather the others, send them downstairs, keep the guests occupied, or make up something and send them away, I don’t care. Just make sure they don’t go anywhere near GCB.”

Alfred nodded. “Will do, Sir. Go, the car and the armor are ready.”

Steve noticed as Diana rolled her eyes. She wasn’t exactly happy that her gut feeling turned out to be true. She took a deep breath. “Shall we, then?”

Chapter End Notes

Oh, some action. Sorry for the delay in the update schedule, but last weekend was kind of intense, I had no time to write. But let's give credit to those that deserve it, the idea for an action packed chapter comes straight from my husband, who suggested Roman Sionis (Black Mask) as the robber because he's way too underappreciated.
Chapter 11

Going down to the Batcave as everyone seemed to call the Batman’s headquarters was some sort of mystical experience for Steve. In the packed elevator full of very elegant people he felt quite out of place. He and Lois were the only ones without a secret super identity and not only he was a fish out of water in that century, he felt like a complete nobody among those... gods. He had read a lot about them both through internet and more conventional means and yes, he felt like a complete no one, like he meant nothing in the world. Everyone around him seemed so concentrated on the task ahead, they weren’t really paying attention to his sudden jittery demeanor.

But when the doors of the elevator opened, boy that was a sight to behold. Every wall was lined with racks that held any kind of gadget and weapons he could have imagined, all clean and shiny. A soldier’s dream come true.

“So, what do we do?” He heard Diana say as she took her dress off to reveal her armor beneath.

“If you give me a moment to get changed, I’ll log into their CC system and...”

“I can do that!” Lois interrupted him and slipped in a chair in front of a massive screen. Steve noticed she operated the keyboard with ease and even saw Diana make an impressed face as she snapped her gauntless around her wrists.

“Uh, alright...” Bruce seemed a little uncertain but pressed a hand on a sleek panel on the wall and beside it slid open to reveal a hidden compartment that contained his costume. “Just give me a moment.” And he disappeared inside it to get changed.

The small crowd of superheroes then gathered around the computer as Lois finally managed, through whatever system Bruce Wayne used to obtain access to a bank private security system, and they started discussing what would be the best way to get in, neutralize the robbers and save the hostages, minimizing damage to the structures. Everyone seemed to have a different idea on how to proceed and everyone seemed to prefer a different approach that, one way or another, clashed with the idea someone else had.

Steve chuckled, as he inspected what looked like a heavily modified M1A1 carbine, the latest standard equipment for the US army. If only we had something even remotely similar to this back in the day... he muttered to himself as he tested how it felt in his hands. It was equipped with a red dot sight, he recalled from the Wikipedia page he had casually skimmed through just the other day, and a telescopic stock that felt really good against his shoulder. Even the trigger required the right amount of force to be pulled. Truly a work of craftsmanship, in his humble opinion. Sure, it was the opinion of a man used to stuff that wasn’t only outdated, it looked jurassic compared to the weapons of this millennium.

He kept perusing Bruce Wayne’s armory, but behind him, the discussion had become more heated than useful. Time to intervene.

“Guys!” he yelled, to be sure he would be heard above their voices, that promptly fell silent. “It’s a bank robbery, not an intergalactic invader from outer space! Don’t overthink it, analyze the battleground and come up with a strategy, come on! Yelling won’t get you anywhere.”

Beneath the heavy cowl, he saw Bruce throwing him a killer glare. “What do you suggest?”

He walked closer to them and took a cursory look at the planimetry of the bank. “Do we know how
many people are in there?”

“At least forty,” said Arthur. “Ten hostages and we counted thirty robbers. They’re going in for the big prize.”

“The caveau? So I guess most of them are technicians of some kind, or engineers. How’s the economy doing?”

“Not good,” replied Lois.

“I’m ready to bet most of them are just desperate men trying to survive in a harsh world and they turned to desperate measures to do so. The moment the boss is out of the picture, be him dead or subdued in any way, they would scatter around trying to save their hides. Barry, how fast can you get there?”

“Way less time than it would take you guys.”

“Then you’re the perfect lookout. Could you please go ahead and give us your impression of the situation?”

The young man smiled. “I’ll be in touch!”

He disappeared in a flash of bright light and static energy that made his hair stand up in the back of his neck. “With this done… let me see… is this your guy?” He pointed at the screen at a man with a sleek black mask, dressed in a striped suit and dark shirt.

Bruce nodded. “Yes, that’s him. Roman Sionis, heir of the Sionis industrial empire turned criminal kingpin of Gotham. He goes around by the name of Black Mask.”

Steve chuckled. “Why doesn’t that surprise me? Anyway, he seems nervous. It could be tough to take by surprise, he’s hypervigilant. Arthur, Mera… can you control water inside plumbing?”

They looked at each other with a knowing smile, then at him. “Of course we can!”

“Then you can blow them up, cause a distraction and fill the room with steam. This should give enough time to Diana, Bruce and Clark to burst inside and deal with them. What do you think? In and out in thirty seconds, we’re back in less than an hour.”

Everyone looked at him as if they had seen a ghost, except Diana, she just beamed in his direction. “How did you do that?” asked Lois. “Come up with a sound strategy like this, in… no time at all?”

“During a war you either learn to improvise or you die, especially if you’re a spy. But really, what do you think? Could this work?”

Clark nodded. “I like the plan.”

“Seems doable,” added Arthur.

“And it’s versatile. If anything happens, we have solid bases to come up with something new on the spot,” stated Diana, wrapping a hand around his arm. “Bruce?”

He sighed, but nodded. “Alright, it’s a sound plan. Diana, Clark, go up ahead. Arthur, Mera and I will come with the car and…”

“Wait, what about me?” asked Steve. “I can help!”
“With all the due respect Captain, you’re not…”

“With all the due respect Mister Wayne,” he nearly roared. “I’m a soldier and I work great under pressure, and believe it or not, I know those buildings, they were built when I was young, I watched them rise, I know how they’re built. I can be an asset! Ask Diana!”

Bruce shook his head before she could speak. “Alright, alright, but you need to change. That’s too expensive for something like this. Come with me, we don’t have much time. Diana, Clark, go ahead. We’ll be there in a few minutes.”

Diana kissed Steve. “Be careful, alright?”

“Of course Angel. You too, please.”

The two moved towards the elevator and everyone then looked at him. “I guess I need to borrow some clothes?” he asked and Bruce nodded.

“Body armor and weapons too. That one is modified to shoot rubber bullets, they hurt a lot but don’t kill. You think you can use it properly?”

Steve looked at the gun in his hands then back at Bruce. “It’s a gun. We had semiautomatic rifles even in my time. These are just… smaller?”

“And more efficient. Come on, let’s get going before Sionis snaps and kills someone. Mera, Lois, are you two coming?”

They both shook their heads. “No, I’d prefer to stay here,” said Arthur’s wife. “You guys might need some help from the base.”

“Yeah, well… let’s go, alright?”

When they finally reached Gotham Central Bank it was a mess of police officers, cars, flashing lights and boots stomping on the pavement. Batman led Aquaman and Steve, now dressed in full tactical gear, to a nearby roof where Flash, Superman and Wonder Woman stationed, discussing the correct approach to the situation.

I really hope they don’t start bickering again … he thought as he reached for the thermal goggles, a special high tech gadget that allowed him to see the heat radiating from the robbers bodies instead of the robbers themselves. He might not have superpowers, but he was still a soldier down to his marrow, his mind was attuned to a certain type of thoughts and to him, this didn’t look any different than crossing No Man’s Land. It wasn’t a trench, it was a building, but the idea was the same. Go from point A to point B, minimize casualties, save hostages, stop criminals. Heck, the save hostages, stop criminals was new to him, but nothing he couldn’t adapt to.

“Uh, JL, it looks like these guys are quite ahead with their plans, more than we had thought.”

“What do you mean?” asked Aquaman. He was the only one that hadn’t changed as he wasn’t going to get inside the building, but would provide some steamy support from outside.

“It means that they’re about to reach the caveau, get to the money and go away. And maybe kill the hostages sometime in the middle,” replied Superman. “We need to hurry, before something goes wrong.”

“Captain,” called Batman. “Any idea?”
“Yes. Flash, you enter from the front door. The hostages are concentrated there, I guess to keep the police from bursting in. Can you take care of five armed… oh come on of course you can you travel through time!” He answered his own question. Superman, back door then downstairs. Stop the people working on the safe. Diana and I can take care of the rest, on the first floor. Batman, Black Mask is all yours, second floor. All by himself.”

Flash sat beside him on the edge of the roof. “Dude, you come from 1918, when did you learn all this stuff? This is military grade strategy, stuff soldiers learn now, not in your days.”

Now, that was a good question. How did he learn all that stuff? Sure, he had training, but strategy was minimal in his course, he had learned way more on the field, improvising when in dire need or taking his time to analyze the situation when he did have a moment to sit down and think about it. But this? This was way out of his league. “You know Barry? I have no idea, but in the last few days so much crazy shit happened that I’m willing to accept that along with immortality Diana’s family provided me with something more. Just… trust me, it’s a sound plan. Way better than whatever I came up with in Belgium.”

Diana chuckled, behind him. “I vouch for that.”

“How shall we go then?” said Arthur. “Tell me when you need some fog.”

Steve dropped the goggles and prepared the rappel gear, strapped to the harness around his waist and thighs. Thanks to one of Batman’s great devices, he shoot a gas-propelled grappling hook into the stone edge of the GCB building. “Whenever you’re ready!”

“Hey, Steve,” called Diana. “Be careful.”

“Always, Angel. Let’s go kick some butt!”

As he had predicted, it was over very quickly. The moment the bank was filled with hot steam from the plumbing that Arthur, with extreme ease and efficiency, made burst by surging it with very hot water, the first mundane outing of the Justice League started. The robbers didn’t even know what had hit them. Without superpowers or hyper technological suits and acrobatic skills, Steve did his part the best he could. He wasn’t someone who could just sit by and watch as people did the hard work, he liked to get his hands dirty. He wouldn’t have volunteered to become a spy, in addition to his already flying - literally - career as a pilot. He didn’t need it, but it was the right thing to do.

And in that moment, getting down in the battlefield, albeit a very different one, was the right thing to do. But there was something, nagging him a little bit.

Liar, murderer and smuggler, that’s how Diana had called him. Strategist had never come up, when describing him. Sure, he could come up with good plans from time to time, he had nearly no formal training, just a lot of direct experience gained on the field, what the hell was he thinking, imposing himself over a band of super-fucking-heroes? A wreck from another century?

Well, the wreck from another century that night turned out to be a great strategist. With the thick steam acting as a smoke screen, both meta humans and just humans burst in the bank from their appointed positions and kick some butt they did.

Bursting through a window on the first floor, Steve and Diana swiftly dealt with the goons in no time. Working in tandem just as they had done in Veld, they got rid of Sionis’ thugs, Diana with her lasso and Steve with the non-lethal rifle, they fell like a house of cards in a hurricane. His heart beat fast and loud as a drum in his chest and his breath caught in his throat every time she saw her, elegant
and lethal at the same time, the fierce Amazon Princess fighting for those who couldn’t fight. Nothing had changed, she was still as inspiring as she was one hundred years before, thought it had been just more than two weeks for him. No, scratch that, she was more, of everything. More inspiring, fiercer even more gorgeous. Was that possible? He had no idea, but damn if she didn’t look sexy as fuck when she threw her lasso around a goon’s midsection and pulled on it so hard he landed face first on the marble at her feet with a thud and groan.

He had to mentally slap himself because it wasn’t only his mind that was going down the gutter, it was his whole body!

When the steam cleared out, they found themselves surrounded by unconscious people. “Steve, the zip ties!” she urged him.

“The zip wh…” Then he remembered those plastic strips Batman had thrust in a side pocket of his pants. “Oh, yes… those things.” He switched the safety of the rifle on and dropped it, let it hang from his side with the shoulder strap - nice invention that one - and then proceeded to cuff the thugs with the plastic ties while Diana took care of their weapons. Above and beneath them they could hear the sound of the battles raging, with Superman taking care of those trying to reach the money in the caveau, Flash saving the hostages and Batman beating the crap out of Sionis upstairs, but it was a short lived fight. Soon, the bank fell silent.

“Are we done?” asked Steve when they couldn’t hear anything more than the groans of the goons they had just disposed.

Diana nodded. “I guess we are. Shall we go?”

“Sure, I need a ride though!”

She chuckled, and he felt his heart lurch in his chest when he caught her biting her lower lip as she walked towards him. “Come on GI Joe, let’s get out of here.”

As predicted, in and out in thirty seconds, back at the gala in less than an hour. The best of Gotham and Metropolis high society didn’t even notice they were gone, when they returned to Wayne Manor, ready to mingle and help Bruce raise as much money he could to help rebuild the city after they had partially demolished it battling Steppenwolf.

Strange enough, after their escapade at Gotham Central Bank, Steve felt better, more confident, suddenly thrown into his element again even if only for a brief moment, that he stopped hiding behind Diana’s charm and quick wit to handle conversations, he started actually talking to people. Her constant presence at his side spurned him on, and it turned out he could actually hold a conversation with people not aware of his special condition of a time traveler and not sound like a total fool.

“Having fun?” asked Arthur a little bit after midnight, presenting him another chalice of champagne.

Steve shrugged and accepted the wine. “It’s better than the last gala I attended. No mass murderers ready to poison a village just to showcase his new weapon to his peers.”

The huge man nodded. “Yes, Diana told us about… General Luden… Ludendorff, was it? Well, no one died tonight. That’s a plus. I wish they served some beer though. It’s more up my alley.”

“Oh I don’t mind too much. Food was great though, I have to admit it.”

“Absolutely. I mean, Bruce Wayne knows how to throw a posh party when he wants to. I thought he was just a vain, rich, stuck-up son of a bitch before I met him, but it turns out he can actually be a
nice person, when he wants to. He just needs to warm up to you.”

Uhm, even Aquaman looked like a nice man, one he could be friends with. “He was nice to me, when I popped up here. He even got me IDs and inserted me in your systems, like I’ve always been here. We’re waiting for my passport so I can fly to France with Diana.”

“Well, good for you. Uhm… one day or another I’ll have to take Mera there.”

“I’ve seen it only during the war, but if it’s only half as beautiful as it was back then, I’m sure she’ll love it.”

They ended up discussing how many wreckages of submarines, ships and planes from the Great War now rested on the bottom of oceans and seas.

In the end, the night went way better than expected. Steve made some friends, found out he could socialize even though he came from another century, from a time when people acted completely different from now. Two weeks in since his arrival in 2017 and everything felt like a dream. Not only he wasn’t dead, and he still had to shake that dreadful feeling off his back as it came back to him to cut his breath short, from time to time, but he was with Diana, they had all the time he had ever wished they could have back then and her friends were just as awesome as she was, each one in their own peculiar way.

He and Arthur were talking about Hawaii and the fact the islands had become part of the United States long after his “death” when Bruce Wayne approached them. “Arthur, could you excuse us for a moment? I need to talk to Steve for a moment.”

“Sure thing. Have fun, you two!”

Bruce straightened up in his suit. “How are you holding up?”

“All good. Enjoying the company and the wine” he replied.

Bruce nodded. “Good. Listen… about tonight, I have to tell you I really appreciated what you did. We’re almost out of practice, chasing standard criminals, we were all thinking like we were against some kind of alien.”

“So I noticed. I’m glad I could help.”

“Great. Now… about that, I think I have a job for you.”
The rest of the night went smooth as silk. Bruce raised quite a sizeable sum he would devolve to the rebuilding of parts of the town that had been damaged by their fight, Sionis was currently in police custody awaiting a formal incrimination and the rest of the gang was getting along very well. The little job at the bank actually helped them all warm up to Steve, who actually felt a little giddy about everything that was going on around him.

“Still nervous?” asked Diana swiping the keycard on the pad, unlocking the door.

Behind her, Steve let out a soft laugh that sounded a lot like a grunt, so tired he was. “No, not really. Your friends are really nice in the end, they tried their best to make me feel comfortable.”

“It also helped that you came up with that plan that got us in and out that bank in a minute or less. You impressed everyone tonight.” She took off her shoes with a sigh of relief. “Where did that come from?”

“You know, I have no idea. I… I’m starting to think that whatever your uncle gave me that night helped me catch up faster, I’m not averse at the idea that it also gave me an additional edge, combined with technical immortality.”

“Could be. Or you’re just incredibly smart and talented for this type of thing?” she proposed.

“Uhm…” he huffed. “I like that sound of that too!”

They both moved into the bedroom. There, they took off the formal and slightly uncomfortable clothes and prepared for bed. They had fallen into a habit, when it came to little things like getting ready for bed, they looked like those old couples he used to see in town when he was a kid, so used to each other’s presence that they were synchronized in almost every little movement they made. It was like they were dancing around each other, even though they were just getting ready for bed. And damn he liked it. Her apartment in Metropolis was a little oasis of calm, he had no idea of it was just her presence that helped him live a less stressed life, despite having been hauled ahead in time, or if it was the novelty of having a place to call home that made him this serene.

He was in the shower while she took care of the makeup, when she asked him a question he wasn’t expecting. “What were you and Bruce talking about?”

He was kind of hoping she hadn’t noticed them talking, but no such luck. “Nothing, really. He wanted to offer me a job.”

She pulled the shower curtain open and shoved her head in. She looked really worried and he had no idea why. “What kind of job?”

“He wants me to be the Justice League’s liaison with the United States government and even with the United Nations, should need arise. I basically would be the League’s face with the public and the politicians.”

“He wants you to be his personal spy, you realize that?”

He nodded, drops of water shooting off the tips of hair, and moved away so she could step inside.
and take a shower too, then he got out of the tub. “I know. He didn’t really hide it, he seemed pretty blunt about what he wanted for me. Brutally honest, in some ways. He doesn’t trust the government, he’s not a fan of the president, he said he’s not the type of person that should be leading the United States. He wants someone with diplomatic skills, or that can fake them, to deal with him.”

“Yeah well I don’t like him either, and I see his point. So, when and where are you going to start?”

“He wasn’t precise about it, but he said he’s going to give me all the details before we leave for Paris. He said it’s not going to be a nine-to-five job, but I could be called anytime and anywhere.” He towelled himself dry and quickly slipped into a clean pair of boxer briefs and a cotton t-shirt. “Basically, I’m always on call. If anyone needs me, I need to be ready to fly, or answer the phone, then fly.”

“Like us,” she said. “It’s not a good life, I tell you.”

“Yeah well…” he replied around the toothbrush. “It’s still better than what I did before. Maybe it’s not as exciting, but I can do my part, as you do yours.”

“I just wonder why he doesn’t do it himself. As Bruce Wayne I mean. He’s rich, he has power and influence, he could be pose as the League’s liaison with any organization that would interpell us.” She turned off the water, grabbed a towel and stepped out the shower. “He’s not exactly known for his diplomacy but I think he can hold his own.”

“I think it’s more about his short temper.” He spit the excess toothpaste and rinsed his mouth. “I spoke to Alfred for a moment, after Bruce and I discussed the job, and he told me Bruce doesn’t trust himself much, after last year. He said he jumped to the wrong conclusions and someone died, unjustly, because of that.”

“Uhm, yes, he didn’t take Clark’s death well. Most of what he did last year, finding the metahumans and forming the Justice League… he did it in Clark’s name. He paid for his funeral, you know?”

“You mentioned it, a couple of times.” With a yawn, he ran his palm over his cheek and felt a slight stubble already prickling his skin. After days of just forgetting to shave, he kind of missed the long beard. “You think I should keep shaving every morning?”

“Not if you don’t want to. I don’t mind the beard. Looks good on you.” Diana smiled around the toothbrush. “Very good.”

---

I need to pee...

The first thought that ran through his mind next morning wasn’t exactly the most interesting one. And it was an issue that he quickly dealt with. He washed his hands and took a peek at his reflection in the mirror over the sink.

“For a dead man, you look good…” he whispered to his image. As much as the last couple of weeks had proven to him that it wasn’t a dream or a vision his brain conjured as he died in blazes of glory just to make him feel better, he still couldn’t exactly grasp the fact that he was indeed alive and that he had been catapulted ahead in time. It was a thought that seized his mind at random times, but most of all in the morning, when his mind was still drowsy and boggled with sleep. It often came so suddenly that the bare thought clogged his throat, it made it hard to breathe and he did feel like he was dying a little bit until, frantically struggling to fill his lungs, he turned around on the bed and saw Diana sleeping soundly beside him made him return to reality.

It was more than enough to quiet his doubts, shut them in the back of his mind and let him live this
new, astounding life he had been gifted like nothing happened. That was how powerful her presence was, to him. How her inner strength was more than enough to help him deal with anything he found in front of him.

As he walked back to the bedroom, he stopped at the foot of the bed just to look at her and he felt like a warm wave of tranquillity washed over him. Looking at her during her day to day life, with her poised demeanor, one would never guess that when she slept she was a hot mess. She tossed and turned around, almost all night long. She often kicked the covers off her body and slept in awkward poses, so weird he wondered how could she not wake up with her neck constantly cricked. It was like the weight of the world rested on her shoulders and it made sleeping harder and uncomfortable for her. She didn’t look tired in the morning, but he knew deep down her awkward sleeping habits took a toll on her, and he hated to see her like this.

That morning was different though. She had been quiet that night, curled up against him, and now she was even smiling in her sleep. And she was so… wonderfully gorgeous she took his breath away like the first time he had opened his eyes after she had dragged him to shore back in Themyscira.

And the best part? The black panties with the pink butterflies printed on them. It was stupid but he absolutely loved that carefree side of her that came out only if you knew her really well. Or in his case, if you were allowed to see her underwear. The white tank top just completed the look and in its simplicity, really suited her. He didn’t mind the tight, form fitting clothes and the elegant dresses, but this was the Diana he knew. The headstrong warrior with a kind, big heart and a sweet spot for ice cream and dancing. Or swaying, as she called it.

“Staring is creepy…” she murmured, eyes still closed.

Steve smiled and climbed in bed beside her. “You stared a lot, back on the boat.”

“You were fascinating,” she replied, wrapping an arm around his shoulders and pulling him close to her. Heck, she was so hot, literally so. “And it was either looking at you or the sea. You were more interesting. Slept well?”

He kissed her cheek. “Like a baby. You?”

“Kind of. Listen…” She yawned and he covered her mouth with his hand. “Thanks. You think you’re ready for an eight hours long flight above the Atlantic Ocean to Paris?”

He shrugged. “My passport came in the other day, right? Then I guess I am. What happened? They need you at work?”

“They don’t exactly need me at work, but I kind of miss home. Also there’s some bureaucracy we need to take care of so you can live in France on stable basis so I want to take care of it as early as I can. Also… I might have got an interesting email a couple of days ago about some artifacts and they want me to go and give them an assessment. The dealer comes to Paris next week and…”

He shushed gently pressing a finger on her lips. “Say no more. Your work is important and I’m ready to take a plane and sit for eight long hours as we fly over the Atlantic. I need more books though, you know I read fast.”

“How about I get you a Kindle and we buy some ebooks for that? Less weight and less space in the carry on baggage.”

“Whatever you say but… what’s a Kindle?”
“Are you sure you want to go to Paris?” Bruce Wayne himself had come to bid them farewell at the airport, before they boarded. “There’s so much work we have to do here and…”

Diana shook her head and smiled. “Bruce, unlike you, I have an honest job. And I have to go back to work.”

He grunted, softly. “I told you I can pay you just as much if not more, if you move here.”

“And idle all day waiting for something to happen? Not my style, you know that. Don’t worry Bruce, we’ll be here, in case something comes up.”

He wasn’t satisfied with her answer, but he accepted it with a curt nod. “As you wish. Captain Trevor, I’ve provided you with everything you need to deal with the government in case things get heated. Remember, you’ll be our face and our voice when we can’t speak. The day may never come, but you never know. Are you ready?”

Steve nodded. “Yes sir. I’ll prepare myself in case it happens. You think I should present myself as a soldier or… simply as Steve Trevor?”

“Go forth with the Captain rank. I made sure to put a fake career in your official records. You’re technically a honorably discharged Marine and a veteran of Afghanistan and Iraq. They’ll be more inclined to listen to you, as a former soldier. Now go, or you’re going to miss your plane.” The shook hands. “Have a nice flight.”

“Come visit, one day or another,” said Diana. “I’m sure Paris is more than capable to handle Bruce Wayne for a week or two.”

“The real question is: can Bruce Wayne handle the amount of amazing wine in Paris?” Despite the attempt of a joke, there was no humor in his gruffy voice. “I’ll see what I can do, anyway. Thanks for the invitation. Now really, go, it would take way too long to pull out my private jet, gather the crew and transmit a flight plan to move your asses on the other side of the Ocean. I’ll be in touch.”

He turned and left. Just like that.

“Grumpy old bastard…” murmured Steve.

“Life hasn’t been kind to him,” she replied, a sad smile printed on her face. “A robbery gone wrong left him orphan, his parents were killed in front of him. He has two adopted sons but… He had a bad discussion with one and now they don’t talk anymore.”

Steve grabbed his carry on luggage and they moved towards the gate. “And the other one?”

She sighed. “Dead. Murdered, actually, a couple of years ago. He… let’s say he didn’t take it well. He tries to hide it behind the big tough guy persona, or the charming airheaded billionaire, but deep down he suffers, he bleeds just like anyone else. He’s… there’s more beneath the cowl, than just what you saw.”

He felt his heart sink in the pit of his stomach and he immediately regretted even thinking something like that. “Oh. That’s some tough shit. No wonder he’s… well, he’s who he is.”

“Just wait until he warms up to you a bit more. He was kind to you, when you first appeared, remember?”

“Do I need to be worried about you and him?”
Diana hooked her arm around his and pulled him close to her. “No, definitely not. Bruce isn’t my type.”

“And what exactly is your type?”

“Go in the restroom and check yourself in the mirror, that’s my type!”

Steve chuckled and placed his luggage on the conveyer belt of the metal detector. “Touchè.” He emptied his pockets in the plastic box the TSA agent offered him then walked through another security device. Diana had explained things thoroughly, so except the nuisance, he wasn’t too bothered with all the security procedures. “You did spend quite some time with him, allow me to be a little jealous.”

“I spent a lot of time with Arthur too, though,” she deadpanned.

“Arthur’s married and hopelessly devoted to Mera!” he objected. “They could come and visit, Arthur said they’ve never been to France but they would love to see it.”

“I bet Arthur wants to go to Eurodisney.”

“And that would be?” he asked, picking up his belongings from the box.

“A theme park. Oh don’t worry, I’ll take you there, but only after I start and finish your Disney education. And after you watched Star Wars. And Indiana Jones… It’s going to take a long while before we can go to Disneyland, now that I think of it.”

Shaking his head, Steve pulled his phone out from the pocket of his jeans and started looking.

“Alright, alright, I’ll do my research on my own. No need to be purposely vague just to push me to seek the answers to my questions on my own.”

“That wasn’t my intention. I just didn’t want to spoil the whole thing. We’ll watch the movies I mentioned and then we’ll go to Disneyland. Just… be patient. It wouldn’t be half as fun, if you didn’t know the theme.”

Despite his best efforts, Steve kept feeling like he was too far behind to catch up. The moment he grasped one aspect of life in the twenty first century, another one came up. What was a theme park? What the hell was Disney and what did it mean that there were decades of movies he needed to watch to enjoy it? And what on earth was Star Wars?

He typed furiously on the tiny keyboard of his phone as they waited to finally step on the plane. Well, this is new! He thought as he read through the Wikipedia page of EuroDisney. It looked like a hyper technological version of the stable Luna Park in Metropolis he had visited… so long before. But it looked like a happy place, where to go and enjoy some time without a care in the world, where children could live their fantasies in the real world.

He felt a sudden lump forming in his throat, thinking about children. Would she want a kid, one day or another? Was she the type of woman? Times were different now, he had quickly grasped the notion that these days women weren’t relegated to stand by and witness the great deeds of men, unable to do anything because society thought they were less than human, now women could hold power if they wanted to. And she was one of those women, she was more than capable to hold her own in a world that no matter what was still somewhat hostile to women, would she even think about having children?

Deep down, he truly hoped she would, because he did want them. Not right now of course, but… one day maybe?
Truth was, he was thinking about the possibility with increasing frequency, mostly because days before, the night he got smashed drunk thanks to Hades, he had the weirdest dream that revolved around that matter and no matter how hard he tried, Steve couldn’t really get the images out of his head. And he loved them! The dream was so vivid for a moment he had thought he had gone completely mad and had started hallucinating, and as he woke up that morning he got the feeling that dream was something more, like a taste of something that would come, either in the far or near future he didn’t know, but it was something that could happen.

But that wasn’t the time to discuss it. Not as they were embarking on the biggest plane he had ever seen, even bigger than the German bomber he had boarded back in 1918 before Flash came to rescue him.

“Damn I so want to pilot one of these!” he murmured as they sat in their allotted seats.

“You should see military jets. I bet those are more up your alley,” replied Diana. “Is the battery of your Kindle ready charged?” She asked him, holding up a power bank, a small device that stored electricity to charge other devices.

“I think it is. I followed the instructions and let it charge overnight. I should be fine, I have more books than I can read in eight hours in here anyway. And you said there’s wi-fi connection up here?”

She nodded. “Yes, there should be. You want to go go forth with your musical education?”

“I’d love to. Any suggestion?” he questioned, flipping through the digital pages of the Kindle to pick a book from the long list they had picked from the website.

“I would either go for Queen or David Bowie.” She stifled a long yawn. “Sorry, haven’t slept much last night.”

“I know. I was there. It’s partially my fault, sorry about that. Think you can sleep during the flight?”

“I’ll try,” she whispered. “Now hold on tight, we’re almost ready to go.”

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow I'm going on vacation. I'll stay away for about a week, so expect a couple of weeks of hiatus for this story (well, all stories actually) because I'll be camping and I doubt I'll have a stable internet connection, let alone a computer to write. Have fun everybody, I know I will. Metaldays Festival here I come!
Chapter 13

Paris was different than how he remembered.

Like, really different. With two separate World Wars tearing it down, Steve noticed how much more it had changed compared to Gotham and Metropolis. There, buildings had been taken down and had been rebuilt because they had gotten too old and rebuilding was cheaper than renovating, but here? Here building had been rebuilt because they had been bombed down! That was a huge difference.

Yet, he loved the city. It was beautiful during the Great War, but right then, with no signs of bombs marring its beauty, it was way better. They had caught a flight that had arrived early in the morning, Central European Time, and on the way to her apartment, Steve took some time to look around, only this time he was sure he didn’t look like a dumbstruck child in awe of everything, like his first car ride from Wayne Manor to Gotham about a month before. It was a bright sunny winter day and the early arrival allowed him to see the sun rising as the taxi speeded on the highway from Charles De Gaulle to Paris.

Seeing the sun rise in the East had always been a welcome sight for him. He hadn’t always been a spy, before those days there were nights spent in cold, muddy trenches or in cold bunk beds in military airports all over Europe, and night was always the most stressful part of the day. Seeing the sun rise was heartening for him. When he was a simple pilot, it meant no one had bombed them, when he was a spy, it meant he hadn’t blown his cover.

The car ride was making him sleepy, despite the hours he did manage to sleep on the plane, when it finally stopped in front of a tall building. The cabbie informed them they had arrived and Diana quickly paid the fee. After unloading their baggage, the man greeted them with a polite adieu then drove away to catch a new passenger.

Steve took a deep breath and looked up. “So… this is where you live?”

Pulling a set of keys - traditional this time - from her purse, Diana nodded. “Yes, this is the place I call home.”

“It’s close to the Museum, if I remember correctly, right?”

“Close enough.” She pushed the heavy wooden door like it was made of paper and walked inside the tall hallway. He could spot her mailbox immediately, it was the one bursting with envelopes. He saw her sigh and pull a handful of them out before opening the door and pulling out the rest and shut it again. “Want to come with me tomorrow? It’s going to be a quiet day, I’ll spend most of it replying emails and checking the new inventory, you can work on your thing.”

“Why not… but only if I won’t hinder your work or cause trouble with your bosses.”

“Please, I’m my own boss, above me there’s only the Minister of Culture and I highly doubt he’ll just walk in and ask me why you’re using the wi-fi.”

Steve shrugged as they stepped in the elevator. “In any case, you can hold your own with him, he hasn’t a chance.”

“She. And really, Madame Nyssen is way above that kind of petty thing, she wouldn’t be too
worried about you hanging out in my office. As long as you don’t break anything.”

“I wouldn’t dare. God, I so need a shower.”

“Just give me a moment to see if everything still works, restart the heating system and the shower’s all yours. I have a few phone calls to make, to see what we have to do in order to get you permanent rights to stay here in France. I don’t know about you, but I have no intention to move to either Metropolis or Gotham for good,” she explained during the elevator ride. “As a US citizen you don’t need a tourist visa to stay here for ninety days, but if you actually want to live here, there’s some bureaucracy we need to take care about.”

“Is it going to be tough?” he asked her as she handed him the pile of mail so she could open the door of her apartment.

“No idea. I’ve been living here for the past sixty years, I just had to move around birth and death certificates to make sure people wouldn’t start thinking I’m some kind of weirdo that doesn’t age.” She turned the key in the hold and opened the door, then let him in.

“But you don’t age! How do you handle it?”

“Friends in high places and a talent for forging signatures. I wonder where that comes from.”

The apartment was dark, all the windows were shut and Steve couldn’t help but notice that it was really cold. She had been away for more time he had imagined. “Stay here,” she told him as she closed the front door behind them. “I’ll open the shutters.”

It turned out the apartment was a loft. A huge open space with modern furnishing but with just enough of a classic touch that it didn’t feel as cold as the apartment in Metropolis. “Wow! Love the place!”

“Really? You don’t think it’s too big for a single woman?”

He shrugged. “First, you’re not single anymore. Second, if you like it, then it’s your home, no matter what other people say.” He looked around and suddenly a feeling of deja vu drilled its way in his mind, but he couldn’t exactly identify from where, so he dismissed it. “Third… who cares what people think? Has anyone criticised you for being single and living in a place like this?”

“No really. But… you know, I bought this place four years ago, it’s the first place I ever owned, I had always rented property before this and some colleagues thought it was too much.”

“Did you poke with an Ottoman halberd?” he asked her, more than a hint of a joke in his voice.

That made her laugh out loud as she bustled about with some kind of control panel on the wall. She pushed a lever and he heard a low pitched whistle from the plumbing as water started running in the pipes again and the heating system fired up again. “No, the Ottoman Empire isn’t even my department. Anyway, come with me, I’ll show you the rest of the place.”

Diana just wanted to get the smell of the cramped airplane off her, but before that, she needed to shuffle her clothes around to make room for Steve’s stuff. In Metropolis they had bought enough for the winter, but what about the rest of the seasons? Not to mention anything else! Was he going to start doing some sport? He would need the appropriate clothing, stuff like that. And her wardrobe was a bit cluttered with her own stuff! How the hell was she going to make room for his clothes if her own were already threatening to burst out of their confines?
“Well… I’m in trouble.”

In that moment, Steve walked outside the bathroom, fresh from the shower, hair still dripping and wearing only a towel around his waist. “What kind of trouble?” he asked, pushing some wet strands away from his face.

“Look at this!” she gestured at the wardrobe in front of her. “How in Tartarus am I supposed to make room for your stuff?”

He did look at the wardrobe, hands pressed against his hips as he observed piece of furniture like he would study the battlefield. “Uhm… I suppose buying a larger wardrobe is out of question, this one seems to barely fit the space. Seems like a tough challenge. Do we have to tackle this matter right now? You look like you really need a shower and I can keep my clothes in the suitcases for a couple of days more. It’s not like I need to unpack in this very moment.”

She felt utterly defeated. “Seems reasonable. I’m going to shower then. We need to get groceries too, there’s absolutely nothing edible in the fridge or in the pantry.”

“Don’t tell me there aren’t take out places here in Paris!”

With a soft chuckle, she nudged his side with her elbow. “Of course there are, but contrary to popular belief, Wonder Woman loves to cook.”

“Then go and take a shower. , or a bath even! Hell, running water on demand is amazing…” he mused. “I’ll dress and check whatever Bruce has left me on that laptop and that other phone, take your time. I know you haven’t slept much last night, not to mention on the plane. You’ll feel better, and then we’ll take care of more mundane stuff. Like the mail.”

Diana ran her fingers through her hair and nodded. “That’s the best plan I could have come up with. Give me half an hour, I should be done by then.”

He took a deep breath and wrapped his arm around her shoulders, pulling her close to him. “Hey, take your time. No one’s trying to catch us, we have the whole day. The… red eye flight, is that how it’s called?” She nodded. “Yes, that a great idea. Even though the time zone change is a killer.”

“Yes, jet lag can be a tough monster to conquer.” She huffed a little then, reluctantly, pulled away from him. “Anyway… you mind if I play some music?”

Steve looked at her as if she had just said the most stupid thing in the world. “Diana, you ask me every time. I know you sing in the shower, you don’t need to ask my permission!”

“Great, because I fear that if I don’t have some music on, I’ll fall asleep in the shower.”

The risk was real. She wasn’t overly tired, but flying always left her utterly devastated. Maybe it was the cramped spaces, no matter in which class she flew, or being compressed with so many people for so long… she hated long flights. No, wait, she actually hated flying, period. Always had and probably always will. As she let the scalding hot water wash away the still lingering stench of bodies forced in tight spaces for too long from her skin and hair, she had the idea that maybe she hated flying because of how Steve had died. She had entered her life crashing down on that small plane with canvass wings and he had flew away from her the same way, flying. And although he wasn’t dead anymore, she still felt like planes and flying in general made her memory go back to the worst parts of her past and she would always hate flying and be worn out each time she flew because of that.

Well, nothing that a long shower and some Florence + The Machine blasting from the Bluetooth
speaker couldn’t cure. Nearly an hour later, when she finally emerged from the bathroom fully dressed and nearly ready to leave, she found Steve sitting on the bed typing furiously on his laptop with one hand while he held the phone with the other, nearly screaming at it.

“What do you mean? Can they do that?” He sounded outraged. “No, wait a second, that’s against the First Amendment! Well, shit, this sucks. Alright, I’ll… I’ll make up something. When are they going to discuss this? After Christmas? Great, I have more time than what I need. Does Bruce want me to do a press conference or… oh, alright. Thanks Alfred. Oh, yes, the flight was just fine. Bit boring, but fine. Weather’s great, yes. Sure thing. Say hi to Bruce and the rest of the gang, from Diana too. Thanks again, bye.”

With a grunt, he swiped the screen to close the call and threw the phone on the bed. “Who the fuck did they vote last year?”

“Oh, I suppose you’re referring to the current POTUS.”

“And the rest of his crew! I mean… you guys save their sorry asses multiple times and they want to pass a law that would make it illegal for the JL to gather? What the flying fuck!”

“I suppose the news came out while we were flying,” she muttered, sitting beside him and checking the screen of the computer as it showed the Daily Planet website. There was an article, penned by Clark and Lois together, that ranted about the proposed bill that had come out as they were above the Atlantic Ocean.

“‘Yes, and Alfred was so kind to call me before we heard in on the news. He said there’s already a lot of stir among the population, that apparently no one wants this bill to pass and they’re very vocal about it. It seems like people aren’t afraid of you as much as the government is. There’s a chance the bill will be pulled sooner than later, but in case they’ll go forth with the discussion in January, I’ll have to make my first appearance as the official speaker of the Justice League.’”

“‘Are you scared?’”

He smiled. “‘Nah… I mean, it can’t be worse than following you across No Man’s Land. Believe it or not, I’m good with my words. And I have time to prepare your defence.’”

With a sigh, Diana grabbed the laptop and gave a quick read to the article. “It does seem unconstitutional, I doubt they’ll go forth, it seems like a belated knee-jerk reaction destined to be forgotten quickly.”

“But remember what happened with Superman two years ago, when politicians tried to regulate his actions? I’ve read stuff about that and that was crazy!” He did seem pretty angry. “This is not the way you treat someone that comes and saves you from intergalactic genocidal invaders!”

“You think the US government has ever been too kind towards soldiers coming back from war, I wasn’t exactly expecting to be adored by the guys in Washington. I mean, I understand, they fear us, they don’t know who we are, they can’t control us.”

As she flipped through different articles and blog posts that talked about this law, Steve fidgeted beside her. “Well then why propose a law that would forbid metahumans from gathering together? You said it, they don’t know who you are, how can they control what you do or where you go?”

“I told you, it’s a knee-jerk reaction. They’re afraid and they want to show they still hold the reins of the nation. What they don’t know is that the League is composed mainly by US citizens, while reading here it seems they consider us illegals. I mean… I’m the only one that’s not technically a US
citizen, but I have a permanent visa that allows me to come, go and stay for how long I want. Technically I could live there, if I wanted to.”

He let out a low growl and crossed his arms at his chest. She couldn’t help but notice his biceps flexing beneath the light blue fabric of his shirt. Gods, modern male fashion looked so good on him, no wonder she couldn’t take her eyes - and her hands - off him.

“Is this what I’m going to face? Forever and always? Ungrateful politicians catering to their voting base without a gram of common sense in their vapid brains?”

“For the time being. But we have your back, don’t worry about it. Now, I don’t know you, but I’m starving and I’m great need of some real espresso. There’s a nice place down the road just on the way to the grocery store. You in?”

Chapter End Notes

Short one, as usual, I needed to take things from point A to point B. Juicy stuff comes in the next one.
“So, let’s recap. We have a piece of an Hittite shield, parts of an hoplite headgear you found in an excavation in former Persia territory, current Iraq, then a number of fragments of Phoenician pottery gathered around areas they colonized in North Africa. And last but not least, inscribed slabs of stone from Siracusa. Oh and the Parthian cataphract you left down in storage because it’s too heavy and large to take here. Am I right?” asked Diana, looking at the array of padded containers laid on her desk in her small study at the Louvre. “You need this cleaned, dated and possibly translated where inscriptions are readable by…”

“There’s no rush, but it would be great if we could come and take them back by March. We’re sponsoring a Middle East themed temporary exposition in Ukraine and we’re going to take all the artifacts there by April to set it up,” said the unexpected client that turned up that morning with all that material, a tall brunette wearing a gorgeous black tailleur and killer high heels and the brightest smile you could see in Paris before eight in the morning. The day had started early and even Diana, usually a very morning person, was still lagging, despite having drunk three cups of strong coffee already and that woman glowed like the sun that still had to fully rise. And the sun rose quite late in Paris, in winter.

Oh well.

“Right, I’ll call you as soon as I’m done. Christmas is usually a very busy period here at the museum, with the surge of tourists in the city, but I’ll try to be done as soon as I can. I guess…” she looked at the woman on the other side of the desk but suddenly forgetting her name. “I’m deeply sorry but I think I didn’t catch your name. Talia…”

“Head. Talia Head,” she replied with a warm smile “And don’t worry. To be completely honest I didn’t want to come this early but my flight got delayed and I have another one in a few hours to catch, I was running out of time.”

Diana smiled herself. “Thanks for the understanding. We’re doing some renovations in the exposed collection in preparation of Christmas and believe me, it’s gruelling. Uhm, out of curiosity, who gave you my contact?”

“An old common friend, Bruce Wayne. I’m sorry now Miss Prince, I really have to go. Traffic is going to be horrible from here to the airport. If you’ll excuse me.”

“Of course, Miss Head. I have your card, we signed the acceptance bill, insurance now covers all these artifacts and we should be set. Have a nice flight and all call you as soon as I’m done.”

The shook hands and the woman gathered her purse from the chair behind her, then she moved out the office, the click of her stilettos slowly fading in the high halls of the museum as she walked away.

“Uh… Bruce Wayne. I wonder what kind of relationship those two had,” she told herself while she gathered the papers related to the artifacts she had just been tasked to examine, date and give a thorough clean up if needed, so she wouldn’t lose any important document about the precious load spread in front of her. And precious it was, indeed. And she still had to see the cataphract downstairs, she hadn’t seen one in ages even though they were a staple on Themyscira!

Anyway, no time for sentimentalism and getting lost in old, long gone memories. She had an appointment later that morning with a collector of antiques interested in giving parts of his extensive collection to the museum and she needed to have her desk ready for the meeting.
It took a little time and effort to clean up, considering the fragility of the items that cluttered the surface, but at least she made it in time to even deal with some of the paperwork that had amassed in her mailbox during her stay in Metropolis before said collector arrived.

One of her assistants, Etta’s great granddaughter Helena, announced his arrival just a little bit after ten in the morning. The man was tall and slightly imposing, probably the same size as Arthur Curry, in his late fifties and with dark, now graying hair and beard. He surely filled the dark grey suit and as he entered the small office, Diana felt the air singe a little, in a metaphorical sense obviously. He did emanate a sense of command and authority, she could read it in his dark, piercing eyes.

“Mademoiselle Prince,” he started in a slightly accented French. “My name is Alastor Nikolaides.” He extended his hand and shook hers, with a tight but not uncomfortable hold. “I’m here to present you some pieces from my private collection.”

Diana nodded. “Please, have a sit,” she continued in Greek. “Can I offer you something? Coffee or tea maybe?”

“I wouldn’t say no to a nice cup of coffee. Black, no sugar, please.”

“Of course, Helena,” she called her assistant. “Could you please bring us two cups of coffee, my usual and the other black with no sugar. Oh, and a bottle of water.”

The girl smiled. “Right away, Diana. I’ll divert all phone calls, so you won’t be disturbed.”

“Thanks. Now, Mister Nikolaides. What brings you here?”

The man leaned slightly on the armrest of his chair and folded his hands in his lap, a bit like a classic marble statue. “Well, I have to say my collection is starting to burst and I have no idea where to put stuff. You see, I come from a long family of entrepreneurs with a keen interest in the history of our nation so we’ve been financing excavations ever since archeology has become an almost exact science. And as you know very well, not every piece you dig out ends up in a museum, sponsors most of the time keep the best pieces for their collection, and that’s what happened.”

“So, you hoarded artifacts and now you don’t know where to put them,” she joked and he chuckled.

“Pretty much. Rumors have it that you are the most competent curator in any museums in the world, even more qualified than the team of curators of Athens Archeological Museum and they literally live among Ancient Greek culture from the day they’re born. So I thought, who would be more qualified than the most revered curator in the circle to appraise my collection and see if there’s something worth of being put on exposition here.”

“Well, you flatter me now, Mister Nikolaides,” she told him as Helena quickly and silently walked in the office with a small tray in her hands, bringing their beverages. “I had no idea I was revered in the circle. I had no idea there was even a circle!”

“Oh yes, curators tend to check out the accomplishments of their colleagues, and according to the people down in Athens, you’re currently the best of the best on the market. The Louvre surely hit the jackpot, when they managed to secure your services.” He took the cup of espresso and the plate and turned the dark liquid with the spoon for a moment. “Now, I don’t have all the pieces I wanted to submit with me, because they’re are too many, but I assume you’ll be interested in taking a look at them in a way or another.”

He produced a thick, bound book from his case and set it in front of her. As she opened it, she couldn’t help but admire the great quality of the photographs and the printing, that showed each
piece from multiple angles. Not to mention the detailed descriptions of everything pictured in the thick book.

“I also have more pictures on a pendrive, in case you want to see them.”

“Oh, give me some time with this and I’ll get there,” she replied. “You certainly have an extensive collection, for sure. This comes from Schliemann’s excavation, doesn’t it?”

He leaned closer to take a better look at the picture she was pointing at. “Oh yes, I actually bought it, for a hefty sum I have to say. You know, the Trojan War has always fascinated me and I wanted a piece of that excavation in my collection. Truth is… I may have bought one too many of those and I need to get rid of some of them.”

“Oh, you’re free to take a look at our storage room, I think we have more than one piece that might interest you.”

“Ohm,” he mused. “Do you trade, by any chance?”

She laughed. “I think we can arrange something. There are some very interesting items in here, I think we can come up with some good deals.”

He let examine the rest of the book in silence, but keeping a close eye on her every second. She felt his eyes on her as she flipped through the pages and looked at each artifact in his collection and for the first time, she felt a little uncomfortable. His stare was almost like a woodpecker, he was boring inside her soul, judging every move and every movement of her eyes over the pictures of his collection, and it was kind of awkward.

And it was escalating, because as she moved forward in the book, the artifacts depicted there started increasingly reminding her of the Amazonian weaponry she had grown up with, up until a full armor turned up, rusty and with the leather withered to the point it was almost nonexistent, photographed on a mannequin inside a huge display case. Said mannequin sported other Amazonian equipment, like sword, shield and gauntlets, not to mention the long spear, that was clearly a replica though, leaning on a stand beside the figure.

“Seen anything interesting?” he asked.

“Yes, something I haven’t seen in a long while.” She flipped the page again and felt her heart skip a beat or two, when she found herself face to face with a picture of six Amazonians headgears, covered in rust, scratches and bumps from countless battles. Each of them different, each of them belonging to a sister fallen in battle.

“Those are incredibly rare,” he explained. “Archeologists and historians are still baffled by those, that’s why I keep them for me, but I think it’s time they are admired by more people than just an old man with a fascination for Greek myths.”

Diana bit her tongue, hard, to stop herself from shouting that the Amazons weren’t a myth. “I see. Let me be honest with you, this full battle set seems incredible, I’ve read of this kind of equipment only related to the myths of the Amazons.”

Nikolaides gave her a small nod. “Indeed, that’s my theory. For a long time I thought that the items depicted in those photographs where the solid evidence of the real existence of the Amazons, but I never felt confident enough to release them.”

“It’s a controversial topic.” Again, she had to refrain herself very hard not to say something really stupid about it. “Not many historians seems inclined to acknowledge their existence, given the lack
of hard evidence, beside the myths.”

“Too bad. Fascinating culture. The hard evidence that men, as in chromosome XY, cannot live in peace.”

“You really think so?” she questioned, intrigued by such a bold statement.

“Well…” he started, rolling a chromed case about the size of a book in his hands before setting it in front of her. “You tell me, Diana. You’re the one that left Themyscira a bit over ninetynine years ago.”

What the… She grabbed the case, flipped the latches and snapped it open.

She froze, and then she started shaking.

It was the hilt of the Godkiller, the sword she had stolen from the armory back in Themyscira and that Ares had destroyed like it was made of clay and not solid steel.

“Where did you get this?”

“Where you left it. In Veld, a small village in Belgium. Come on Diana,” he suddenly shifted to ancient Greek, rather than modern. “I cannot really believe that Hippolyta’s daughter hasn’t realized who I really am yet. You’re built like you’re mother, but damn you got all my colors!”

Suddenly the overly heated room became cold as the North Pole.

Damn, she should have guessed it. Alastor… it was one of the many epithet given to the Father of the Gods.

“Zeus?”

The man shrugged his shoulders and smiled, briefly. “It’s nice to meet you, finally.”

“Really?” Diana felt the anger surge from the pit of her soul and burst like a firework. “After all this time? After nearly a century, you come to see me? And under this stupid pretense?”

“Would you believe me if I told you I was scared?”

She let out a frustrated grunt. “You? Scared? I’m sorry but I find it very, very hard to believe!” She shut the case, closed the hatches and pushed the container on the desk, towards him. “Come on, why? Why now?”

She saw the doubt screw up his face and his composure, very statuesque up to that point, falter. “Diana I… really, I was afraid. I was afraid you wouldn’t understand what your mother and I wanted for you, or why I couldn’t kill Ares and stuff. I…” He took a long pause, twisting a strand of his thick beard between his fingertips as he looked outside the window. “I’m being sincere, Diana. I was afraid you would have lashed out. I never wanted for you to do anything you did. I truly hoped Ares would never pop up again, so you would have never needed to leave home and…”

“And?” she prodded him, barely containing the rage coursing through her veins.

“And lose everything!” he snapped. “Because you did lose everything, that night at the airstrip. Like we almost lost everything that day, so many years ago, when we tried one last time to stop him from destroying the world. We almost failed, we came out nearly dead, all of us. Even your mother, and your aunt! We almost lost that day, and you succeeded when we failed, but for Olympus’ sake you
lost everything else!”

“You mean Steve, don’t you?”

“Yes!” He was slipping into an even more archaic language than Ancient Greek, reverting back to proto-Indo European language. Probably his native tongue. “And your hope in humanity! Diana, that day… that day you lost so much more than what we ever had, and I was afraid to meet you because… because I never wanted this to happen and I’m too much of a coward to face you. That’s why.”

He seemed sincere, but she couldn’t really believe him. Not with that timing.

“Let me get this straight… you never even dared to come and explain yourself after I managed to do what you couldn’t for reasons I still don’t understand and you haven’t said yet, and you come to me now to tell me that you were a coward? You? The mighty Zeus, father of all Gods?”

“I’m inexcusable, I get it.” He took a long, deep breath and blew it out with a hiss. “Alright Diana. You clearly have no interest in getting to know so I’ll leave you be. By the way, the artifacts are real, if you want them, they’re all yours.”

He stood, gathered his things and, with a curt nod, walked towards the door.

And Diana found herself doing the last thing she thought she would do in such an occasion.

“Wait!”

Zeus stopped, one moment away from shutting the door behind his back.

“Listen, I have work to do, but I can meet you for lunch. I had an appointment but I can cancel.”

“Is Steve coming here?” he asked, not turning to face her though.

“He was, but I can cancel. I’ll see him home tonight.”

Zeus nodded. “Alright. I’ll try my best to explain.”

She leaned back against the chair and folded her arms across her chest. “You better.”
“Are you sure he’s what he claims to be?”

The first thing she had done as soon as Zeus had walked out of her office was calling Steve. And he didn’t seem too inclined to go soft on him.

Diana pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed. “Yes. He knew things… only a god could know. Only Zeus could know,” she explained. “It must be him.”

“Uhm… so you want to go to lunch with him?”

“Yes. I mean, no, I don’t want to go to lunch with him, but it could be my last chance to have some answers. Do you mind?”

She could almost picture him shrugging and smiling. “No, of course not. Just… be careful. You sound quite upset, I don’t want this guy to ruin your day completely.”

The concern in his voice was genuine. “Don’t worry about me, I killed the son, I think I can handle the father with no hostile means. I’ll be fine.”

“Alright. Just… text me your location when you get there. I’ll be close, just… just in case something goes wrong.”

Diana laughed. “Steve, you want to be my knight in shiny armor?”

“More like your pilot in a drenched German uniform. Though… I’m not a pilot anymore, I have no idea what happened to that uniform and I’m not drenched. Though I was, about an hour ago. Damn, I forgot how much you sweat when you go for a run!”

“Sounds fun. Still got issues with the polluted air?”

“I’m getting used to it. My throat still stings a little, but nothing a glass of water can’t cure. Anyway, I’m here catching up with the history and the technicism of the European Union so I can be your spokesperson to them too, in case my job requires it. Just text if you need me, alright?”

“Will do. You stay home for now, I think I will manage on my own.”

“I don’t doubt it, Angel. Just… I’m here, remember that.”

“Got it. Listen, I have some work to do before lunch break, I’ll see you home. Love you.”

“Love you too.”

Once the call was closed, she placed the phone on her desk and went back to the paperwork, though struggling as she waded through the bureaucracy of handling ancient artifacts. Meeting Zeus was a dream she had given up ages ago. Seeing it actually fulfilled had rocked her world more than an earthquake and she was still reeling from it, but she had a job and she had to do it. Actually, it did wonders to get her back to a decent state of peace of mind, one that wouldn’t have her clench her fingers into fists each time Zeus spoke because she wanted to throttle him.

By the time lunch break came, she felt more than able to sustain a civil conversation with him, despite the rage still lingering beneath her skin, like a ripple caused by a rock thrown into an otherwise calm lake. From the outside, she looked like her normal self, not one of her colleagues, not
even her assistant, could detect her distress. But from the inside, she felt like a volcano, with the boiling magma ready to erupt if the pressure grew too much.

But, as with every obstacle she had encountered in her life, she bit the bullet, gathered her coat and purse and went to face even this enemy.

She found him just outside the Pyramide Du Louvre, wearing a thick black woolen coat with the lapels pulled up to ward off the cool breeze blowing in the city. Somehow, he looked less imposing than when he appeared in her office, his face showed his worry and his shoulders, that normally would be squared and wide, were sagging and he kept clenching his jaw.

He did look like he was afraid of her.

“Thank you, Diana,” he said. “For this chance.”

“If there’s something I learned in the past century is that sometimes people deserve a second opportunity. I guess it’s true even for some Gods.”

He nodded. “Well, thanks anyway. Listen, it’s been a long while since I’ve been here in Paris, do you know where we could…”

“There’s a nice place just down that street. It’s off most tourist routes, so we shouldn’t be disturbed. Also, since you speak Ancient Greek, we definitely won’t be disturbed.”

“How’s your mother?”

The deadpan question came right after they had placed their order to a young waiter. “Fine, I guess. I haven’t seen her in a while.”

“Despite the fact that she lead the Amazons against Steppenwolf’s army?”

She sighed. “I know, but I was a little occupied elsewhere.”

“I know, I saw it. We saw it.”

Diana rolled her eyes. “And lending a hand wasn’t even taken into consideration, uh?”

“We stopped meddling in mortals’ affairs long ago, Diana. For their own sake. Look what happened the last time one of us did it.”

He had a point. “Then how come you helped Steve, like a month ago?”

“Because he deserved it!” he exclaimed, with a smile. “And because you deserved it. Diana, listen to me and please trust me on this, I know I don’t have the best backtrack of trustworthy deeds but I’m being sincere right now. We would have brought him back right away, back then in 1918, if his body hadn’t vaporized. I spent a good couple of hours arguing with my brother, yelling and screaming like an obnoxious brat, to send him back, but he couldn’t because there was no body to send his soul into.”

“Why should I believe you?”

With a huff, he pulled his phone from the inside pocket of his jacket and dialed a number. “Hey… yes she’s here. Do you mind telling her what happened… Yes, that night. Alright.” He handed her the phone. “It’s Hades.”
“What?” she grabbed the phone. “Hello?”

“Hey Diana, it’s probably your least favourite uncle speaking!”

Contrary to everything she had always thought about Hades, his voice was full of sass and fun, despite the slightly guttural tone. It caught her completely off guard and she had no words. “Oh… Hi, I guess.”

“Kinda speechless, uh?” he joked. “Don’t worry, I completely get it. Steve and Clark were too, when they discovered I actually own a pub in Metropolis. Anyway… what do you want to know? Shoot, I’m all ears.”

Damn he sounded nothing like she thought she thought he would. Owning a bar must have changed him, someway.

“My…” She took a deep breath to steady herself. “My father said you wanted to give Steve a hand back in…”

“After Veld?” he asked. “Absolutely! Girl, you two were the golden couple, we were all rooting for you from the moment your rescued him! Your sister… Aphrodite I mean, she was oh so gleefully waiting for the moment you two would realize that the strange feeling in your stomachs wasn’t indigestion but love, you have no idea. And then he blows up? Like that? Well excuse my French but fuck that we hadn’t seen a love so true, pure and powerful ever since Narcissus discovered himself, we had to do something!

“Wait a second, did you just quote Hercules?” she gasped in the phone, while Zeus, on the other side of the table, laughed softly.

“What can I say, I love James Woods, I watched all his movies multiple times and believe it or not, I have a big soft spot for Disney so… yes, I quote their movies a lot. Anyway… yes, your dear father tried to bully me into pushing Steve’s soul out of Underworld for a good two hours, with Steve actually witnessing the argument and trying to understand what we were saying because of course he doesn’t speak what you call Indo-European. Long story short, I can’t resurrect anyone if I don’t have a body. And there wasn’t a body left when Steve died so, nope, sorry, I tried and believe me, I screamed and yelled at Steve for years for not using that damn parachute behind his frigging seat, too bad he doesn’t remember that because to him it didn’t happen, now that your friend rigged time and brought him up here. Well, now.”

“So what happened last month didn’t come out of…”

“Pity? Absolutely not. We were all agreeing on giving you two a boost, now just as we did back then. It was only a matter of finding the right chance to do it. Diana, I know we Gods may not come in a good light, to you. And you have all the rights, we have done nothing good to you, all your life, and what we did with Steve may seem like it came out of pity, but it was gratitude for getting us rid of Ares and some sort of compensation, for what had been stolen from you, that night.”

“But why wait so long, or a third party interjection?” she questioned him.

“My dear, we’ve been working on it for ages, from day one actually. Problem is, reincarnation takes a long time, because we needed to… ehm what’s the term… engineer a person that would look like him, have the same character and other things, in order to make it work. It’s not like moving some water from a container to another, it doesn’t work like that. I wish it would, because that way, we would have sent Steve back in twenty years or something, but unfortunately, it takes a long while. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have an incoming truck with more kegs of beer I can count and I have to
unload it. Next time you’re in town, come and have a pint, I’d love to meet you in person.”

“I’ll see what I can do. Do you need to talk to Zeus?”

“No, we’re just fine. Give him a chance, dear. He may have issues keeping it in his pants, but deep down he’s not a bad guy.”

With a sigh, she closed the call and handed the phone back to Zeus. “Alright, now I have three versions of the story and they more or less coincide. I can say I believe you, on this matter.”

“It’s more than I could have asked. Is there anything else you want to know?”

“Oh well, there are tons of questions I would just love to have answered, first and foremost… why the hell did my mother never tell me the truth?”

“You have to ask your mother about it,” he replied, now more calm than before.

“And you think I didn’t?”

He groaned before he opened his mouth to speak, but in that moment the waiter arrived with their lunch. They thanked him in French, before reverting to Ancient Greek. “I can only offer you my side of the story. After the war with Ares, after I managed to hurt him bad enough to force him into a disastrous retreat, we decided to also get away from human affairs. Let’s say we… we still did our job without being a constant presence among men. We sort of lived… boring immortal lives, doing activities we loved. But before that, your mother and I reached the conclusion that we needed a way to defend ourselves in case Ares came back. A weapon, so to speak. Someone he wouldn’t know about.”

“And that would be me, right?”

He chuckled. “Yes. Your mother desperately wanted a daughter, I ardently wanted a weapon, we both wanted Ares gone for good. We made a deal, we both got what we wanted.”

“Then why lie to me? Everyone on Themyscira knew I was your daughter. Everyone! Why not tell me?”

“To protect you from Ares, I guess. Listen... Hippolyta loves you, her love runs deeper than you can imagine. She adores you and she truly longed to have you, before you came. She even allowed you to go back, even though the law forbids people leaving the Island to come back! Listen, I understand, alright? You feel betrayed and the fact that she never explained her reasoning must hurt even more, but trust me when I say that she loves you, and everything she did, she did out of love. She’s the strongest Amazon I’ve ever met, but she’s not perfect. We Gods are not perfect!”

“Well, neither am I so I think I’m allowed to be a little angry, about this,” she snarled. She closed her eyes shut for a moment and tried to calm down a little bit. “I’m sorry… this is all so confusing. I never thought I would meet you and the events of the past month have been a little…”

“Messed up?” he proposed.

“You can say that.”

Zeus sighed. “I knew I shouldn’t have come. It’s just…”

She raised a questioning eyebrow. “Just what?”
“It’s just I wanted to meet you. To get to know you a little, meet the person beneath the Wonder Woman. Of the many children I have, you’re the only one I had never met and… I was curious to see what kind of person you had become. And before you ask why I didn’t come earlier, again, I was scared. I was scared to death. After what you did to Ares… I was scared you would do the same to me and let me tell you, I’m kind of attached to my life, I’d like to keep it.”

That made her laugh. Sincerely. “Oh I think I reached my quota of dead gods when I killed Ares!” she replied between fits of laughter.

“And you scared everyone to death!” added Zeus. “Hera was terrified!”

“No. Freaking. Way.”

He chuckled. “You’re free not to believe me but trust me when I tell you she said something on the line, never EVER have another child with an Amazon, not if that’s the result! You scared the crap out of her! Oh, by the way, Hephaestus sends his regards. Took him a while to actually confess he had offered his services, all those years ago. He wonders if you still like the gear he made, or if you need something stronger.”

“Tell him I’m just fine, though the sword could do some sharpening. Standard whetstones don’t work so good on Olympian steel. It still does its job well enough though.”

He gave her a quick nod. “Duly noted. Now, tell me: what does Diana Prince do when she’s not Wonder Woman or the most respected museum curator of the world?”

“You should have seen her, thirty seconds after she had gulped that shot, she was drunk. I mean, smashed! Completely gone! Never seen anyone get drunk so fast!” Diana was telling him about Lois’ and her night out when Hades and Aphrodite had worked together to give Steve his immortality. “By the way, what did you put in that liquor?”

“Ambrosia mixed with what you would nowadays call whisky and then some mead. Thing is, ambrosia itself gets to the head quite fast so mix it with a solution that’s 60% ethanol, I don’t doubt they got drunk so fast. On an empty stomach? Girl, you were heading for a bad hangover!”

“Oh come on you know it takes me way more than that to get drunk!”

“Of course I know, you’re my daughter not the offspring some kind of low-weight amateur. And your mother can hold her alcohol as well. I watched her drink many mighty warriors under the table, on multiple occasions.”

Diana was stirring her coffee and she stopped mid turn of the spoon. “I beg your pardon?”

“You don’t know? Oh, man… your mother was a heavy weight, let me tell you. I haven’t seen her in a couple thousand years, maybe more, butdamn she outdrank people like no one else. Dionysious loved her, I guess you could have called them best friends, by nowadays standards.”

She leaned back on the chair and smiled to herself. “I guess now I have one more reason to go back to Themyscira. To ask her about her wild days.”

“And wild they were. But… tell me. You two… how are you doing? I mean, from what I understood, Hippolyta never explained to you our reasoning. Do you ever speak about other stuff, when you go back?”

The concern in his voice sounded very sincere, she had to admit it. Even his face showed true worry,
something she would never expect from him.

“I… I try. I mean, she speaks about everything else without a qualm. But when it comes to you, she doesn’t want to talk about it. It’s like she’s ashamed of something.”

Zeus nodded. “I see. Do you mind if I go and talk to her?”

“You’re a grown God, she’s a grown Amazon, you can do whatever you want. Just… be careful. She’s a tad overprotective.”

“I will, don’t worry. Now… You’ve got to go back to work and believe it or not, I have an industrial empire to run. It’s not like they can’t work without me, but I like to supervise them as much as I can.” He grabbed the wallet and handed the credit card to the waiter.

“So you truly are an entrepreneur!”

“Oh yes, switched from petrol to renewable energy about twenty years ago. Much more remunerative, you have no idea. Alright, Diana, it was a pleasure to meet you, finally. I won’t impose anymore, if you don’t wish so, but I beg you, don’t shut us out. I know we made mistakes, big mistakes, but deep down, we care for each other. Don’t trust the myths, we’re a little better than that. Except for Poseidon. He’s a grumpy old fucker that one, he’s going to live up to your expectations, I tell you.”

He slipped a folded piece of paper into her hands. “These are all our phone numbers, addresses and even e-mail addresses. We’re scattered around the world but… call us, if you need anything. Even if it’s just curiosity.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. Just… give me some time.” She took a look at the list then folded it back before safely tucking it between the pages of her planner. “Too many things happening in too little time.”

“I understand, and I don’t blame you. Just call, if you need anything."

“Alright. Just one more thing, before we part ways. Why didn’t you kill him, when you had the chance?”

He sighed and his shoulders sagged. He suddenly looked a lot smaller than he really was. “Diana… no matter what he did, Ares was my son. One day you and Steve will have children on your own and you’ll understand what it means, why I couldn’t kill him. Now go, before you’re late for your work.”

Later that evening, when Diana walked out of the Museum, she was surprised to find Steve standing by the Pyramide, non too far from where Zeus had been waiting for her with a smile and a huge bouquet of red roses.

“Wow!” she exclaimed when she finally reached him. “What do I owe the pleasure and the surprise?”

“I think that meeting your long-lost father who also happens to be a God deserves at least flowers and some company on the way home. So? How did it go? When you didn’t text or call, I assumed it wasn’t that bad.”

She kissed him for a long moment, reveling in the sensation of warmth that traveled through her body and deep down in her soul. “You’re right, it wasn’t that bad. You can almost say it was a nice
lunch. I even got to speak with my uncle.”

“Uh, which one?”

She took the flowers from him and hooked her arm around his as they started walking towards home. “Hades. He sounded the complete opposite of what I thought.”

“He’s a funny guy, from what I remember.”

“Exactly. He was… he even quoted a Disney movie that sort of made fun of him, can you believe it? Also, it seems like all the Gods were rooting for us, and that they were working on getting you back via reincarnation. And that he’s been screaming at you a lot.”

“Really?”

She nodded. “Seems like there was a parachute, behind your seat on that plane.”

He shivered, beside her. “Really?”

“So he said. Anyway, I got most of the answers I really wanted, though we didn’t have enough time to ask everything.”

“I see. And tell me, how does he look like?”
Chapter 16

“Uhm, Diana?”

When she heard Steve calling her, she was in the kitchen preparing some coffee. “What?”

“I need to get to Washington, ASAP!”

Terrified, she dropped the packet of beans she was about to grind and ran to the room they had just recently converted from her study to their study. “Why?”

“Remember the bill that would have prohibited the JL from assembling without the government permission? It has been repealed but they want to hear from you guys. They called for you or any representative to come and answer questions.”

Steve was sitting at his desk, reading from his laptop. “See here?” he pointed at the screen. “It on all the news, Lois already wrote a piece on it, citing that the last time the government tried to meddle with superheroes affairs it brought destruction, death and nothing else, but this time it doesn’t seem like a crusade against Superman, rather a research for answer.”

“What do they want?” she asked, circling around the table to look at the screen.

“Let me see… Here’s the full statement from the Senate. The Government of the United States has decided not to proceed with any castrating law against what is now known as the Justice League, the conglomerate of metahumans that seems to be fighting the battles humanity cannot fight yet. Still, the Government of the United States Of America recognizes that the Justice League and its components are a force of untested capacity and considering this, we are calling for a meeting, an official hearing, be it with the Justice League in person or with a spokesperson of their choice. While not compulsory, the Justice League is advised that in case they decide to refuse, it will be taken as an act of hostility against the authority. And then they go on. What do you think?”

“That I don’t like it. What does Lois say about it?”

He moved the cursor and selected another tab on the browser, opening the Daily Planet page with the article. “Here. The last time an emissary of our government, and she seems sarcastic when she speaks about it, tried to put up an inquiry over one of our most beloved superhero we all know how it ended. With the Capitol Building up in flames and a psychotic megalomaniac unleashing a Kryptonian abomination over Gotham and Metropolis. Do they plan to do the same with the Justice League? Do they want to scare them away, order them to disband so the next time a menace bigger than all our armies combined comes we will be defenceless? And so on. She’s very skeptical about this matter.”

“And given what happened last time, I’m not surprised. What do you want to do?”

“I…” He rubbed his cheek with the palm of his hand. “Do you think we can contact the others? I want to ask them what I can and what I cannot say about them, and then… I guess I’ll play their game and go answer their questions, as much as I can.”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea though.”

He nodded. “Neither do I. But this is my job now. I fight on a different battleground, and I fight for those that can’t.”
His words made her smile. Even after all those years, he still remembered her bold statement, made under the hail of mortar fire unleashed by the Germans on the French front. Or was it later in the village? Damn, she didn’t remember, but it was nice to hear him express the very same concept, though a little twisted.

“We could go by ourselves, you know that. Contrary to popular belief, even Bruce can be a good diplomat, when need arises. Despite the bad temper.”

“I don’t doubt it, but if I can preserve your secret identities, if I have to be your face to the public, I have to start somewhere, and this is the perfect occasion.”

She kissed his forehead. “If you say so. Do you need me to come with you?”

He shook his head, with a smile. “No, Angel. I think it’s time I move my first real steps in 2018 by myself.” He circled her waist with his arms and pulled her close to him, until she sat on his lap. “I know the drill, I just need help finding a flight and paying for it. I still haven’t caught everything about online shopping and credit cards.”

“Give it time, there will be more occasions for that. Alright, call the others, I’ll look for the flight.”

“Weren’t you making coffee before I called you?”

Diana was about to sit in her desk chair to start perusing the online tickets sales, when she stopped mid-movement only to bolt out of the study and into the kitchen. Caffeine first, tickets later.

Steve left Paris five days later, on a cold January morning. Diana left him outside the check in at the Charles De Gaulle airport, with a kiss and a recommendation to keep his eyes open, that she was just a phonecall away, if he needed help. Also, he wasn’t alone in the US. They had already arranged for Clark to accompany him, along with Lois, as they had a good excuse to be there, as reporters. Bruce and the others on the other hand would watch the QA on live TV.

They had everything ready, what he could and couldn’t say about the identities of the members of the Justice League, their goals, their funds. They had covered pretty much everything the politicians could have asked and in case something different would pop up, Steve was good at improvising, he wasn’t afraid of unprogrammed questions.

What he was afraid was his still lacking knowledge of recent history. He was completely up to date with recent superhero events, like General Zod’s arrival, Luthor’s attempt to kill Superman through Batman and the subsequent unleashing of Doomsday, the destruction of Midway City and the failed experiment of Task Force X, or the Suicide Squad as they had been dubbed. He was ready for questions related to those events. But if they questioned his veteran status of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq? He knew the basics, Bruce and Diana had helped him come up with a convincing story, corroborated by the fake documentation Bruce had managed to plant in the military archives, but what if he faltered?

What if someone discovered that he wasn’t Captain Steven Rockwell Trevor of the US Air Force, born in 1982 in rural Wisconsin, but that he was Captain Steve Trevor, born in 1882, still in Rural Wisconsin?

That was scared him the most. If someone discovered that Flash could travel back in time, that would mess things up more than anyone wanted.

The flight was boring and long. Very long. He used the long hours to review his documentation, but after the third time he had read the folder from the first line to the last, words started mixing together.
Sighing, he pinched the bridge of his nose, shut his eyes tight and let his head fall back on the backrest. Time to change method of entertainment. Thanks to the modern marvels of technology, there was a good and stable wifi connection on the plane, so he fished the headphones in the front pocket of his backpack and searched for something to listen to.

As he searched for something on Spotify, he thought back at how people had to listen to music back in his days, how cumbersome were those vinyl disks and the gramophones, not to mention the live bands. And how much the music had changed! Not that he minded, quite the contrary he loved the variety, though he preferred some genres to others.

*God this flight will never end...* he thought. Good thing that, between the boredom and the lulling background noise of the plane, he quickly fell asleep and spent the rest of the flight dead to the world until the landing sequence was initiated.

When he finally passed through the TSA and got his suitcase, he found Clark and Lois already waiting for him at the gate for the flight to Washington.

“Hey guys, good to see you!”

He shook hands with Clark and hugged Lois. “It’s good to see you too,” she smiled. “How’s Diana?”

“Submerged with work, Christmas was a hell of a mess for the Museum, the surge of tourists was insane. And she had a private commission for an upcoming exposition in Ukraine… she’s overworked,” he explained. “What about you? Ready for the circus?”

“We’re just going to sit and report, you’re going to do the hard work.”

“Weapons are not allowed in the room, right?” he asked. “Then I’m going to be just fine.”

“They also upped the security measure after the explosion, two years ago. It shouldn’t be that bad,” added Clark. “You’re going to be on live television though, aren’t you a little nervous?”

“Can’t be worse than having to improvise for weeks at times, behind enemy lines, trying not to blow your freaking cover and having to do it in another language. I think I can manage.”

One more hour of flying and they finally reached their destination. The hotel wasn’t too far from the place where they’d hold the hearing, the next day, and as soon as he got the keys to his room, Steve caught the occasion to call Diana. It was about six PM in Paris, she was probably still at work.

“Hey, got Washington in one piece?” she asked when she picked up. Her voice was strange, it echoed as if she was in a large, nearly empty space.

“Yeah, it was just boring as hell. At least I was on the same flight to Washington as Lois and Clark, and they’re always good company. How was your day?”

“Boring! Very boring. Mostly paperwork. I managed to get my hands on something interesting only half an hour ago.” Something metallic clattered on the floor. “And Francois is trying to ruin the fun. One day or another that guy will break something more precious than a can of solvent.”

“Oh you’re downstairs? That explains the echo. What are you doing?”

“Remember that woman that gave me those things to clean, date and estimate? I finally got the time to finish the job and take a look at the cataphract. You should seen this thing, it’s huge and it’s
beautiful! Last time I saw one so well preserved was on Themyscira, and I was preparing Antiope’s new horse for training with it!”

“Diana, that thing wasn’t well preserved. It was brand new!”

He heard her chuckle softly in the phone. “Well, sort of. Some plates were. So, are you ready for tomorrow?”

Steve put the phone on the small desk in front of the bed and pressed the loudspeaker button. “Yeah, I just need to review my file one last time so I don’t mess up and I should be alright. Bruce asked me to remain for a couple of days more so I could do some interviews in case some journalist asks for one and then I’ll be home by the end of the week.” He took his sweater off and unbuttoned his shirt. “I’ll call you if I need anything.”

“Got it. Listen, I’d love to stay on the phone for hours but I need both hands to check a couple of things on the cataphract. I’ll be watching you tomorrow.”

“I count on that! I’ll leave you to your work then. Have a good night, Angel. Love you.”

“Same to you. Love you!”

With an unhappy sigh, he closed the call and sat on the bed. It suddenly hit him that this would be the first night he would spend away from her since November. Technically, since 1918. He had gotten used to her presence, her tossing and turning, the late nights and the early wake up calls. It was a bit like being in the army again, but he wasn’t waking up to the voice of a drill sergeant or bombs exploding merely yards away from his position it was the ringtone of her phone. And they don’t wake up to go to war, even though Diana is always ready to go and help those that need it, it’s to have breakfast, read the paper - though digital and not on actual paper - and then go to work. Alright, he worked from home, she went to work, but they both had a job.

It’s crazy how easily you fall into a routine when you like something, how easily you adapt, despite the initial difficulties. And he had adapted insanely quick to a situation that was completely out of his league, the polar opposite of his old life.

Now going back to sleeping alone, even if it was only for four nights?

It was the closest thing to a living nightmare he could come up with. Most of all because his nightmares were incredibly realistic and they often woke him up in the middle of the night, drenched in sweat and heart pounding against his ribs like a wardrum. It was a near nightly occurrence and even just thinking about the fact that those nightmares could come and visit him when he was so far away from her only added to the anxiety.

He had hoped he wouldn’t be affected by shellshock, or post traumatic stress disorder as it is called nowadays, but as the initial, more than pleasant shock of being catapulted ahead of time and being alive when he had already come to terms with blowing up with the mustard gas, not to mention being with Diana, it had come to him too, like it had happened to Charlie.

For him it was mostly nightmares and being startled by loud noises. He could deal with the noise aspect, but the nightmares? Those were gruelling, and Diana was his anchor, she was always there to bring him back to reality, to calm him down, even by just being there. He didn’t need to wake her up, those few times she wouldn’t by herself, to feel better.

Maybe he wasn’t ready yet.

How did his fellow soldiers deal with the stress? With the near death experiences? Diana had
mentioned that the US government had never been kind to its soldiers, often neglecting to take care of them when they needed help coping, and that was in recent times, what had happened after the end of the Great War? Did his friends have a shoulder to cry on? Someone they trusted, someone they could talk to, someone who could help them deal with the horrors they had witnessed and they had carried home with them? Because surely he had brought back a lot from the trenches, the dogfights and his days as a spy, enough to fill tons thousands of books. Horror books.

He was contemplating the idea of going for a quick run to shake off the sudden surge of anxiety when the phone on the table ringed. He grabbed it and picked up the call without checking the caller ID. “Trevor.”

“Hey Steve, it’s Lois. Clark and I are going out for lunch, want to join us?”

Or he could go out with some friends and forget said anxiety with some company. “Uh… sure! Just let me freshen up and I’ll be ready. See you downstairs.”

“Sure thing. See you later!”

Yes. Going out with his friends was definitely a good idea. He clenched his fists and stood up, opened his suitcase and selected some clean clothes before heading to the bathroom. He wasn’t alone, he was among friends, people Diana trusted with her life, his life. He would be fine. He would have had to step out of his comfort zone, one day or another. Better doing it with a bang.

Contrary to his expectations, that night he slept like a baby. He had spent the day with Clark and Lois, just being a tourist around DC. They visited museums, checked traditional landmarks and other things tourists usually do in Washington. They even took some pictures they sent to Diana, both to involve her and reassure her about Steve’s wellbeing. She tried not to show it, but he knew she was a little worried of being so far away from him.

Anyway, between the long flight and all the walking around town, when he arrived in his bedroom and started getting ready for bed, he found himself totally worn out and when he fell asleep, he didn’t wake until the alarm blared from phone as it rested on the nightstand.

“Ugh… alright…” he groaned as he got up from the bed and into the bathroom. “I’m awake…”

He went through his normal routine, showered and trimmed his beard - he had let it grow after Diana expressed her appreciation - and dressed. The hotel had offered a laundry service so he had both the dark grey suit and the blue shirt ironed. He wanted to look at his best at the hearing.

As he got dressed, he went to his suitcase to retrieve his watch, the steel monolith Diana had got him for Christmas, he found a little surprise. In a neat velvet box, beside the newer one, he found his father watch. Diana had kept it as if it was sacred, greased the leather and had professionals maintain the gears. It still ticked like the last time he had worn it. She had told him she had always kept it with her, her only link to him after he had…

There was a note, on a tiny piece of paper probably torn from the back of an envelope. Go and kick some ass. Love you. Your Ange On The Wing.

Steve smiled and pressed his lips to the tiny note. “Love you too, Diana.” He folded the note and stuck it between the watch and the leather casing. With more attention he would usually dedicated to such an act, he set the correct time and strapped it around his wrist.

“Uh… it’s like I’m getting married,” he mused to himself. “Something old, something new… something borrowed and something blue. Too bad it works only for the brides. Wait I think I listened
to a song with a line like that...” He tried to remember the lines as he tied his his shoes, he kept reciting the line in his head until finally the melody popped up in his mind. “Ah, gotcha! *Something borrowed, something blue, every me and every you!*” he sang aloud.

Ten minutes later, he was ready, just in time for Clark to knock on the door to call him down for breakfast. “Steve, we’re going. Are you ready?”

“I’m coming!”

He grabbed his coat and the briefcase with all the documentation then opened the door. “Here, I’m ready.”

“Hey, look at that! All dapper and elegant! You’re sure going to make an entrance!” said Lois, who was waiting for him just outside the door, with Clark.

“Is it too much?” asked Steve, suddenly worried. “You think I should…”

“No, it’s perfect. You look great. I meant that you’re going to make a good impression, and as long as you don’t try to hurt anyone, everything will be just fine,” she explained. “Now, breakfast. If we don’t hurry we’re going to be very late.”

“Got it. Shall we go then?”
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The hearing was going to take place in a building adjacent to the Capitol, still under reconstruction after Lex Luthor’s plan to make Superman’s image to the public sink had blown it up. Bruce had arranged for a car to pick him up from the hotel, and when they finally reached the place, now surrounded with members of the press and random people there to show their support or lack of thereof to the Justice League, Steve finally felt the lump of doubt forming in his throat.

Was he really ready to do something so big? To be the face of the League? Was he ready to be on his own at all, after only two months in the twenty first century?

As he walked through the hall of the building, heading towards the large room where the hearing would take place, the lump in his throat became nausea in a split second.

“I can’t do this…” he whispered to himself.

“Oh dear, sure you can!” Boasted a voice behind him. A voice Steve knew.

He looked behind him for a moment and found a tall man smiling brightly beneath the thick beard. He looked so different, dressed in a black suit and tie. “Hades? What are you doing here?”

“You thought we would leave you alone without Diana in a moment like this one? Oh please, we’re better than that. We promised we would take care of you guys, and we are. My brother couldn’t be here, previous engagements, but I was free to come. Need a hand?”

Steve shook his head. “No, not really. I just kind of wish Diana was here.”

“Do I need to go and bring her here? It’s a matter of a minute, trust me.”

“No,” he exclaimed, resolute. “I must do this on my own. It’s been two months, it’s time I take my first steps in this world, on my own. I’m a grown man, I got my vaccine shots done, I can make it.”

Hades patted his shoulders. “That’s the spirit, boy. Need a pick up?”

“How is it going to make me drunk again?”

The God chuckled. “Not this one. It’s strictly non alcoholic.” He pulled a steel flask from his jacket. “Here, have a sip. Persephone was right, you definitely need this.”

Steve grabbed the container, opened it and gave it a quick sniff. “What is it?”

“Blueberry juice with elderflower extract and a tad of raw honey. She makes it, only fresh ingredients, and makes it last all winter.” Steve took a sip and suddenly felt a strange sensation of heat spreading from his stomach to the rest of his body. “Warms your heart, uh?”

“Yeah! It’s great! Are you sure I’m not going to make a fool of myself because I’m drunk?”

“Nah, Persephone calls it liquid courage, but it’s not booze. She used to give it to the children, back in the day, when they felt discouraged and needed a quick boost. So, no, it’s not going to make you drunk. Now go, there’s a selection of representatives of the government that need your answers. I’ll be in the public, unless someone starts a ruckus downstairs and I’ll have to travel down to the
Underworld. Good luck, Steve.” They shook hands. “The Justice League is in good hands.”

“Thanks, sir. For everything.”

The God gave him a smile and a quick nod. “Don’t mention it. Break a leg!”

It was the weirdest encouragement he had ever received. The God of the Underworld, straight from
the Greek Mythology he had studied in school, had come to help him, for no reason at all. He had
left his workplace and had come to see him, a complete nobody, just to give him a pick up.

“Well, I’ll be damned if I let this opportunity go to waste.” He squared himself up, clenched his fists
and finally walked ahead inside the room. An already large crowd of politicians, Vice President
included, had already gathered there. The Speaker of the House of Representative and the Minority
Leader would officiate the hearing, according to the email he had received a couple of days before,
and he could spot them both, behind a tall table.

“Alright… Here we are.”

He didn’t have to wait too long. The room got packed in less than ten minutes and the Speaker, a
man about Steve’s height with cropped black hair, dark eyes and neat mustache with a goatee stood
and turned on the microphone. “Ladies and gentlemen, if you would please take a sit at your allotted
places, we shall begin this hearing.”

It took a while for everyone to find their seat, but once the noise had stopped and everyone was
sitting quietly, the large room fell into a deathlike silence. “Good. Now, this commission has been
called in the aftermath of the appearance of the group dubbed Justice League, composed of what the
press and the people call superheroes. Now, we know nothing about the reasoning behind the group,
if their motives are friendly and they intend to keep them so, or if there’s something else. Now,
we’ve been informed we have someone speaking on their behalf. Is this person here?”

“Yes!” exclaimed Steve, raising his free hand. “Yes, I’m here!” He walked towards the small
podium in front of the balcony where the committee sat. He placed his case beside it and the coat on
a chair behind him. He checked the microphone before speaking. “Captain Steven Rockwell Trevor,
ID 8141921, former US Air Force, now official spokesperson of the Justice League. At your
service.”

“Welcome, Captain. Could you please tell us about the nature of your relationship with the Justice
League?”

He was ready for that question. “Strictly work-related. I was among one of the first to come to aid in
the aftermath of the battle against Doomsday and… well, I sort of made friends with Wonder
Woman and she asked me to come here today. I have been appointed as the official representant for
the Justice League with the authority, be it the US Government, the United Nations, NATO and the
European Union too, should need arise.”

“Friends?” asked one of the men.

Steve nodded. “Friends. Plain and simple. My girlfriend wouldn’t be too happy about anything more
than platonic with her, so yes, friends.”

A short burst of hilarity coursed through the room. When it died down, the Speaker went on. “So
you are in contact with them.”

“Not constant,” he lied. “They call me if they need it.”
“And what’s your current job?”

“I work for Wayne Enterprises.” Technically, it was true. Bruce had set him up to be a consultant, a former pilot that would use his experience in aeronautics in the development of building materials and pieces for the construction of skyscrapers.

“And where do you live?”

“I’m currently employed in their Paris R&D section, a new joint venture with the École Polytechnique that started a couple of months ago. And before you ask, yes, Mister Wayne knows I’ve been contacted by the League and that I’m here. And yes, he approves.”

He answered every question with the utmost sincerity, despite the fact that no word coming out of his mouth was even remotely true. And yet, he found it easier than ever, to keep this cover from blowing. He dared to look up to the balcony, where the general public and the journalist sat, and noticed Hades, sitting not too far away from Clark and Lois, giving him a quick and subtle thumbs up.

**Doing good so far.**

He wondered if Diana was really watching him. She had told him she would, through the online stream service of the CNN, but it was still office time for her. Maybe she had other stuff to do.

Anyway.

“Very well Captain Trevor. Now, do you have anything to report, from the members of the Justice League before we begin the questioning? Any spontaneous statement?”

“Uh, yes sir. The Justice League is a group of superheroes, both human and metahuman, that in the wake of an intergalactic invasion decided to come together and fight against it, considering humanity had no chance to do so by itself. What they do, they do it only with the intention of protecting innocent people from being harmed.”

“Currently the Justice League is composed by…?”

“By Superman, Wonder Woman, Batman, Aquaman, The Flash and Cyborg.”

“All American citizens?”

_Ah, here comes the fundamentalist and purist arsehole…_ thought Steve when he heard the question.

“Superman, though born on the now defunct planet Krypton, was raised in Kansas, Batman is native of Gotham, so is Cyborg. The Flash was born and raised in Central City, Aquaman in Maine, though he now resides in Atlantis where he rules as King. Wonder Woman… that’s another story, but she has a valid Visa.”

“So they all have legal documentation. They live, were born or at least they have the legal requirements to be here, on American soil.”

“Yes, all of them. They also maintain a regular job to pay bills and taxes. Well, except for Aquaman and Wonder Woman, since they doesn’t live here.”

“I presume you cannot present their tax returns or their birth certificates,” asked the Speaker.

Steve shook his head. “I’m afraid not, sir. My role is to preserve their privacy, to be their proxy with
any authority that requires it. I’m their friend, and I intend to help them the best I can to keep their lives as they are now.”

The questioning went on for an endless hour. Mostly menial things, they hammered like an angry blacksmith on the group’s global intentions, their reliability and trustworthiness about them not going against the United States Of America. Not the world, nor the people. They were all interested in their freaking seats, their places of power. That was the matter, they were scared the Justice League would turn on them and take over the government. They didn’t care about the safety of millions, billions of people in the world. They wanted to make sure they would keep their highly paid job. So Steve hammered back, even harder than them, swearing to a God he didn’t really believe in anymore, bringing forth examples of the many times Superman had helped humanity and all the opportunities he had in his life to take over but never did.

And the same worked for everyone else. The powers of all the metahumans of the League hadn’t manifested yesterday, they were either born with them or acquired them long before Steppenwolf came for the Mother Boxes. And no one, even though they had the chance to take over, had done such a thing.

Also, a long moment of global embarrassment brought an ice cold silence in the room, when Steve reminded them what had happened the last time politicians tried to meddle in the affairs of superheroes.

“Captain Trevor.” The Speaker, trying to shake off the awkward moment, wanted to save his ass from the not so veiled accusation of having caused Superman’s death. “What happened with Superman, nearly two years ago, was the result of a smear campaign put up by a now convicted psychopath.”

“You followed his lead though. I remember what happened, I was watching. And all I saw was a bunch of scared children too afraid to ask him directly what he wanted to do. It’s the same thing here. You called for a public hearing, because you wanted to show you still have the upper hand in a situation that’s completely out of your control. But by the constant questions you’ve been asking me today, I see you are very far away from getting it back,” he stated, quite boldly.

“Are you implying that we don’t know how to do our job, Captain Trevor?” asked the guy fixated with citizenship and visas.

“No sir, I’m implying that you’re just doing it the wrong way. You called the Justice League here, said it wouldn’t be mandatory, but then stated that their refusal to come or send someone in their stead would be taken as an hostile act. I’ve spent the last few days trying to find the words to explain to you that a bunch of superstrong, superintelligent, superfast people that have done nothing but fight for humanity when humanity couldn’t are not an enemy, and all you want to know is their visa state, or about their allegiance to the United States of America! You fail to grasp the fact that if they wanted, these guys could take over not only the US, but also the world! For heaven’s sake, Superman was dead and now he isn’t! Just the other day he saved a bunch of people from a sinking tanker in the Gulf Of Mexico and while he was there prevented the oil spill from contaminating the whole area for how long? Decades? Centuries?” His voice was growing louder and louder each word he spoke, and he knew it, he was getting over excited about the situation, and he couldn’t help himself. “Billions of people owe these guys their lives. Without them, Steppenwolf would have conquered the planet and we would now be slaves of an intergalactic conqueror. And all you care about is if League intends to take over the government of the United States? Don’t you think they would have already, if they wanted such a thing?”

“Try to think from our point of view,” started the Minority Leader. “The people of the United States
deserve answers.”

“Yes, but they need the answers to the right questions! I highly doubt a man with a bullet in his gut worries too much about the nationality of the surgeon stitching him up, I know I don’t care. I’ve been cured by doctors of many nationalities and I owe them my life, do you think I care where they came from? No! I cared that they weren’t alcoholics, I cared that they knew how to stitch me up! Not about their nationalities! Yes, Batman is a Gothamite, born and bred. Superman was adopted by a lovely family in Kansas and his mother is an absolute sweetheart that makes the best chocolate chip cookies you can think of. Wonder Woman is of Greek origins but she’s a huge fan of baseball. Aquaman is a mean surfer, before the accident that nearly killed him Cyborg was a rising star of college football and Flash is the geeky kid that was always picked on in school, more American than that there’s only the parchment where the Founding Fathers wrote the declaration of Independence! You want the people to know for sure that the Justice League doesn’t want to take over them? Well, let me tell you this. Batman has been around for two decades. He lost a son, because of the insane crime of Gotham. He is smart enough to hack every single computer existing in the United States, find our deepest secrets and sell them to the highest bidder. He has done nothing. Superman is thirty six, his powers manifested when he was two and kept evolving through childhood and puberty. Has he tried to take over the world yet? No, every day he goes home from work, kisses the woman he loves and cherishes her, like she’s a goddess! And speaking of goddesses, do you know what Wonder Woman does, in the end of the day? She cooks. Her spanakopita is to die for by the way. And Flash? He watches Rick and Morty, religiously! Oh, and Aquaman wants to take his wife to Paris. Then let’s talk about Cyborg’s dreams, crushed by a freak accident, that still goes to the park to throw a ball with his friends! Ladies, gentlemen… I know metahumans have a bad record. I know about Midway City, about the Suicide Squad. I know about rampant crime spree, genocidal psychopaths that want to take over the world and how they tricked everyone into thinking that metahumans are dangerous, but stop for a moment and ask yourself about what these people have done. Do they look like a threat? Did ever ever give you the impression that they could be a threat to national security?”

“No,” replied the Minority Leader. “But they could, one day.”

“And I get it, you’re all worried about tomorrow. But think in perspective. Look in perspective, at their track record. What has Superman done to make you think he could, one day, decide he wants to rule the world?”

Steve flashed a look towards Clark, up in the balcony, and saw a wide smile on his face.

“Nothing,” she replied.

“Batman?”

“Is he even real?” asked another senator. “No one reliable enough has ever seen him and brought back hard evidence of his existence.”

“I’ve had coffee with him just a couple of months ago, but I understand. Anyway, he’s real when he needs to be. What about Wonder Woman?”

“I can’t really think of anything.”

“Aquaman? He’s a king, he rules a nation, he could submerge earth with water if he wanted to. He has ruled over Atlantis for over fifteen years now. Do you know why the tsunami after the earthquake in Japan, in 2011, hasn’t caused more damage or casualties? Because he pushed it back. Cyborg? The Flash?”
No one dared to speak.

“Still, a month or so ago, you were ready to pass a law that would make it illegal for these guys to work together. Without even asking who you are. At least Senator Finch, may she rest in peace, had the guts to ask Superman what he was all about. The fact that Lex Luthor conspired against her and the whole government to put Superman in a bad light, make him look like a terrorist doesn’t matter. She tried to see things from different perspective. You were simply ready to ban the Justice League from doing what they do best.”

The Speaker chuckled, loud, in the microphone. “And what would it be?”

“Keep your sorry asses glued to your seat when you can’t.”

The audience, in the balcony, stood up, clapped and cheered. It took a while for silence to return in the room. The loud reaction to his last words gave Steve the absolute certainty he was winning the debate, he had the upper hand, the people were with him. At least those that were in the room with him. Even some of the politicians in the committee were on his side, he could read it on their faces.

“Now, let me tell you a story. Indulge in the memories of a war veteran with post traumatic stress disorder. The war left me hopeless. I looked around and I only saw the worst humanity could give. Then I met Wonder Woman. We were lifting rubble, after the battle against Doomsday. She had fought nail and teeth against that… that thing. But she was still there, searching for any victim. Looking for survivors, under the pile of steaming ashes and broken concrete. She gave me hope. Batman, he offered a mug of coffee when I needed one. He pointed me in the right direction, when I was looking for work. The Flash, he presented me my girlfriend, an exceptional woman I love with all my heart and then some more, a woman I wish one day will make me the happiest man on earth and allow me to pride myself to be called her husband. Superman, he was a friend when I needed one. A shoulder I could cry on, even. And you know what he said, when I asked him why he would just be a superhero, when he could be a god among us? He said he doesn’t care about being a god. All he wants is to go home at night, to his fiancee, cherish her and make her happy. The real Superman is just a boy from Kansas, the devoted son of a farmer and a waitress, that happens to also be… super. And to hold alcohol way better than me.”

That was it, he had them. Steve had won the debate. He knew it. It was written on the faces of every single committee member in front of him. From their high chairs, from their places of power so neatly saved by those they wanted to sully, not three months before, they were at a loss. They didn’t know how to reply. They had nothing left to say.

And they knew he knew.

They were powerless now.

“I guess we have the answers we came from, Captain.” The Speaker’s voice was dull and carried a distinct tone of barely repressed anger that only served to make Steve feel even more powerful, despite being a lowly human. “The hearing is adjourned. Please make sure to leave us ways to contact you, should need arise.”

“Will do, sir. Feel free to call or email me anytime.”

He nodded. “Very well. It was a pleasure, Captain. Now we’ll leave you to the journalists. I’m sure the press will have lots of questions to ask.”

“And I’ll gladly answer them, if I deem it possible. Thanks for hearing me out. Now, if you’ll excuse me.”
He grabbed his case and his coat, then walked out the room, people clapping as he moved away. Steve had just stepped outside the room when he was literally assaulted by a crowd of journalists yelling questions and taking photographs. He had been expecting it, Lois and Clark had warned him about that type of behavior, so he was ready to counterattack.

“Please, ladies and gentlemen, don’t push!” he said loud, to be sure the people around him would hear him. “Please, there’s no need. I will gladly answer your questions in a press conference that will take place in about a couple of hours in that room over there.” He pointed to a now closed door. “Now, if you please, I have other matters to attend to.”

The press seemed appeased enough to let him go outside the building, just in time to feel the phone in his pocket buzz to life. He smiled, when he checked the caller ID and saw Diana’s picture, one he had taken while she was looking inside a padded box containing a bunch of sarmatian artifacts, a couple of days before Christmas. The sparkle of happiness in her eyes every time she got her hands on something so old and precious filled his eyes with joy.

“I suppose you watched the hearing!”

“Oh, sorry. I meant you did great and that you had the upper hand the whole time. You were amazing! Gods, you should see social media, you’re a trending topic on Twitter, videos have already started appearing on YouTube, you’re one step away from becoming an internet meme, and I’m pretty sure it’s only a matter of time! Oh by the way, thanks for mentioning my spanakopita.”

“Hey, it’s true! And I stand by it! Anyway, you really think I did good?”

“Absolutely. You were great, and I’m quite sure the others think the same. And… by the way… you could have asked, you know?”

He froze. What was she talking about? “Uhm, ask you what?”

“Steve, less than ten minutes ago you told millions of people that you want to marry me, didn’t you?”

“I…” he swallowed a thick lump that constricted his throat. “I didn’t realize I said that I… I thought it was too soon and…”

“Ninety nine years, two months, thirteen days and about twelve hours. I think we’ve waited enough.”

He clenched his fist around the handle of his case, the lump in his throat was nearly cutting all his breath off and he felt a sudden surge of churning emotions rise from the pit of his stomach. “Are… are you sure?” he asked her, his voice trembling to the point he feared he was babbling without realizing it. Oh he so needed Persephone’s pick me up in that moment. “You didn’t seem like one for marriage and I don’t want to…”

“But you are, Steve! I know you are, and believe it or not I don’t mind. Is it something you desire? Getting married I mean.”

“Yes!” he exclaimed, with way more force than needed. “Yes, it is! I’m sorry Diana, I know marriage is something completely out of your upbringing and that in many ways it’s even against it
but… this is who I am, this is how I was educated. I understand that things have changed, for the better I mean, but this…”

He was fumbling, running around in circles because he had no words. This suddenly scared him way more than facing the representatives of the US Government.

“Calm down. We don’t need to decide right now, we can talk about this when you come back from Washington. But, just to be clear, I don’t mind. As much as marriage is way out of my upbringing, I’m not averse to the idea, if it’s you. Now go, do whatever you have to do with the press, we can talk later.”

“Diana, are you sure? You’re not telling me this just to make me happy, are you?”

“Steve, trust me. But we’ll talk about this in person, this is not a conversation to hold on the phone. Trust me Steve, I’m not doing anything just to make you happy. It’s because it makes me happy too. But, seriously, I’ve got to go back to work and I presume you have the press hot on your trail. Call me, tonight, please.”

Still anxious, Steve nodded. “Of course. I’ll call you as soon as I’m done. Just… thank you Diana. I love you.”

“Love you too. Now go!”

As he slid his thumb over the touchscreen, Lois and Clark finally arrived. They had an appointment for an exclusive interview and they were supposed to meet outside the building to go and find a place where they served a decent coffee so they could do such interview.

“Steve! I can’t believe it! You were amazing in there!” screamed Lois. Everyone seemed so excited about his performance, but in that moment, Steve felt extremely awkward in that moment.

“Yeah, that was awesome! No one could have done better! Where did you learn to speak that way?” asked Clark, before he noticed something was wrong with him. “Hey, everything alright?”

“I…” He swallowed hard. “I think I just proposed to Diana on live television.”

Chapter End Notes

The characters have taken control, I don't control them anymore. Be aware of that.
“You did what?!” screamed Clark.

“She said yes, right?” yelled Lois at the same time.

“I…” he ran his free hand through his hair. “I got carried away, I said something about wanting to marry her and she saw it on the live stream! And… she said that I should have asked her, that we’ve waited long enough and… oh fuck what did I do?”

“Nothing wrong Steve,” said Lois. “Listen, I know Diana and if she said that you’ve waited long enough, she means it. ‘You’re going to be just fine, don’t worry about her. Come on, let’s find a quiet place, so we can talk, do this interview and you can calm down. You have two hours before the press conference, you can’t do that if you’re hyperventilating.”

They found a nearly empty not too far away from the building, ordered their coffees and a blueberry muffin for Clark and sat in a booth. Steve had to take off his jacket and vest, also he pulled the tie open and unbuttoned the collar of his shirt. “Goddammit, what the fuck did I do…” He tried to take a deep breath but he didn’t feel the air reach his lungs. “This is not how it was supposed to go, I had plans I…”

Clark wrapped his large hands around his shoulders. “Steve, calm down! I get it, it was a spur of the moment thing and she wasn’t supposed to hear about it like this. I get it. But it happened and you can’t turn back time. Also Diana’s not one for formalities, I think you’re safe!”

“Yeah, I’m surprised she didn’t actually propose to you herself!” added Lois.

“Women do that these days?” Steve asked, the whole idea sounding completely absurd to him.

“Oh yes, it’s becoming more and more common! See Steve? What’s better than a declaration of love made in front of millions of viewers? Hell, people are organising flash mobs as proposals and post the videos on YouTube!”

“Alright, I’m not even going to pretend I know what you’re talking about. It’s just so… out of this world that I can’t really wrap my head around it.” He grasped a spoon and turned the coffee in the mug to let it cool down a little quicker. “God, the world has changed so much… will I ever catch up with everything?”

“I don’t doubt it,” she replied. “And I’m pretty sure you’re going to have fun doing it. Also, listen to Clark. Diana might be an unspecified number of centuries old, but she’s lived through the last century and enjoyed it in its fullest. She’s quite the modern woman, even farther ahead than most of us. I’m quite sure she actually appreciated what you said. I know I would have, had it been Clark speaking that way about me. Now, how about we go through with the interview, get it behind our backs? You have to be back for the press conference in about ninety minutes, we better hurry!”

“Oh yes, she’s got tons of questions,” added Clark. “And be ready to answer all of them, she can be a real rabid dog, when she wants answers.”

In the end both that interview and the press conference went quite smoothly. By two in the afternoon, everything was done and technically Steve could return home, but his flight was booked
for the day after the next and changing it was going to cost a fortune. Sure, Bruce could afford it, but he didn’t want to bother him for such a nuisance. He caught a train back to Metropolis with Lois and Clark and he finally walked through the doorstep of Diana’s apartment just after sundown.

He sighed. “Home sweet home…”

He took his coat off, hung it to the rack beside the door and left the case there too. With that done, he moved to the bedroom, dragging the bigger case and the backpack with him. Once there, he took off the suit and carefully laid it on the bed. The piece wasn’t cheap, and he didn’t want to ruin it by haphazardly throwing it around like it was a pair of trousers made out of a sack of rice.

He felt strangely worn out but also energized. He had no idea how to deal with it, it was a weird feeling. His mind was completely depleted of all energy, but his body was still buzzing. The jet lag was going to kill him. He took a long shower, ate the sandwich he had bought at the Starbucks at the train station before calling the cab and dropped on the couch. Bored out of his mind.

He had so grown accustomed to spend the evening chatting with Diana about how things were going in the world, watching the news or watching a movie, that being again in that apartment, by himself this time, felt strange.

Grunting, he checked his watch. It was nearly midnight in Paris. Diana was both a night owl and an early riser, maybe he could call her…

He hadn’t finished the thought when his phone buzzed on the table in front of the couch. It was Diana.

“Hey Angel.”

“Hey, Soldier… how’s the hero of the day doing?”

He took a deep breath. “I’m exhausted and at the same time I feel like I could run a marathon. Do you think it could be possible?”

“I think I can recall a couple of occasions it has happened to me too. Still in Washington?” she asked.

“No, I’m in Metropolis actually. No more press duty for me, so I caught a train back here. You were right, when you gave me the key for the apartment. It’s a tad cold but it will do, for a couple of days.” He barely managed to stifle a yawn. “How was your day?”

He could almost see her, walking around the loft in Paris as she always did when she spoke on the phone. “Normal. Mountains of paperwork and little to no time to actually handle the real deal. I’m still trying to finish the work for that exposition in Ukraine and I’ve been informed that my father truly donated parts of his collection to the museum and that means I’ll have to file, date, catalogue and decide what stays in storage and what gets exposed. I swear that after I’m done with this job we’re going on vacation. A real one.”

“What people do when on vacation, these days?” he asked.

“I…” she started but stammered for a moment. “I have no idea, you know? Usually I take time off work only to… only to be Wonder Woman.”

“Well, time to change it then. What do you want to do? I’m up to everything, last time I went on vacation I went camping in the mountains with the other boys in my parish, more than a century ago, I wasn’t even fifteen. How about we go somewhere by the sea?”
“Uhm… I bet you’re not so subtly trying to suggest we should go to Themyscira?”

Steve shrugged. “Why not?”

“Because getting there takes ages, you can go only by boat and because if you come with me my mother will probably murder you in cold blood?”

“Oh come on, she can’t hate me that much! I’ll stay on the boat, if they don’t want me around. I won’t disturb their training, they won’t even see me around, if they don’t want to. I just… I think you should talk to your mother.”

He heard Diana grunt on the other side. “Because of Zeus?”

“And because you haven’t seen her in ten years. Diana, every single time we talk about Themyscira you get teary eyed. You want to go back, see your people, stay with them for a while. Why do you keep pushing it back?”

“Because I don’t belong there!” she exclaimed. “When my mother allowed me to come back despite the law that forbids it some people… very important people on Themyscira, they weren’t happy and they made no attempt to at least make me feel welcome and getting back has become harder and harder each time. This is why I don’t go back so often, even if I miss them.”

“Ah crap I hadn’t thought about that.” He sighed. “Alright, we’ll talk about that another time. Either way, I’m not going to sail from anywhere to the Aegean Sea in January. In any case, come on, tell me, did you see the press conference too?”

“Not live, I had work to do. I watched the highlights when I got home though. What can I say, still impressive for an elder, but not as much as the hearing. That was truly phenomenal.”

“Are you sure?” He slid down until he was lying on the couch. “I mean… I had a little meltdown after you called and I didn’t feel like I was at my peak. I haven’t heard from Bruce or the others though.”

She chuckled. “I did. They’re all enthusiast about your performance. But… what are you talking about? A meltdown?”

“Yes I…” He scratched his chin and sighed. “I think I had a bit of a nervous meltdown when you mentioned marriage. I know I brought it up first, although unconsciously, but… Sometimes I can hear my father’s voice in my head telling me that what I’m doing is wrong, that I’m tarnishing your reputation.”

“Oh Gods Steve! You’re not tarnishing anything! Times have changed!” she laughed.

“I know!” he exclaimed, slightly exasperated by his own foolishness. “It’s just… when I was born things were different and travelling ahead in time it’s not like flipping a pancake. It’s just so integrated in my mind that I can’t get over it.”

“Well alright. Now listen to me then. Push the green button with the white symbol in it on the screen please,” she instructed. He did as instructed and was amazed to see her face appear on the small screen. From the little he could see around her, she was lying on the couch just like him, with the flickering light of the TV giving her an otherworldly appearance as it moved shadows around her face that the light glow of the lamp in the corner couldn’t contrast. “Hey, I like this function!”

She smiled. “Yeah, me too. But, back at more important matters. Look at me Steve and mark my words: I understand. I lived in your times, I know them very well. And as I said this afternoon, if you
want to marry me, you just need to ask! Steve, just because my people don’t know the concept of marriage doesn’t mean that I haven’t learned about it. Or that I disapprove. Alright, I think it’s a little antique, the vestigial form of a man’s ownership over the women in his family and more of a contract between two men for said ownership but hey, it doesn’t hurt anyone, not these days!”

“But Diana, this doesn’t belong to your culture!”

“Well neither did egalitarianism belong to yours, but you listened to me, you trusted me despite…” She shook her head and chuckled. “Gods, I was such a brat at the time… it was either my way or no way!”

“You were adorable! And… what’s the term these days? Badass?”

“Yes, it is.”

Steve felt a surge of emotions when she smiled at the tiny video camera. “You know… I dreamed about marrying you, that first night on the boat. At the time it was pretty much a nightmare, you were bossy and unreasonable, but it happened again the night before we reached the front. Remember, when we met Chief.”

She nodded. “Oh yes, I remember. You didn’t seem to be plagued by nightmares that night though.”

“Because that time it wasn’t a nightmare. More like something I really, really wanted to happen.”

“Do you remember it? The dream I mean.”

He shook his head. “Not really… Bits and pieces,” he recalled. “I remember we were somewhere in England, maybe the countryside. It was cold, but not enough for snow or ice on the ground. I remember one scene in particular, we were walking on one of those unpaved roads, open fields on each side of it, no one around… and just a few meters ahead of us a little girl with long dark hair like yours running around, chasing God knows what. You were holding my hand and… I don’t know, it was brief but magical. And then Charlie woke up and ruined everything!”

“Seems like a nice dream, for a night like that.”

“Yeah, it was…” he murmured. “It was strange though. It seemed strangely real…” He so wanted to tell her about that other dream, the one had in Metropolis, the night he had gotten smash drunk along with Lois, but that one was much closer, even more real and in some ways even scary, so real it had felt to him. “And it felt good. A little beacon of hope, when I had lost it.”

“We can have it, you know? Maybe not what you dreamed, not so precisely, but if you want, we can have it. Nothing, no one’s going to stop us,” she told him, a tad of emotion coursing through her voice, making it tremble slightly. “Just ask.”

“Like this? On the phone?”

“Yes, like this,” she stated, more than resolute this time. “Take it off your chest. You can do it again, your way, when you come back.”

God this is terribly out of my league. He thought as he took a deep breath. “Alright then. Diana, daughter of Hyppolita Queen of the Amazons, Princess of Themyscira, would you do me the honor of allowing me to be your husband?”

It felt strange, but just saying those words actually lifted a weight of his chest.
“Well, Captain Steven Rockwell Trevor, liar, murderer, smuggler and time traveler, since you asked me, yes, I will!”

With a sigh of relief, he let his head fall back against the pillow. “Oh thanks Hades!” he exclaimed. “And without whatever you gave me this morning!”

Diana arched an eyebrow, questioning. “Wait, Hades was at the hearing?”

Steve nodded. “Oh yes, he came to me just before I entered the room and gave me something his wife made, nothing alcoholic he said it would boost my confidence. He said it was blueberry and elderflower juice with honey, something like this.”

She shook her head, a minute jest that moved a lock of hair in front of her face. God she was so beautiful… “Damn, I miss you so much!”

“I miss you too, Steve. But you’re going to be home in just a couple of days, it’s not going to last so long.”

“I know…” he whined a little bit. “But it still sucks! I… I wish I could just kiss you goodnight and…”

Another arched eyebrow. “And?”

Steve grunted. “Do I have to say it aloud? Like, really? Oh damn it, I just wish I could make love to you all night and forget about my meltdown!”

“Well, there’s an alternative for that. It’s not exactly the same but…” She turned the phone and pushed icons and typed something, and an email notification appeared in the corner of the screen. “There, check the few links I sent on your computer. The larger screen helps.”

“Uhm… alright.” The laptop rested on the table beside the couch, so he opened the lid and the moment it connected to the wifi he opened the email box then then clicked on the first of the few links she had sent. Only to jump sitting upright the moment the page loaded, hastily click the close button and shutting the lid with a jerk. All while Diana watched and laughed her ass off on the other side of the atlantic. “What the fuck was that Diana?” he cried.

“That my dear was one of the most famous website that provide free pornography to millions of users every day.”

And she said it like it was the most common thing in the world. “But…” he gasped. “What kind of sick joke was that? I almost had an heart attack!”

“Welcome to the dark side of the internet. And don’t worry, it’s pretty common these days. It’s not like when you were younger,” she explained. “It’s not exactly a subject of conversation but it’s almost taken as granted that most people in Western World have at least once tried pornography on the internet. Come on, don’t tell me you never had experience with porn in your time!”

“Diana, I’m a soldier, of course I have experience with the pornography of my time it’s just… I wasn’t ready for it…” He rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand. “God, I so need to wash my eyes with bleach. Do you have any here?”

“Check the laundry room,” she told him. “Come on, go to sleep. It’s been a hell of a day for you, you need some rest!”

“Yeah, I just hope I won’t get nightmares. I’ll call you tomorrow, alright? The flight back arrives in
Paris in the middle of the night, can you book a cab from the airport?"

“I can pick you up there, if you want.”

“No Diana, there’s no need. I’ll have to get used to this whole coming and going, you don’t have to follow me around, I’ll deal with it on my own. Don’t wait for me awake, alright?”

“Got it, Steve. Good night, Soldier. Love you.”

He gave her a quick wave through the phone. “Good night, Angel. Love you too.”

Chapter End Notes

Tiny fun fact: I spent the day with my grandmother (83 years old) and made her watch Man Of Steel and BvS, since she had wanted to come and see Wonder Woman with me, but she had no idea of the backstory. She spent half of MoS wondering when Clark and Lois would kiss and the other half asking "where's the kryptonite?!". BvS was probably a tad too much for her (too complicated, but she liked it) and the moment Wonder Woman appeared she jumped on the couch. It was like watching it with a kid. Gosh...
Steve spent the next morning surfing through different channels that focused their daily programming on the hearing and the subsequent press conference. Different commentators meant different opinions on the effectiveness of his intervention. Those on the liberal spectrum were more inclined to favor various points of his speech, many found his humor one of the greatest weapons in his arsenal but also praised the the solidity of his thesis, while on the other hand, the more conservative commentators were more inclined to attack him for the use of humor and inappropriate jokes, and called his stance based on anecdotes rather than physical and substantial evidence.

One online newspaper, one that according to Lois had always kept a very critic stance on superheroes in general, while praising his earnestly and the passion he put into it, thought that the presence of the whole League instead of a representative would have cleared more doubts. Another hoped for the appearance of the League, one day, for a press conference, but felt like having a representative in close relationship with them could be considered more than enough, surely a sign of goodwill on their part.

And then there was Lois and Clark’s article divided in two parts, the report and commentary of the hearing and the exclusive one on two interview they had done soon after.

There were tons of articles, blog posts, TV shows or people on YouTube that were discussing the events and Diana, apparently very bored on a dull day at the office, kept sending him links, screenshots and other things from all around the web. She even made a quick translation of the article wrote on the major French newspaper. One of the best was from a website he had learned to love for their not so serious articles but that at times was the source of great commentary to major events in the world. It had published a delightfully funny recap with photos of the hearing and the comments were just hilarious.

Captain Steven Trevor, former US Navy, held his own in front of a skeptical committee with wit and the perfect dose of humor, revealing tiny details about our beloved superheroes lives we never knew. Who wants to know Wonder Woman’s recipe for the spanakopita? Read one of the comments. FML, I had no idea Superman had a higher tolerance to alcohol. And he has a girlfriend? Or that Batman had a son? Now I feel sorry for him, knowing he lost him. Another one was a little more of a personal opinion from the editor. Damn if a man like Steve Trevor would say something about priding himself to be called someone’s husband I would marry him right away. Come on, he looks like that guy that plays Captain Kirk in the new Star Trek movies, with a beard! He's too pure for this world. And hot AF!

In the end, he was pretty satisfied with his job. He had stirred something in the members of the committee and in the public. It wasn’t one hearing that would change the mind of those that were scared of the metahumans, but at least depicting them as more human, showing the people around the world that in the end they were normal people with normal lives, just a little spiced up with superpowers of various natures, could help steering the public opinion towards acceptance of their existence.

Sure, the JL and most if not all metahumans could defend themselves without his interference, but he had no special power, if he didn’t count the immortality the Gods had granted him as a token of gratitude for having helped Diana defeat Ares, he could be a public face much more than Bruce Wayne. If he started promoting the League’s actions someone could have linked him to them, maybe
someone could have seen past the thick curtain of lies he put up with the public so he could be
Batman without being associated to him.

Steve? He was a simple clerk in a huge corporation, a work emigrant that lived in France with his
girlfriend… soon to be wife… he had nothing to lose. No one questioned his story of how he came
to know the members of the League, it was built to be simple and easy to relate to so no issues about
that, but in any case Steve had nothing to lose. No superpower, no secret identity. He was just a
nobody, just one of the many soldiers coming home from the recent wars the United States Of
America had started. They didn’t even ask for more credential, they just trusted him about his
military career. After all, he was the correct age for discharge, not everyone wanted to pursue a
career in the military.

He sure didn’t want anything like that. He hadn’t wanted it back in his own time, he didn’t want it
now. He was more than happy to be an advisor, a spokesperson and strategist at times. If that meant
he was going to spend the rest of his now indefinitely extended life with Diana, it was more than
enough. He was more than happy to be just that. No need to be a hero, no need for action. He was
ready to be a stay at home husband, if the situation required him to be.

As he checked different programmes and websites to keep track of the evolving opinion about the
Justice League, Steve kept a close track on his phone. It didn’t ring. Bruce sent a congratulatory text,
so did Flash and Cyborg. He didn’t hear from Aquaman, but he wasn’t really sure the King of
Atlantis had any interest about what the US government thought of the League.

He spoke to Diana on the phone she walked home from work, each recounting their day, but nothing
big had happened other than some texts and a couple of emails, his day was pretty boring. So he
decided to go out for a walk. The sun was setting behind the tall buildings and skyscrapers, but for a
January late afternoon it wasn’t too cold. He wandered around, with no specific destination, just
watching the people around him. One foot in front of the other, he felt the adrenaline still lingering in
his body from yesterday slowly fading away from his system.

Then he reached a known place. A pub, to be specific. Hades' pub.

With a wry smile, he pushed the door open and walked in. The establishment was nearly empty, but
it was still early, most people were just getting out of work right in that moment. Lifting his eyes
from the bar, Hades saw him and smiled. “Welcome back Steve.”

He gave him a curt nod. “Sir…”

“Oh come on boy you’re almost family, stop with the formalities.”

Steve sat at the bar, took off his coat and placed it on a stool nearby. “How should I call you then? I
doubt you go by your true name.”

“Well, unlike my brother, none of my classic epithets survived and were turned into common names,
so I usually go by as Jack or any variation of said name, depends on where I am. Common,
normal… makes me a nobody.”

“Strange choice but if that’s how you go by… thanks for helping me, yesterday, Jack.”

“No problem at all. Now, Steve, would you like something to drink?”

“I wouldn’t say no to a pint of that beer you served me and Clark back in November.”

He nodded. “Ah, a pint of Arrogant Bastard, good choice.” He moved to the tap, washed a glass and
started pouring. “So, you’re the hero of the hour.”
“For what it’s worth, I guess I am.” Steve folded his arms on the bar and sighed. “I’m just… I don’t think I’m a hero.” Hades set the full glass in front of him. “Not of this hour, and surely not back then.”

“Ah my dear Steve, there are so many definitions of hero, you probably could fit two third of them. Being a hero doesn’t necessarily mean that you fought in a war. Sometimes standing up for something means more. At least in my opinion.”

“And what I stood up for?” He grabbed the glass and drank a long sip of beer. “People who can do it on their own? Probably way better than what I’ve done yesterday?”

“Oh yes they can, but what good would that bring to them? More exposure, in a world that can’t really accept them unless something bigger than all humanity comes to conquer it? Superheroes are cherished when the need comes, but in after the battle, not so much. Not because they don’t want to help rebuild, but because sometimes humanity as a whole is too proud to accept help from someone superior. Why do you think we Gods walked away? Why Diana walked away, after the war?”

“Because we didn’t want you anymore.”

Hades nodded. “You got it, son. We weren’t welcome, other religions and other means of worshipping I didn’t like were on the rise… after we stopped Ares’ rebellion and Zeus had made sure we’d have a weapon to stomp any possible uprising in the future, we decided to retire. And we were happier that way, considering how the world got torn upside down by religion wars in the later centuries, eh… I’m kinda happy we did.”

“What about other religions though?” asked Steve, genuinely curious. “I mean, you seem real enough to me, but what about other gods that are worshipped around the world?”

“Ah… how can I put it… let’s say that different religions are different declinations of worshipping the same gods. The Greeks called me Hades, the Romans Pluto… the Norse populations actually worshipped my wife Persephone, or Hela in their language… monotheistic religions usually identify their God with Uranos, my grandfather and… well, I guess any offspring of his could be called angels and demons of sorts… I think at least, since I’ve been called Satan for the past couple of millennia. You know Steve, religion is a tricky subject, even for those that are worshipped, and I don’t really like talking about it. As I see it, no religion is intrinsically right or wrong, mostly they’re there to provide solace in people in need. Or at least they should be. The problem rises when someone decides he’s worth more than the others and starts calling him or herself the sole depositary of all truths. Fanaticism comes from that type of person, and I never liked fanatics.”

The explanation was quite satisfying, to Steve at least. “And with the growing atheism? Don’t you feel… forgotten?”

Hades shrugged. “Nah, not really. I mean… I was never one that was worshipped that much I mean, you don’t worship the god of Underworld unless you want to get someone out of there. We are fine. After all, immortality has its perks. Also… again, considering how bad religious wars became, I was happy I retired before anyone started killing people in my name. Thanks for the additional work, punks!”

“Hey, I was curious, how does the whole Underworld thing works?”

Hades chuckled. “You asked me the same questions about ninetynine years ago, you just don’t remember it because to you it never happened, but I do. You were fun enough to be around that when I came downstairs I used to hang around with you, when Persephone was out on her six month leave and you were asking all kinds of questions, like this one.”
“Oh…” Steve was surprised. He had no memories of it, because like he had said it never happened to him, but for a long while his soul had truly resided in the Underworld. “I had no idea.”

He shrugged. “Of course you don’t, it never happened! Anyway, I’ll explain it again. It’s pretty much an automated process. You die, your soul gets in my realm. You go through some sort of judgement and that sorts you to your destination, I rarely have to settle disputes, I mostly stay down there when my wife’s home. You were good in your life? You got a nice seat in a nice place. You were bad in your life? Sorry pal, it’s going to get worse. You were supposed to be my niece’s companion for the rest of her immortal life? You get to hang around with me.”

Steve laughed. “I can think of worse fates than hanging around with Hades and Cerberus.”

“Ah, you two got along quite nicely. He has just one head, by the way, and he’s quite a playful dog for a molosser. He was always happy to play fetch with you.”

Steve raised the now half empty pint in front of him. “Glad to see even dead I could be useful… not like right now…” he added, in a whisper.

Hades shoved a thick rimmed glass beside the pint and poured him an unidentified dark liquor in it, from a green glass bottle. “Good Scotch for your thoughts.”

“I proposed to Diana on live television,” he replied, bluntly, then emptied the pint. “And she said yes.”

“Well about time! Congratulations, live long and prosper and whatever else you younger generations say in these situations. Now remind me how this makes you even remotely useless?”

“Because I had other plans and they didn’t included doing it while she was on the other side of the Atlantic and in front of millions of people!”

“Oh come on Steve, don’t be such a killjoy! The woman you love wants to marry you! Not to mention she’s a woman that has lived for centuries in a civilization that doesn’t even know what marriage is, who cares how you asked! The important thing is that she said yes! It’s 2018 Steve, I’m kind of inclined to think she wouldn’t have said yes if you had proposed the traditional way, you know… all the kneeling stuff and the overpriced rings. I bet she appreciated the spontaneous proposal more than whatever you had planned.”

“Yeah, maybe.” He downed the Scotch in the glass and grimaced. “Now I just need to find her father and ask him if I can marry his daughter.”

Hades snorted, loud, trying not to suffocate with laughter. “Oh please no, don’t do that. She’d hate that. And Zeus’ fine, you don’t need to ask him anything. I’ll vouch for him. Now, about her mother… that’s another matter entirely.”

“Yeah, I know. I heard she hates me.”

“Maybe hate is a strong word but yes, I bet she doesn’t have a very high opinion of you though. Now… out of curiosity. Is Lois Lane as much as a shark in real life as she looks from her articles?”

Steve shook his head. “No, not really. I think she becomes a shark when she sees something wrong and realizes she can do something about it, but people interfer. In many ways she’s like Diana, you know? She fights for those who can’t, only her battles are different than those of a demigoddess.”

“Would you consider her a heroine, in her own way? Or would you think what she’s doing is useless?” asked Hades.
“Uhm… yeah, I guess I would consider her a heroine, in many ways. I mean, I read her works on Superman after he died, battling against Doomsday. She was able to convey many emotions while also remaining detached from the subject, even though Superman was her partner in life. That alone is more than remarkable, her work is never useless.”

“She fights different battles, right? Just like you. So please, don’t ever think you’re useless. No one is useless in this world. And you can be a hero in your own way, just like her. And don’t believe we don’t know about how you handled that thing at the GCB, you managed to guide the League through such a menial task as a bank robbery when they’re not used to that type of event anymore. Stop undermining yourself. We wouldn’t have given you that little boost, if we hadn’t thought you could be… above average.”

It made him chuckle. “I’ll try. Can I ask you one more thing?”

“Shoot.”

“What happened to me after I died? I know you said you hanged around with me a lot, but… what did we do?”

“Uhm…” Hades sighed. “You see, time moves differently in the Underworld. Souls don’t feel the passing of time, you never realized that time moved forward. But you knew that outside things moved on and each time I came back, or when Persephone did, you always asked about Diana, and your friends. When they died, I made sure you would meet them for one last goodbye at least, and you reformed the clique as it was before. They were fairly relieved when you suddenly disappeared, back in November, and Persephone had to explain you had been saved from the explosion. Anyway, to answer your question, life in the Underworld, for those worthy, it’s nothing less than idyllic if you were a good person. And very shitty if you were a bad one. Simple as it is. Dante wasn’t that far away from Tartarus, with his Inferno. It’s just… less complicated and more direct in its way of punishing people.”

“How direct?”

“Uhm…” Hades scratched the back of his neck, thoughtful. “How are you doing with your musical re-education? Have you encountered a band named Twisted Sisters?” Steve nodded. “Well, to put it simply… you’re gonna burn in hell.”

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: Arrigant Bastard Ale is a real ale produced by Stone Brewery, based in California (I think...). It’s one of the finest examples of American strong ale, one of my favourite beers available in the world, canned or draft (though I prefer it drafted).
Chapter 20

The flight back to France didn’t exactly start the best way. First, he got stuck in an endless phone call with the director of the FBI. It lasted nearly two hours, his phone was overheated and so was his ear, and he was getting more and more annoyed with the questions, to the point he had to actually cut the man short because he had to go through the TSA.

“Sir, I’ve already answered all your questions, multiple times. I’ve given you even more details than what I’ve said at the committee. Now, if you excuse me, you’ve kept me on the phone for two hours, my phone’s battery is about to die, my ear so hot you can fry an egg on it and I have a plane to catch so I can see my girlfriend and go back to my job. Excuse me but I have to say goodbye.”

He didn’t wait for a reply and simply hung up. Before the man could call him back, he texted Diana what had happened and turned it off.

*Free at last*. He thought as he stood in line for the TSA controls. He passed them and looked for the gate, then again waited patiently until they started boarding people. He followed the procedure, found his seat and set his backpack beneath the chair in front of his own. With a sigh, he finally sat down. *I’m going home*… he thought. *I’m going home and everything will be fine. I’m going home to Diana and everything will be alright.* He texted her that the plane was almost ready for take off and that there were no delays in sight, before he turned the phone in flight mode for the duration of the flight.

He had no idea why, but he was nervous. It was his third flight on a modern plane, he was used to less than stable ramshackled single seater planes made of canvas, plywood and little else, and yet he was nervous. He could feel it beneath his skin, something was going to happen. Maybe not to him, but he felt like a strange kind of energy buzzing beneath his skin. His hands were shaking as he buckled the seatbelt.

The man beside him, a sixty-something gentleman in dark jeans and a navy shirt smiled. “Issues with flying?”

The deep, almost guttural voice shook Steve out of his daze. He had an accent he couldn’t really recognize, but it sounded familiar in a certain way. “Uh? Oh no, no issues with flying. Just… other stuff. I’ve had a busy couple of days, just that.”

“Oh I know, I saw your intervention the other day. I bet your phone hasn’t stopped ringing ever since.”

Steve smiled, briefly. He was famous enough to get recognized now. “I just hung up the phone after a two hours long call with the director of the FBI. I only managed to close it because I had to go through TSA. Damn, that man is insistent.”

“Some men are just like woodpeckers. They don’t know how when to stop, they keep going on and on until they get what they want or you punch them in the face, literally, or not. In my line of work I have to deal with many people like that, it never gets easier.”

“And what’s your line of work?”

The man smiled and scratched his bearded cheek. “Energy. You know, once it was oil and coal, now it’s solar power, wind turbines, hydroelectric energy… that kind of stuff. I’m on my way to Kazakhstan to see if I can strike a deal with the local government for a couple of solar and wind
“Must be interesting, going up and down the world selling this kind of product. I mean, it’s better than buying and selling contracts for oil ducts going through warzones.”

Again, he smiled for a brief time. “Oh, I’ve done that too, but I never liked it. Oil ducts destroy the environment, they pollute… it’s not for me anymore. I’ve managed to steer the company away from oil and coal, now we work only with renewable energies. Not bad uh, for an old man like me?”

Steve laughed. “Impressive, to be sincere. You’re staying in Paris long?”

He shook his head. “No, just the time of the layover. Unfortunately, I don’t have much time to be a tourist in general, but I managed to squeeze a couple of days in the city between engagements in early December. It’s not I never been there, anyway. You?”

“Uh? Oh well, I live there, moved there in November. Got a job there so I could be close to my…” Steve took a deep breath. “…Close to my fiancé. She works at the Louvre, one of the curators.”

“Wow, nice catch! Louvre uh? My wife’s into art, mostly the Renaissance and the neoclassical era, we’ve been to the museum a bunch of times and each time she just gets lost in front of the Monna Lisa. Can’t say I blame her, it’s hypnotic, even though my concept of art doesn’t go beyond saying *eh, looks good*. Oh, by the way, I’m Alistair.” And he offered him his hand, which Steve grabbed and shook.

“Steve. Nice to meet you. You seem like a veteran of flying around the world!”

Alistair sighed. “What can I say? When you own a business, a successful one to boot, you need to be ready to go here and there, when you’re requested,” he explained. “Sometimes it’s better to do the negotiations in person, most of all when you deal with governments. Speaking of which I’m kind of surprised the League didn’t appear in person at the hearing, the other day.”

“It wouldn’t have done them any good. Remember what happened with Superman, two years ago? Not good, they have too much to lose. Their lives is worth more than what some people in Washington think. Me? I’m nothing more than an office worker that was lucky… or unlucky, from certain points of view, to know them. That’s it.”

“Just out of curiosity, how are superheroes in real life?”

Steve chuckled. “Believe it or not, super boring. They all have a fulltime day job that takes them most of their time, not to mention their families… believe me, superpowers or not, they’re just normal people. They wake up, go to work… and sometimes they save the world. End of the story.”

“I think it’s better this way. I mean, as long as they don’t turn into tyrants I’m fine with that, but knowing that they’re so integrated in our society to the point of living boring lives, I feel like I can trust them a little more.”

“Oh trust me on that, they’re as normal as they can be. If you met them you’d never guess they’re super. I truly had no idea, most of all when I met Superman.”

“Oh,” the businessman looked genuinely surprised. “And here I thought he would be the easiest one to spot.”

“Oh no, he’s the less suspicious of all of them.”

The hostesses and stewards caught their attention and signalled the plane was about to take off. They
spent a long while in complete silence, waiting for the plane to reach the cruise height, until Steve yawned and shook his head. He was getting strangely sleepy.

“Tired?” asked Alistair.

“It’s the central heating, it’s too warm and it gets me sleepy. On the way here it wasn’t so warm, I didn’t get so sleepy,” he explained. “Or maybe it was because I was nervous, too wired to sleep.”

“Had it been me, I wouldn’t have slept the night before the hearing. Did you? I mean, did you manage to sleep, that night?”

“It was a miracle but yes, I did. I hadn’t been in Washington for a while so I roamed around with a couple of friends, I think I walked for miles to the point I was exhausted when I got to my hotel room.”

“Yes, that’s a good technique. It works even to counter the effects of jet lag. That and reading bookkeeping reports. You have no idea how boring that can be, gets you to sleep faster than any sleeping pill I’ve tried. And believe me, I’ve tried them all, even not so legal stuff, and nothing go me to sleep faster than all those numbers in line.”

Steve laughed softly, so he wouldn’t disturb the people around them. “I can only try to imagine, I never had to deal with bookkeeping, but I read my share of less than interesting reports from war zones, when I was in the Air Force. Problem was, if I fell asleep reading them, my superiors would have flayed me!”

“Ah, the good ol’ discipline of the military. Speaking of merrier matters though, how did you meet your girlfriend? I’m curious, you said you met her through The Flash, how did that happen?”

“Well…” Technically, it was through. He had met Diana, again, through Flash and his power, he hadn’t lied. “Well, it was some time after what had happened with Doomsday. At the time I had just been discharged from the Air Force, I still didn’t have a full diagnosis of PTSD and I was insomniac and I could barely sleep at night so I had started walking around town just to try to get tired enough to sleep. I wasn’t so close to the battle, but after it ended I felt compelled to go there and help them.”

“And that’s how you met Wonder Woman?”

Steve nodded. “Yes, exactly. And Batman. He took care of Superman’s body while I helped her with the rubble and stuff. Later I met The Flash and the others and through Flash, I met Diana. They met in college, and remained friends after that. One thing led to another and in November I moved in with her in Paris, after I got a job there.”

“Wow!” commented Alistair. “And she works at the Louvre. Must be nice, if you like art.”

“I won’t say it isn’t great to have access to the museum afterhour, but I can’t really say I’m one of those that fall in love with a painting or anything like that. I can appreciate it, but art it’s not really my thing. I’m more of a compulsive reader, you know… when the Kindle came out years ago I was the happiest dogfighter you could have seen.”

“Ah yes, that’s one of the greatest inventions of the last twenty years, I agree. Uhm, you basically did the exact contrary of what I did. It was my wife that moved in with me, she kind of renounced to her dreams to follow me. She never tried to make me feel bad about it, except when he argue of course, but sometimes I feel like I wasn’t a good husband to her, always travelling here and there, I was never home with her and the children… I mean, I love her very much but… yes, sometimes I think Juno deserved more.”
“How long have you two been married?” asked Steve.

“Nearly forty years.”

“I think you’re not so bad in the end,” he replied. “She would have gone her own way, if she thought you weren’t enough. Don’t underestimate your wife, if she stuck with you, it’s because she thought you were good enough.”

“Come on, you’re saying only because you don’t want to hurt my feelings!”

“Maybe, but like my old man used to say, if you’re worried about being a good husband, then there’s a big chance you already are,” Steve explained. “And I always saw my father as a good husband, despite the little hours she spent with my mom, being a farmer and all. He didn’t have much time to spend with her, but when they were together, she was always happier. Just try to make the time you have together count, it should be more than enough.”

“Wise words…” mumbled Alistair. “You seem like a nice fellow, Steve. One day you’ll be a good husband.”

“You think? I mean, I hope you’re right, because turns out we’re getting married sooner than I thought, I just proposed the other day!”

“Well, congratulations, Steve.” The man smiled as he patted his shoulder. “And yes, I’m absolutely you’re going to be a great husband, way better than what I could have ever hoped to be. Now, tell me, favorite book?”

In the end, the flight was way better than what Steve had thought. Alistair was a nice man, a good listener and once they started talking about books, they stopped only when they had to say goodbye. All nervousness quickly melt away and when he finally set foot on the ground, Steve felt slightly better. Alistair disappeared soon after they had got their baggages to the terminal for his second flight to Kazakhstan, while Steve headed to the exit so he could take the cab.

The driver was waiting for him with a small sign with his name printed on it. On the way there, the man turned out to be quite talkative and Steve found himself stuck with an endless rant with immigrants stealing jobs for the French people, as it seemed he had no idea he was talking to one of those immigrants, and suddenly wished he had let Diana come and take him with the car, despite the fact it was the middle of the night and she had been to the office that day. Sure, she never slept much and it was saturday, she didn’t have to go to work that morning, but he didn’t want to depend on her so much. He was an adult and he could take a cab, also living in the 21th century was getting easier every day, as he got used to all the changes.

With a huff, when they reached their destination Steve paid the guy and as quickly as he could he got his stuff and let him go. Gods, that guy should really shut up, he thought as he opened the front door and walked up the stairs. As he turned the key in the padlock, he sighed in relief. “Home sweet home!” he whispered, pushing the heavy door on its hinges and trying not to make too much noise, as he thought Diana was already fast asleep, comfortably wrapped around the duvet in their bedroom.

Oh yes, asleep she was, but not in their bed, let alone in their bedroom!

He hadn’t even taken off his coat when he noticed her shield resting beside couch and one of her grieves laying on the floor beside it.

“What the…” He threw the keys in the small bowl on the table beside the door and shook off his
coat without even caring where it would land then rushed to the couch.

And there she was, fast asleep still in her armor, the sword placed haphazardly on the coffee table in front of her. She looked positively battered, as if she had gone through hell, came back and crashed there without even taking her clothes off, shoes excluded. Yes, like death warmed over.

“God Diana, what happened?” he mumbled kneeling beside the couch. She didn’t even stir. She was a light sleeper, she would at least reply to him in normal circumstances, but not that night. She was out like a candle. Her face and exposed skin were covered in soot, her hair was wild and there were speckles of charred material nestled through the dark strands.

“Diana?” he called her, louder this time, brushing the back of his fingers on her cheek. “Diana, I’m home. Is everything alright?”

She opened an eye, just a slit though, enough for her to see him in the pale light coming from the streetlamps through the windows. She gave him a weary smile. “Hey, you’re back…”

“I am, Angel, but I thought you would be asleep in our bed, not on the couch looking like you went through a fire.”

“Ugh, I look like this because I went through numerous fires that broke out in a residential complex in Siene-Seint-Denis. You know, those huge apartment complexes with hundreds of small, overcrowded apartments? There. I spent three hours going in and out getting people to safety. How was your flight?”

“Not bad, met an interesting guy. Come on though, let’s get you to bed.” He slipped his arms beneath her shoulders and knees and picked her up.

“I can walk you know?” Her attempt at a sarcastic remark was drowned by a tired yawn.

“I know it very well, Diana. That doesn’t mean I can’t carry you to bed this way though.”

She giggled and wiggled a little in his arms as he walked to the bedroom. “Steve, I need a shower.”

“No, you need to sleep. You can take a shower next morning.” He placed her on the bed and started unbuckling her armor. “Close your eyes, I can take care of you.”

She let her head fall on his shoulder with a sigh. “Aren’t you tired?”

“Nah…” He kissed her cheek. “Also, it won’t take long to get you in your sleep attire, put your armor back on its stand and get to sleep myself. But no, I’m not tired.” Deftly, he grabbed her tanktop from beneath her pillow and slid it over her head then tucked her arms through the sleeve holes. “There you go, ready for bed.”

Diana finally lay down beneath the duvet with a whine. “I’m going stain the sheets.”

Steve smiled and unbuttoned the first buttons of his shirt. “Then I’m going to wash them tomorrow when you’re up. Don’t worry about it Diana, I think the washing machine can handle a little bit of soot and dirt. It certainly can handle other stickier things.”

He hadn’t expected the pillow thrown straight to his face, so he couldn’t dodge it or deflect it, but he managed to catch it before it fell on the floor. “I meant that time you spilled the orange juice all over the sheets when I brought you breakfast,” he rebutted.

“Yeah well, there were other sticky fluids on those sheets if you remember.” She yawned again.
“Damn, I had other plans, but I’m worn out. Between work and the fire…”

Steve, now finally done with setting her armor on its stand and had gathered her grieves, shield and sword, walked at her side and kissed her. “Do I look like I’m worried? There will be time, don’t fret.”

She nuzzled his cheek and smiled. “Not fretting, just… I missed you, Steve.”

“And I missed you too,” he replied. “But, again, there’s time. Could this be the morning you finally sleep in?” Now finally stripped to his underwear, he joined her beneath the covers and she quickly nestled herself against him, wrapping an arm around his chest.

“Don’t think so. Antiope’s training regiment is still way too ingrained in my body.”

“Then sleep. I’ll tell you about the flight tomorrow, it’s nearly three AM, you usually wake up at six, that makes for three more hours of sleep.” He kissed her temple. “We have the whole weekend ahead of us.”

“Uhm,” she mumbled an approving sound in the crook of his neck. “Got it. Good night.”

“Goodnight, Angel.”
Of course, Diana didn’t sleep in the next morning. Steve woke to the sound of running water in the bathroom and in the background some music coming from her cellphone, as usual. With a soft grunt, he rolled in the direction of his nightstand and took a peek at his watch resting there. “Uhm, in the end she did sleep in.” In her own way.

It was a quarter to eight in the morning. She was showering, the very first thing she did every morning after waking up, so it meant she hadn’t rose so much time earlier, maybe five or ten minutes. By her standard, getting out of bed nearly two hours later than her usual wake up time counted as sleeping in.

For a moment, he considered the foolish idea of joining her and save some water, but as he sat up on the bed his stomach gurgled, loud. That could wait, breakfast couldn’t apparently.

Diana had renovated the loft, when she had acquired it, and it was extremely efficient thermally speaking, with the heated floor and the insulated walls, ceiling and windows, so he could simply get out of bed and move around, not caring about getting dressed right away. He was getting used to the concept of walking around in his underwear at home, while back in his time rules of modesty dictated a certain attire even in the privacy of your own home. He stretched his back and neck on the way to the kitchen, smiling when he walked past the bathroom and heard Diana belting what he had learned was her favourite song, Purple Rain by Prince. He had to admit he liked it a lot too, though he didn’t possess the vocal range to sing it as well as her, so he just hummed it as he prepared coffee and toasts.

He was applying a generous layer of Nutella on his slices of bread when Diana, just out of the shower, wrapped her arms around him and pressed her chest to his back. She was still warm and wet and the water seeped through the towel wrapped around her into the thin material of his undershirt. She pressed her cheek on his back and sighed, loud. He felt the vibration against his skin. “Sorry I woke you up.”

Steve set the bread and the knife down on the counter and turned around to hug her. “You didn’t. Contrary to popular belief, I can be an early riser too. Once I slept the war off, that’s it.”

She nodded against his chest. “I know. I just wished you would have slept a little longer. You were the one flying over the Atlantic Ocean in the middle of the night.”

“And you were the one saving people from a fire. You were doing the heavy lifting tonight, you were the one that deserved to sleep in.” He fished behind his back and grabbed her mug of coffee, then offered it to her. “Here, drink some fuel. Do you have plans for today?”

“Not really.” She took a long sip of coffee. “Uhm… Damn, I can still feel the smoke in the back of my throat. Anyway, How do you feel?”

“Not bad. A little tired, but nothing too bad. Thing is, the weather doesn’t look too good, so I guess we could just take it easy here at home, what do you think?”

She nodded. “Sounds good. I have a couple of things to deal for work, and then I’m all yours.”

“Cool. Now, eat something, then we’ll see how we can occupy our time today. Also, you still have
As he set the plates with the toasts and his mug on the table, Diana sat at her usual chair. “Nothing really special. Faulty wiring or a gas leak, something in one of the apartments caught fire and it spread faster than the firefighters could control it. When I heard on the news that there were people trapped in, I didn’t even think about it, I just got in the armor and got there. Took me nearly four hours to get everyone out.”

“Victims?” asked Steve as he chewed a bite of toast.

“Unfortunately, yes. An elderly couple for all I’m aware of.” She added a touch of milk to her coffee. “I tried but… I was alone and of course the firefighters couldn’t go where I did, I couldn’t save them all.”

“It’s terrible to say, but I know the feeling all too well. Must be tough though.”

She gave him a quick, weary nod. “Yes, it is. The worst part is that it never gets better, or more bearable. It never is, no matter who dies. I’ve seen many people die and…”

“Diana, it’s not even nine in the morning. Leave the dark and twisty mood for later, alright? Those people that died… it’s tragic. But how many more deaths have you prevented, yesterday? Think in perspective, I bet it will make you feel better.”

“How did you get so wise?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “No idea. I guess that near death experiences give people a certain… I don’t know, perspective maybe?”

“I don’t know,” she replied in a playful tone. “Could be near death experiences or that thing that Hades gave you.”

“Oh, speaking about Hades, I went to his place, the other night.”

“You seem to be awfully close to him!”

“Hey, I apparently spent ninetynine years with him, only I don’t remember it. Seems like Cerberus liked to play with me so we hanged around quite a lot, before Flash rescued be. He seems to have a soft spot for me, what can I say? And he’s awfully nice, you should meet him, I think you’d like him.”

“You sure?”

He nodded as he bit the last of his toast and pushed the bite down with the remainings of his coffee. “Kind of. Anyway, let me shower then I’ll tell you what he told me the other night. It was an interesting conversation.”

With personal hygiene dealt with and the stench of sitting for hours in a cramped space with other people finally gone from his nostrils, replaced by the way more pleasant scent of shampoo and bodywash. As part of his morning routine, he trimmed his beard to the length he preferred and brushed his teeth. Even after two months, he still marvelled at the little things this century provided, like running water, stable electricity supply, new means to cook better without coal or drywood, but even more menial things like the electric razor or something as small as the modern ballpoint pen, unthinkable in his age. Sometimes, when he took down a quick note, he thought back at all the clothes ruined by fountain pens that leaked or exploded in the pocket of his shirt during the war.
The little things, those were the best improvements of the new millennium, in his opinion. From his point of view, despite the obvious advancements in every single department of everyday life, there were still things that were way too similar to his time. It hurt him, to see that in the end he had sacrificed his life - almost - for nothing, that mankind was still battling each other in terrifying new ways to systematically kill each other. The rampant violence and racism he heard of, or witnessed nearly every day made him sick. When Diana had told him that racial segregation and racism had become crimes, he had hoped that it had really stopped, that somehow racism had been eradicated from society, but no such luck.

Anyway, as he set the brush down in its holder, he tried to push away those grim thoughts. He had the whole day to spend with Diana and he had so much to tell her he had no time to dwell in those dark thoughts. There would be a time to fight those battles, but that day, it wasn’t.

He emerged from the steamy bathroom sort of cleanse from the stress of the past four days, finally happy to be home. Immediately, he went looking for Diana and found her now dressed in a pair of form fitting black cotton pants and a simple blue t-shirt lounging on the couch with her tablet in her hands, reading something. Slowly, he walked to the couch and leaned closer to her from the back. “Something interesting?”

She averted her eyes from whatever she was reading to look at him with a smile. “Quite. It’s the official list of what my father’s sending over. That little show he put up back in December wasn’t just an excuse to meet me, he really wanted to get rid of parts of his collection. He’s going to send it over by the end of the month.”

“Uh, neat! I didn’t really think he was going to fall through with his offer.” He walked to the front of the couch and, moving her legs away, sat down, then lay her legs over his own, so she could get comfortable. “Seems nice of him.”

“Yes, nice enough. I just wish he’d come to see me earlier. I don’t really get the whole speech. What could I have done to him?”

“Diana… you killed Ares. And from what I’ve heard, you did it in such a spectacular way it looked effortless, or so you uncle said. You killed a god, you killed his son! Would you approach someone who could possibly kill you and has all the rights to hold a grudge on you, if you could choose not to?”

She dropped the tablet on her face and sighed behind it. “I guess not. I understand that, Steve, the thing that bothers me is that at the time I didn’t hold any grudge on him, I just wanted answers no one would give me. Answers I’m still looking for actually, at least from my mother. The grudge came when I couldn’t get those answers! I mean, to them was I just a mean to defeat Ares once and for all, or was I something more? I know my mother loves me, but deep down, she knows I’m a weapon, and I was meant to be one. Once I fulfilled my destiny and killed Ares did they think I would just disappear? Did they think that after doing such a thing I would just lay low and do nothing?”

“I have no idea Diana, you have to ask them.”

She grunted in barely contained rage. “Easier said than done. I’ve asked my mother for decades, but she just looked… ashamed. And she never gave me a single answer on her side of the story. After a while I stopped asking but deep down I always felt like… like after Ares was gone she thought I meant less.”

“Come on, you can’t seriously believe that. Even I could tell that your mother truly adored you and that she was hurt deeply, when you left. But she let you go, she let you fulfill your destiny because
beneath the hurt and the pain of letting you go, she knew you would do great things. And you did! Look at what happened last year, or two years ago. How many people have you saved during War War Two? How people were born from those people you saved, and now live their lives quietly and happily because of what you did? How can you even think that your existence means any less now than you did before you killed Ares?

She didn’t reply, not immediately at least. For some reason, that morning Diana seemed in a particularly broody mood, he had never seen her like this, not even back in December, when she had met Zeus, and it got him worried. “I don’t know. It’s just… Remember the other day, when you mentioned going back to Themyscira?” He nodded. “Well, I told you that some of the Amazons don’t really like when I go back and they do nothing to mask it, I guess that thought is still nagging at me.”

With a sigh, Steve extended his hand towards her. “Come here, looks like someone needs a hug.” She grabbed his hand and he pulled her flush against him, wrapping his arms around her to keep her as close as he could. “You said your mother defied her own rule to let you return for brief periods of time, right?”

“Yes, she did. And that’s the reason some Amazons don’t see me returning home in a good way.”

“Tell me now, how many Amazons have left Themyscira before you did?” he asked. “Well, don’t count those who left to fight Steppenwolf of course.”

“No one I think. Not that I know of at least.”

“See where I’m going? Now, do you think your mother would have allowed any hypothetical Amazon that had left before you back on the island if they wanted to come back, like she did for you?”

“Probably. I can’t know for sure, but she’s never been one to abandon her people.”

“Great. Last but not the least, who’s your mother?”

She seemed quite weirded out by that question. “Uh, the Queen?”

“And isn’t a queen, any queen, allowed to change the laws, even those she proclaimed?”

“Yes but…”

“Then who the hell are these Amazons that dare to defy the will of their Queen by not approving her decisions?”

Diana opened her mouth to speak, but stopped before any sound could escape her lips. She had to shake her head to get out of that very short moment of stupor. “I never thought about that.”

“See? You have no reason to think you’re not worthy of going back home because a minority thinks so. Also, you have gained all the rights to go home whenever you want, for how long you want, in my humble opinion. You dedicated a century of your life to pursue the cause of the Amazons, a cause they seem to have forgotten altogether.”

“Oh come on Steve, don’t be so harsh on them!”

“No, seriously Diana, hear me out. You once told me that the Amazons were created to protect humankind, to be the bridge to a greater understanding. What have they done to fulfill such a cause? How many wars do you think they could have prevented? How many people that died in atrocious
ways would instead have lived a long, fulfilling life if the Amazons had decided to come forward and help us be better? This is what you do, every day! You inspire people, don’t you think I see how people talk about you, what they write on social networks every time you make an appearance. You’re a beacon of hope in a world that almost lost it, there are little girls that look up at you, young women that realized that even girls can be tough and fight and be fantastic, even men are starting to re-evaluate some of their beliefs on women because of you, Diana, you are that bridge to a greater understanding you told me that night in the pools. And you’re alone, try to think of what an army of Amazons could do to this world!

“It’s too late for them, Steve. They have no reason to move away from their customs, they… would I sound like a spoiled brat if I say that they’re too old?”

He shrugged. “I don’t think so. I have no idea how aging works for the Amazons, but you definitely look way younger than any of them. Uhm, now that you make me think of it, how old are you compared to them?”

She seemed to think for a moment. I don’t know… I guess I’m kind of a young adult to them, somewhere between 25 and 30 while they’re fifty or something.” She thought about it a little more. “But I also think it works different for me, I’m not just an Amazon, I’m also partially a god so… it’s not the same.”

“But they’re immortal too, right?” he wondered.

“Yes, but they can be killed in battle as you saw. I think they age though, just slowly. Like… very, very slowly. Or at least there’s something about time not passing for them, on the Island. Something that clearly never worked for me because I was born there and I did age, up to a certain point.”

“I see. Well, it might be too late for them to move away from their customs, but it’s not too late to stand up for what you believe it’s right, even though some people think you don’t deserve it. Remember that night, on the airstrip? It’s not about deserving…”

“It’s about believing.” She nodded. “And I believe in my mother’s ability to make her decisions.”

Steve kissed the tip of her nose. “You see? Fuck those haters, your mother admitted you to the island even after you had left because she believed, in good conscience, that you deserved that chance. And I bet she let you back not just because you’re her daughter, but mostly because you managed to accomplish the unthinkable. You killed a God Diana, barely weeks after you left your home, with only theoretical situations as your training, even given the fact that you’re a demigoddess, it’s absolutely astounding when you think about it!”

“Oh come on Steve now you’re exaggerating!” she laughed.

He shook his head. “No I’m not. And not just because you’re my girlfriend, but because I saw what you’re capable of doing, and I know what’s inside your heart. The world still has to see the best you have to offer. Maybe you haven’t realized it yet, but I can feel it, deep down in my time travelling bones, there's still so much more hidden here,” he placed his palm over her heart, felt it beat strong and steady beneath her ribs and through the fabric of her shirt, and kissed her forehead. “That I can’t wait to see how the world will react when they will finally see it.”

“Gods, I wish you were with me decades ago. Maybe things would be very different.” She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and hid her face in the crook of his neck.

“I’m here now, Diana.” He held her closer and tighter, feeling her shake a little bit in his arms. The fire must have stirred something deep within her, something she probably wasn’t even aware of. “I’m
not going anywhere. You stick with me, no matter what.”

“Oh well, I can’t really imagine anyone else I’d wish to spend eternity with, so…” He felt her smile against the skin of his neck. “Listen, it’s still kind of early and if we move we can get there in an hour or so, do you want to go to Disneyland?”

“Whatever makes you forget the fire and all these doubts Angel. We could catch a plane to Rome for all I care, as long as you’re happy.”

“Uh, maybe for Easter break. I have work to do on Monday and it would be a waste, staying there only for a night and maybe half a day. Right now, Disneyland sounds better. And closer. Come, it’s just out of the city.”

Chapter End Notes

Uh, do you want to see Steve in Disneyland Paris or should I skip straight to the summer and how they actually sail to Themyscira so Costanza's happy? She's been asking for that part for months now! You have up to tomorrow night to make requests, I'll be at a concert tomorrow so I won't have any time to write, but I'm finally seeing Duran Duran again, who knows if I get inspired...
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

By five votes out of seven (Costanza voted via instant message), I have agreed to write in some Disneyland in this story. Long story short, I've been there a couple of years ago with my now husband (who didn't really approve of this section but meh, who cares, I'm the writer) and a couple of friends so I'm describing it basing it on my own memory, some pictures I took and others my friends took, an hypothetical low attendance day and my hopes for the renewed Magic Mountain ride that has been transformed from a general sci-fi themed ride to a Star Wars one. If you're familiar with the park's recent renovations, I'm sorry I couldn't describe them better, I haven't been there. Yet. We're going for new years eve. Again. And we're going to cry again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The train trip outside the city to Disneyland took about forty minutes. The Marne-La-Valleè station was modern and bright, with high ceilings and big glass windows and skylights. It was crowded but not overly so, with the majority of the people in there being families with young children. Many of them worn fuzzy Mickey Mouse ears over their heads and sported the brightest smiles as they toddled around their parents. In smaller quantities there were also young couples and larger groups of friends, all heading to the large square just outside the train station. There, it was a continuous coming and going of busses and even more people.

“Damn this place is crowded!” exclaimed Steve, his nose stuck up to the sky and his head moving left and right as he took in his surroundings.

“It’s one of the biggest amusement parks of Europe, a major tourist attraction, it’s normal. Actually, I’ve been here many times and this is actually not a big crowd. In summer and during the holidays… that’s when this place gets crowded.”

They followed the small river of people, passed through a checkpoint where they were made walk through a metal detector and then a couple of cops asked them to empty their pockets. As they moved away from the security checkpoint, Diana took a moment to explain to him that in the past three years Paris had been subject of a number of terrorist attacks, some deadlier than others, and law enforcements wouldn't take any risks with a place full of children like Disneyland.

From his very confused point of view, Steve noticed a slight change in Diana ever since he had agreed to go to Disneyland with her. Suddenly, all the doom and gloom had left her, like a cloud blown away by a strong wind. They sky above might have been grey and sullen, with little hope for a little bit of sun later that day, she was beaming, like all the bad memories and the doubts stirred in her by the fire just a day ago had been washed away.

“Now, Steve, you watched a number of Disney movies, right?” she asked and he nodded. “Alright. Now, understand that through the century, these movies have reached a popularity you can’t even imagine. It’s... these films teach something to children and allow parents to remember what it’s like to be a child again. Sometimes I have the feeling that adults enjoy them more than the little ones.”

“Well, those that I watched were quite entertaining. I didn’t have much time to watch the ones from the past thirty years though. You think I will like this place?”
“Let’s say it’s the easiest way to make you relive your days as a pilot, so yeah, there’s a chance you’ll like this place.”

“How can it be possible?”

With a smile, she leaned closer and kissed his cheek. “You’ll see.”

They got their tickets from an automated machine. For good measure, Diana bought a ticket valid for two days, so in case they want to go back another day in the next year they could without having to buy another one. Then, as they walked beneath a passageway and approached the ticket barriers, Diana grabbed his hand and held it tightly in hers. “Ready?”

With a slight frown, Steve looked down at the small piece of paper with the character he had come to know as Goofy printed on one side and nodded. “As ready as I can be.”

And yes, the moment they walked in, he suddenly understood why she suddenly changed mood. As soon as he set foot in the plaza he felt a change in the air, something magical pervaded the place and he had no idea what it was. Maybe it was the sparkling lights, all the themed shops, maybe it was the joyful laughter of children and adults alike, he would never know. All he knew was that Diana was smiling brighter than any lights in the place and she looked truly happy.

“My God what is this place?” he muttered, completely disoriented and taken by surprise.

“Welcome to Disneyland Steve!” she announced as she dragged around the tree in the middle of the square to show him the huge castle down the road.

He felt a smile forming on his face, unconsciously. The structure, painted in pink and with shiny blue roofs on the towers looked like it was taken straight from a child’s imagination, and the rest… well, the rest was, simply put, magical. The early ‘900 look of the small village they had recreated made him feel incredibly at home, it was like jumping back in time to his own childhood. Even the banners and the way the shop windows were arranged reminded him of… of home.

He felt his throat constrict as a sudden wave of nostalgia hit him like a freight train. “God this is…”

“Is it too much?” asked Diana pulling him closer to her. “I mean we can…”

Steve shook his head. “No, it’s alright. Just… just a little bit of a trip down the memory lane. I’ll be fine, just… show me around, you seem like an expert.”

“Oh, coming once or twice a year for the past twentyfive kinda makes me an expert. How’s your stomach? You think you can handle some hoops and loops, twist and turns at high speed?”

“Uh, Diana, that’s what I used to eat for breakfast during the war. What do you mean?”

Without much of an explanation, she grabbed his hand once again and pulled him towards a gate where they entered a queue line. “Be ready because it gets fast. Oh, by the way, this is a Star Wars themed attraction.”

“Wait, is it that series of movies you forced me to watch because you wanted to see the newer one in the theaters and didn’t want to leave me at home?” he asked as they waited in line.

“Exactly that one. And admit it, you liked it.”

“Yeah, a lot actually! I don’t mind the others too, I mean… the other Star something movies…” He couldn’t really remember the full title, but he remembered loving those too.
“You mean Star Trek right?” she prompted. “There’s also the TV show, it’s one of the most important TV series of all time, if not the most important of all!”

“Yes! Those! Those were so funny, I mean… the engineer guy sounded like Charlie, it was awesome! I think I watched some episodes of the show, the old one, it was interesting but I didn’t like the pacing too much. Maybe I still have to get used to the concept of serials. Well, except for books of course. We had series of books even in my time.”

“Could be,” she added. “Well, see it this way. A film is like a short story, or a short book. A series is like one of those big tomes it takes days and days to finish.”

“Uhm…” They walked up a staircase and then into another, narrower corridor behind a turnstile. “I see your reasoning. Maybe I can learn to appreciate even that kind of storytelling. And now?” He asked her as they were directed to another set of barriers, two at a time this time. He was completely lost in the situation, but he could hear the people scream inside the ride and the noise of gears and rails in action. He was getting excited each minute more.

“Now you wait for the carriage to arrive.”

Steve followed her instructions, and those of the workers of the park, down to the letter and sooner than he could think he found himself sitting in the constricting space of the carriage, strapped with a rigid bar that hugged his chest and bracketed his head. “Hold on tight,” said one of the workers as he checked that the protective gear was firmly in place and he quickly wrapped his hands around the handles, mimicking Diana.

“Is this thing safe?” he wondered.

“As safe as they can be, surely safer than that thing you piloted back when we met.”

He was caught a little off guard when the carriage moved, but he felt the singe of the adrenaline coursing through his body already. “Wood and canvass, what were you expecting?” he commented. The train went uphill for a long while and Steve felt the excitement grow even more, the anticipation seeping out of his skin like sweat, despite the cold nip of the January air.

“Hold on tight now!” screamed Diana as the train of cars suddenly turned downhill at a ridiculous speed, with twists and sudden turns he couldn’t see in the dark, while bright flashes and loud noises were projected in hidden ways in front of him. It was like being inside one of those amazing dogfights in the Star Wars movies that Diana loved so much. He could barely keep his eyes open so fast they were going, and he felt his body being tossed around despite the constrictive protective gear, and strange enough he found it liberating. It was absurd, completely out of his mind and damn it was so much fun!

And over too soon. A minute or so later the train car suddenly came to a stop exactly where it started and the protective gear was lifted off his chest. Short of breath, he staggered out of the car and onto the platform, soon followed by Diana. He felt her pushing him towards the exit and he followed her lead, still out of his mind with the adrenaline rush.

Once finally outside, he couldn’t stop himself from letting out a scream of joy and a little jump just to release some tension. “That was so cool!” he yelled. “Let’s do it again!”

Chuckling, Diana shook her head. God, he loved when she bit her lower lip that way. “There are other rides, you know?”

“I get it, but this was…”
“Oh believe me, there are others that go just as fast. Come with me, we have two parks to explore!”

The rest of the morning was spent running up and down the park, inside and outside rides, chasing each other in the nearly deserted Alice In Wonderland themed maze, getting new rushes on the Indiana Jones ride or enjoying a quieter stroll inside the castle, where there were amazing stained glass panels dedicated to the Sleeping Beauty.

It was just as they were heading for something to eat that caught a wrench in their gears. A little fair haired wrench called Georg. They were walking towards one of the many food stalls when they heard a muffled cry behind their backs and immediately turned towards the sound. A little boy, tucked in a thick coat and with bright yellow muffs covering his chubby fingers was sitting on the short wall that circled the hedge decorations and was customarily used as a resting place by a myriad of tourists. Both Steve and Diana rushed to the little boy and tried to communicate with him.

Given her versatility with languages, she quickly managed to understand what he was trying to say and find out he spoke German, that his name was Georg and he had lost his parents and older sister in the crowd. Steve felt his heart constrict when the little boy finally let out a loud snifflle and started a liberating cry, because finally someone had noticed him. God knew how long he had been sitting there, alone and afraid in the cold January air. The boy launched forward in his arms extended and wrapped his little arms around his neck. “Oh boy, don’t cry!” he tried to console the little boy in his native tongue. Finally he got to speak German for a good reason and not to deceive someone. “We’re going to find your family, don’t worry. Now,” he looked up at Diana, who was already trying to locate one of the park workers so they could look for his family. “Don’t cry. We’re here to help. Look at me.” The boy obeyed, his eyes bloodshot and his little puffy face streaked with tears.

Steve found a clean paper tissue from a packet in the pocket of his coat and helped the boy dry his face and blow his nose. “I’m Steve, and this here is Diana. She’s a princess, you know?”

“Like Cinderella?” stammered the boy.

“Uhm, yes, sometimes she’s like Cinderella, sometimes she’s more like Mulan.” He mentally thanked Diana for giving him a very quick rundown of the concept of princesses and a quick description of all of them, to fill in the blanks left by the movies he hadn’t seen yet. “She’s great at finding things, you see, it’s her job to find them and make sure they’re safe.”

“But princesses don’t work!” he cried.

“Oh boy, sometimes they do. You know, Diana’s not really one to sit all day and let others do things she wants to do. Listen here, do you know Wonder Woman?” The boy nodded, vehemently. “She’s a little bit like her, she even looks like her, just she doesn’t have the armor and the tiara.” The boy nodded again. “Now we’re going to follow her and we’re going to find your mom and dad. Do you remember their names?”

Georg nodded. “Dad is Kurt and Mom is Liesel. My sister’s name is Maria.”

“And your last name? Do you remember it?” asked Diana with a bright smile and a kind caress on his cheek. “So we can find them sooner.”

“Klose. My last name is Klose.”

“That’s fantastic, Georg. That way we’re going to find them sooner than you can think.”

In fact, they managed to locate one of the workers who immediately radioed the situation and had someone relate the news to the family who had gone through a similar route as they looked for the boy. Escorted by one of the security agents of the park, Steve and Diana brought the boy to his
parents, who were sitting, distraught and worried out of their minds in one of the hidden security booths that peppered the whole park.

The reunion was a the happy ending the family deserved and the parents wouldn’t stop thanking them for five minutes straight as they held tight on their boy they thought they had lost.

“There’s no need, Mrs. Klose,” said Diana shaking her head. “We just wanted to help you all. Now go and enjoy the rest of the day.” Then she kneeled to look at Georg in his bright blue eyes. “And you, little man, be careful, alright? I know it’s Disneyland and you’ve been dreaming to come here for a long while, but try not to get lost again. Got it?”

He nodded, solemnly. “I will, Diana. And thanks for helping me.” He looked up at Steve. “And thanks too you Steve.”

“You’re welcome kid. Just be careful, from now on, okay?”

They said their goodbyes and went on their own separate ways. “Well, Wonder Woman got to be Wonder Woman even on a day off,” said Steve, wrapping his arm around her shoulders as they walked the way they had come.

“Oh come on, there was nothing wonderful in what we’ve done. Also, you did most of the job, you were the one that consoled Georg. I just looked for a security guard.”

“Please Diana, stop undermining yourself so much. We came here to stop your moping this morning, don’t start it again. To those people we were saviors. To Georg, you were Wonder Woman. Now, I don’t know about you, but I’m starving and thirsty. Shall we eat and then continue with our tour of the other park? There’s another rollercoaster there, and I want to try the Tower Of Terror ride.”

“You’re really enjoying the place, uh? How about we watch a couple of movies when we get home? You still haven’t seen many of them and there are quite a few that I liked a lot. What do you think?”

“Let’s see how tired I am when we get home. With all the adrenaline going up and down, I’m starting to feel a little bit of jet lag,” he explained. “But I’m all for it.”

Her phone shrilled in her purse. “Please let it not be work…” she murmured as he fished it from the bag, but she smiled as she checked the ID and swiped the screen to pick up, then turned the speakerphone on. “Hey Lois, what’s up?”

“Oh come on!” whined Lois. “Diana, you promised me you could go with me!”

“I promised we would go to Disneyworld, in Orlando! Hey, I had a bad day yesterday, I needed a distraction and we live not forty minutes away from the park.”
Steve could almost imagine Lois pouting on the phone. “I guess you’re talking about the fire. Caught a few images on the news here. Everything alright?”

“Oh she’s just fine,” said Steve. “She was just a little mopey this morning. She’s fine now.”

“Got it. Alright, Clark’s ready to go out, I just wanted to check in with Steve. Send a message to Bruce too, he was a little worried. Have a nice day guys.”

“You too Lois. And I’ll text Bruce right away. Say hi to Clark!”

“Will do. Oh by the way, when are you coming back to the US?” asked Lois.

“No idea Lo,” replied Diana. “I’m kind of swamped with work but I bet Steve will have to travel there quite often, I guess I can join him. Anyway, I have a conference in town in early December, so I’ll surely be there around that time. Unless something really big comes in and the world needs Wonder Woman.”

“Got it, girl. Now go and have fun, Clark and I are going to follow a lead on some strange things about LexCorp. Not exactly the best way to spend our Saturday morning but, you know… Bye guys.”

When they finally arrived home, about an hour and half after the park’s closing time, they were exhausted but wired enough that they went through with their original plan of watching a couple more of Disney movies. They got a quick shower, slipped into something more comfortable, prepared a good bowl of popcorn and settled on the couch, with Diana in charge of the remote and thus of the choice of the movie.

“So, what are we watching?” asked Steve as he grabbed a handful of popcorn and stuffed some of it in his mouth.

“Oh, you’ll see,” she replied with a gleeful grin. She was navigating through the titles selection and she finally stopped when she reached a small box with a colorful image and a bright yellow writing that read Hercules.

“Wait, they did a Disney version of Hercules? Is it any good?”

“It’s great when you make yourself forget the myths and the stories. It’s a favourite of your beloved uncle of mine, or so it seems. He even quoted the movie, when we spoke on the phone.”

“Oh I can totally see him quoting a Disney movie. Let’s see how this goes.”

Less than fifteen minutes in and he’s gasping for air for too much laughter. After half an hour he was breathless. The way they had portrayed Hades was so off from the real thing, he couldn’t really hold himself back because despite the stark difference, it worked. It was funny as hell. Even the other gods were great, but Hades stole the scene. The voice actor was just so perfect for the role!

“Does your father even look remotely like that?” he asked after the scene in the temple.

“Not at all. Maybe the height. He looked as tall as Clark, when I met him. And his hair and beard are more gray than white. And he has dark eyes. He actually said that I look like my mother but I got all my colors from him, I guess he meant eye and hair color. How does Hades look?”

“Not like that!” he laughed pointing at the screen. “But the flaming blue hair is a nice touch, it adds something more to the character. Anyway no, your uncle looks like a pretty average person. Long
straight dark brown hair and beard, blue eyes. Skin looks a little pasty but not sickly. Tall and lanky, You would never think of him as the ruler of the Underworld. Oh my God what is that?” he nearly screamed when Hercules pulled a half goat half stubby man out of a bush and he started making dirty jokes about nymphs. In a children movie.

“That’s Phyl and he’s very important.”

“By the way, have you noticed how the story of Hercules getting taken away from his home and sent to live with adoptive parents and having some kind of superpowers sounds a lot like Clark’s early life?” he asked her.

“Eh, it does ring a bell or two. Now concentrate, there’s one of the greatest musical numbers in recent Disney history here.”

As the film went on, Steve actually hurt himself for too much laughing. The muscles in his abdomen were straining, he could hardly breathe when the Muses appeared on screen - he also happened to like the music a lot - and found himself really dragged into the story. He could hear Diana chuckle anytime he jumped in his seat. And he was doing it a lot.

Then came the song about Megara falling in love but denying it and it almost brought him to tears. “That is so me with you, you know?”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“I mean… Gods… Alright, I’ll be honest. I started falling for you pretty early, a couple of days after we left Themyscira. But I kept telling myself it was nothing, just a quick infatuation that would go away soon, that it was only lust and it wouldn’t last long. I was so wrong, Etta got it right away that I was getting head over heels in love with you and damn she was right, but I kept denying it like a fool.” He shook his head. “Then Sameer, Charlie and Chief joined the choir. I was like Meg, only there weren’t sassy women with great voices singing to me how stupid I was, it was a bunch of dirty, smelling hardened soldiers with less than desirable voice tones.”

“And that makes me the super strong but naive warrior?” she said with a slightly scolding tone.

“Nah. I mean, you were certainly naive, but you were also mostly right. Now that you make me think of it, you only got Ares' true identity wrong. Oh well and the extent of his corruption, but from your point of view, you were right. And you know what? Your point of view was pretty embraceable. You just wanted to do the right thing, you were just… rushing it. Which is not always a bad thing, to be honest.”

“Uh… nice save Steve. Nice save.”

“What can I say? I’m a spy after all, I need to be good at saving myself without resorting to violence.”

As the film went on, they reached the part where Meg dies to save Hercules and he travels down to the Underworld to retrieve her soul. “So many times I wondered if there was a way to do the same thing and take you back with me, like Orpheus with Eurydice,” she commented, eyes still glued to the screen. “Even before I saw the movie in 1997.”

“Hades can do it, he told me he could and that he sort of did it with Clark. He actually said that he kicked him out of the Underworld. Thing is, he needs a body. And before Barry came to my rescue, there was no body to throw my soul into after that bomber exploded.”

“Don’t remind me, thank you. Well, I might not be a Disney princess, but I got my happy ending
after all,” she said grabbing his hand. “Even if it took me one hundred years.”

“Hey, better late than never!”

Chapter End Notes

Also, I'm a huge fan of Hercules, so bear with me. It has no historic, cultural or mythological valence, but it's just so freaking funny!
I kind of wanted to include a scene inside the Phantom Manor, with Steve going through it wide eyed because of the amazing (and very practical) special effects, but I felt like it was going to slow down the pacing so I cut it.
Chapter 23

For the first time in six years of working at the Louvre, the untiring Diana Prince was tired. Not physically, mind it, but mentally. Some recent instructions coming from the higher levels had forced everyone in the museum to work twice, if not three times harder than the usual. That required working faster to process any piece coming in or going out, staying longer hours and if people took private commissions, like she did, they had to be done outside working hours.

It was now late July and this situation had been going on for the past six months. It had begun in preparation of an official visit of the British Royal Family, which had required not only lots of work on the curators' side to ensure their experience with the museum would be as positive as it could be, possibly educating but also fun and entertaining to keep the young George and Charlotte from getting distracted and wander off. Other than that, there was also the upped security measures that had made everything even harder because employers weren’t allowed to move as freely as before and that made things a lot slower.

The recent official VIP visit had brought a surge of tourist and therefore the Ministry had ordered the museum employees to keep going at that rate to keep the flow of paying customers at that level. High season had become higher seasons and there were no signs of stopping it, not since pieces from her father’s collection started appearing in the museum and they gathered even more attraction. The number of pieces he had donated was staggering and since she had completed the deal she was in charge of the appraisal, the cleaning and the cataloguing and the place they would hold inside the many rooms dedicated to Ancient Greece and the Middle East in general.

That way, Diana spent nearly fourteen hours in her office or downstairs in the lab five days a week, often clocking in even on Saturday for four to six hours more, not to mention the additional hours she had done in the Spring as a guide for high school and university students on school trips or internship at the museum, then there was the not so frequent but even more important side job as Wonder Woman, that kept her always on the edge.

She had never needed to endure such long periods of work-related stress, not in recent years at least. Sure, there had found herself in stressful situations, but not for so long and certainly not in recent years. Also, she wasn’t alone anymore. She wasn’t free to delve in her job, pull as many all nighters as she pleased, since her home was cold and empty. She had someone to come home to now. And Steve was getting increasingly worried about her stress levels.

He kept telling her to slow down, to let one of her numerous assistances to deal with the petty affairs of curating a museum like the bureaucracy and the cleaning of little pieces of little importance, but she was almost addicted to her job, she couldn’t other people do what she felt was her duty. She was trying to change her attitude towards it, but it was so deeply ingrained in her that she found it very difficult to do so. She tried her best, and yet most of the time she came home when the sun was setting - and in summer it set pretty late in Paris - and she was out before it rose.

That situation couldn’t go on for long, she was about to explode. She felt it, the nagging feeling in an incoming outburst behind her eyes. And Gods only knew what she could do, if she reached the melting point. She was even starting to feel the effect of sleep deprivation, and she was never one that needed many hours of sleep to function. She relied on a couple of additional cups of coffee for a quick pick me up in case of extreme emergency, but those were very few and scattered around the year, now had tripled her normal intake of caffeine and still felt occasionally worn out.

“Diana, you need a break,” said Steve one Saturday morning he had come to work with her. She had been filing paperwork all morning, not exactly a taxing job but she knew he noticed she tended to
wander off her set course. “You can’t go on like this, how many of your colleagues have taken days off now?”

“All of them, on turnation,” she revealed. “Just wait until August comes. I have the whole month off and I can take some more in September. Don’t worry, I’ll take a break.”

“Are you sure you can’t take some time off now?” he pushed. “You look wrecked Diana, I know it’s just a week until you get your month of vacation but you’re exhausted, and it takes more than just going to work to get you to this point! Everyone is beyond worn out here, and you’re the only one that has never taken a day off despite…”

She arched an inquisitive eyebrow. “Despite what?”

“Your other job…” he mumbled, afraid to be heard by some nosy colleagues. “And don’t tell me it doesn’t tire you. Two weeks ago you passed out after you helped with the evacuation of that town in Germany during that flood.”

With a sigh, Diana pinched the bridge of her nose and set the pen down on the desk, beside the pre compiled document she was filling. “Just… just wait until Sophie and Marcel’s retirement party. It’s in six days, they’re some of the best colleagues I’ve ever had the pleasure to work with, I’d like to be there for their last day here.”

“I can live with that, just… slow down, please,” he almost begged. “I just would like to see my girlfriend and hopefully soon to be wife at home a little more.”

“Just a while longer. It’s just for a few days, then we’re off. Wherever you want to go.”

“You know very well where I want to go,” he replied. “Where I want you to go.”

She leaned back on her chair. “Insistent, are you?”

“Diana, I want to do things the proper way. I want to ask your mother the permission to marry you, also you two need to talk, and this time for real. Listen to me, you know I had very bad unresolved shit with my father when I left for the front and I never had the chance to fix it, but you do. You said Zeus was going to talk to her, right? Well, I think your mother will be more inclined to speak sincerely with you about this matter, if he went there. And don’t ask me why, but I have a hunch he went.”

“What makes you so sure?”

Steve shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know, a feeling. I think your extended family has finally realized you’re not going to murder them all and has decided to come and help you. In their own way.”

“I don’t even know if I want their help,” she murmured. “I mean, I only met Hephaestus and Zeus and they were both polite and sort of helpful, but what about the others?”

“Well, from my limited experience with Hades, they don’t want to impose. They just decided to come forward. I don’t know, maybe they thought it was about time.”

She chuckled. “Or maybe they thought I wouldn’t go on a murderous rampage on them since you’re back with me.”

“Your guess is just as good as mine. Now that you make me think of it, when did you meet Hephaestus?”
With a smile, she pushed a compiled sheet on a pile and grabbed another one. “I needed a blacksmith. Ares destroyed my sword, and my original shield didn’t fare that good, after World War II. Too many deflected mortar shots. I found this guy in Norway, in the late sixties, he was said to be the best blacksmith in the world so I went to see him in his workshop and the moment I walk in, he blasts the hammer on his hands and lets out the worst sequences of curses and blasphemies I could think of… in the language that would become Ancient Greek. Now tell me, why would a Norwegian blacksmith talk that way?”

“I don’t know, maybe he was a very cultured blacksmith.”

“More like he was Hephaestus in disguise. He looked like he had seen a ghost when I replied in the same language. He knew I knew something wasn’t right about him and he simply dropped the disguise. That’s how I learned that the Gods hadn’t died at all during the war with Ares, they had just decided to step away and let mankind be, trying to live normal lives,” she revealed. “We talked for a short while, but I quickly realized he’s not exactly very talkative so I just explained what I needed and let him work his magic. In the end, he made the shield and the sword out of the same metal as my gauntlets, that way they would resist pretty much everything. I even managed to wound Doomsday, two years ago. And the shield held back his blasts. Works of art, those weapons, I tell you.”

“They’re also very good looking. They could be exposed in a museum, if they weren’t so… new, I guess.”

“And dangerous. Now, let me finish this stack and we can go home.”

Those six days were gruelling. Diana had to finish all the paperwork, before all the backstage works of the museum closed off for a month of holiday for all the employees, then she needed to finalize the last details of an upcoming exposition that would take place from November to the end of January, at the height of the winter season and then, finally, came the retirement party.

It was a low key dinner in a nice restaurant just around the corner, one of those hidden gems that Paris kept a secret. Away from the tourist flow, it was quiet enough and allowed people to actually enjoy their meals, not rushing people out to accommodate new customers, they let you in as long as you wanted. Ever since she had started working at the Louvre, every retirement party had been held there, and she had come to love the place. It was nothing exceptional, speaking of furnishment, but the waiters were nice and the food was always spot on. And most of all, the menu changed almost every day, to follow the seasons and their produce and have them always fresh.

Dinner went quite well, with no issues at all and they were now enjoying a coffee or a glass of liquor to let the mountain of food ingested settle down and digest a little better, chatting of this, that and nothing at all, when the topic of conversation moved to vacations. Where would the curators of the Louvre go during their time off?

“And you, Diana? Where are you going?” asked one of her colleagues, specialized in medieval manuscripts.

“Uhm… I don’t know?” It was more of a question than an answer. “Steve took care of it, I didn’t have much time to think about anything.”

He was sitting beside her, silently enjoying a slice of chocolate cake when all eyes moved on him. He quickly chewed the bite in his mouth and swallowed to answer the question. “Italy!” he exclaimed. “Road trip, southbound, through the major cities. I haven’t been there in ages and mostly it was because of work, when I was in the Navy. Never had the chance to stop by and just enjoy the
places. Can’t wait to see the Valley Of The Temples, in Sicily.”

Thing is, she had no idea that was his plan. Or was it just a quick answer to appease her colleagues? With him, one could never be sure what was real and what wasn’t. He was such a good liar, sometimes it scared her, how sincere he could look when he was actually lying about everything.

“With Diana as a guide, it must be an incredible trip! Any other interesting places?”

He nodded. “Yes, absolutely. Firenze, Roma, couple of days in Napoli then off to Pompeii and Ercolano to see the archeological excavations. Oh yes, and to visit a friend. He owns a restaurant in Amalfi and we were referred to it. The coast there is awesome, so I was thinking we could just go and enjoy even that place.”

“Just hope you don’t get another heat wave like last year,” replied another colleague. “I was in Firenze last year, in August. It was like swimming, the air was so hot and humid it cut my breath short. Then the air conditioning inside the Uffizi gallery broke and they had to evacuate the museum to protect the paintings. From the heat. Crazy, uh?”

“We’re lucky Paris isn’t subject of heat waves so often,” commented Diana. “Some of the pieces we have would crumble to pieces without a stable air conditioning system.”

“Don’t even mention it. Sometimes I curse the day I decided to specialize in tapestry restoration. Those could really get ruined by a little more humidity in the air,” said Marcel, one of the newly retired curators. “Fabric was never made to make it through the test of time, they were hung around in places that were often too cold or too warm, with candles made of tallow and open fires that covered them in soot and dirt, sometimes even oily spots. Cleaning them is a pain in the side, you’re luck Diana you work with marble, most of the time.”

“It’s not like marble doesn’t present its own difficulties, Marcel,” she replied. “It’s hard to clean without damaging it, it’s like you have to strip layer of dirt after layer and it takes months sometimes to restore one single statue. Years, in worst case scenarios.”

“You said you worked on the restoration of the Ara Pacis down in Rome, right?” asked someone she didn’t really know. “During university, if I remember correctly. Must have been a good school for restoring marble the correct way. Though the museum itself is a little bit… I don’t know… too modern for my tastes.”

She nodded. “Yes, it was. I was there only for the latter part of the restoration efforts and only for a couple of months, but it was a great way to learn how to clean marble.”

The rest of the night continued on a similar note, alternating little anecdotes about work and all the experiences they had gathered before arriving at the Louvre, what they wished for the future of the museum and hopes for the upcoming month of vacation. Many of them would remain in France, but some others would go abroad like Diana and Steve. One of their youngest colleagues also revealed that she would leave for two months of exchange at the Hermitage in Russia, later that year, the last details had been finalized just that afternoon.

In the end, that terrible, stressful and agonizingly long period of forced workaholism came to its last moments on a merry note, with great food, great wine and most of all, great company. Even Steve, who by his own acknowledgment wasn’t that much into art was more than happy to join the various conversations that came to life about the table.

As they walked home, with a cool breeze coming from the North stripping the city of the residual heat of the late July sun that had shone earlier that day, Diana felt a strange sense of calm, wash over
her, while the adrenaline left her bloodstream with each step they took towards their home. But there was something she needed to know.

“How much of what you told the others about our vacation was true?” she asked Steve, at some point.

“Some of it was. First, yes, we’re going to Italy, at least for a couple of days. Second, I wouldn’t mind seeing the Valley Of The Temples with you, one day or another, but I doubt we’ll manage to do it this time. Third… It’s not exactly a road trip, because we’ll sail for most of the distance we will travel.”

“And how did you manage to get hold of a boat? I know Bruce pays you well, but I don’t think well enough to afford one.”

He shrugged his shoulders and gave her a sly smile. “I have my methods. Don’t worry, even one hundred years forward in time, I can be pretty resourceful.”

“Do I need to worry about it? Usually your resourcefulness involves lying, murdering and smuggling.”

“Nothing to worry about. For once, I did things the correct and legal way. I just have friends in very high places, that’s all. In a couple of days, give or take some hours, we should be sailing from Amalfi headed to Themyscira.”

Diana stopped in her tracks. “How high, exactly?”

Steve turned towards her, with that enigmatic grin still printed on his face. “Uhm, how high is Mount Olympus?”

Baffled, but not so much, Diana decided to let it go. He seemed so happy with his feats she didn’t want to ruin his joy. “Alright then. When are we leaving?”

“Tomorrow. We better get home and pack our things, the plane leaves at noon, we better hurry.”

At least the restaurant wasn’t that far away from their apartment and they hadn’t left too late. Packing always got her a little flustered. Packing for a six-weeks-long trip that would take her home… that was even worse. Yes, part of the time she would wear modern clothes, but back at home she would be given something else, something more suitable for Themyscira. What did she really need to bring? She stared at her open wardrobe, trying to figure out what to take with her, when the noise of Steve’s duffel bag being closed shut startled there, the zip tearing the thick silence that had fallen in the room. “Wait, you’re already done?”

“Yes. If there’s something you learn in the army, or the navy in my case, is how to pack your things quickly. Also, it’s summer, no need to take too many things with me. Enough underwear changes and socks, a pair of jeans, shorts, t-shirts, one good shirt because you never know where we’re going to eat down in Amalfi, good shoes so I won’t slip from the boat…” he recounted as if checking if he had packed everything. “Swimming trunks, sunscreen, sunglasses… I guess I have everything. Also, I can always wash things, right?”

Diana nodded. “Yeah, I guess so. I just really, really hope my mother will let you set foot on the island.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Don’t worry, I have books with me too. Real books, printed on paper. You said electronic devices don’t work on the island, so I came prepare. I’ll find a way to entertain
Taking a deep breath, she sat on the bed and laid down on it for a moment, stretching her back. “You really planned this down to the last detail, uh?”

Steve grabbed the handles of the bag and set it beside the door of their bedroom, then leaped on the bed himself, beside her. “It’s kind of my first vacation as an adult, so yes, I planned it very carefully. It also serves a double purpose. You need to reconcile with your mother, I need to talk to her. Or at least try. It’s not like I think she should make decisions in your stead, like who you’re going to marry and old, that’s way too retrograde for me. But I want her to know that no matter what will happen I’ll try my best to make you the happiest woman on Earth.”

“You don’t want to ask her permission to marry me?” she wondered.

He shook his head and kissed her forehead. “No, not at all. I want her to be sure that her beloved daughter will be happy. Because I’ll do my best to make her happy. I don’t need her permission, you’re more than capable to decide for yourself, be it what kind of ice cream you what or who you want to marry. I just think it would be polite to tell her I’m going to be your husband. That’s it.”

“Uhm, are you sure you were born in 1882?”

He smiled. “Let’s just say I feel way more at ease now than how I felt back in the day. And that you opened my mind a lot. Well, you and Etta. Damn that girl was a amazing, wasn’t she?”

“And she only got better with age. She made MI6 what she is now. She was even the source of inspiration of a couple of characters in a popular series of books. Which in turn became a very popular series of movies.”

The confused look on his face was pricelessly cute. “Did I see them?”

“Don’t think so. I’m a fan of the older ones, the last two that came out were kind of lacking in my opinion, I never thought about it. I’ll make you watch them when we come home. Some of them are actually great spy movies, I’m quite sure you’ll like them. After all, James Bond is an icon, and I have to say some of the songs from the main themes were amazing.”

She finally stood and grabbed one of the suitcases from the top shelf of the wardrobe, opened it and set on the bed, then started getting things out of said wardrobe. “I think I’m going to follow your way. Simple and minimalistic. I doubt I’ll wear normal clothes for too long, as soon as I set foot on the island.”

He chuckled, behind her, as he started unbuttoning his shirt. “That’s the spirit. Also, I wouldn’t mind if you wouldn’t wear those clothes for too long even right now, because when I said I want to make you happy, I meant that I do want to make you happy.”

With a chuckle, she threw a t-shirt at him, which landed squarely on his face, much to his delight. “And you say I’m the greedy done?”

“You have your moments.” He took his shirt off and she had to admit, once again, that she loved to see him naked. For a moment, her memory flew back at that night in the Pools on Themyscira, when she had walked in at the same time he was getting out of the pools, stark naked and definitely above average. Or at least above whatever she had in mind, when she thought about the then foggy concept of males she had been given by her mother and her fellow Amazons. At the time, lust wasn’t an unknown concept to her, but for a moment it had taken her all her willpower to refrain from doing something too rushed and maybe scare him off. Or maybe at the time it was just curiosity? She had
absolutely no idea, but one thing was sure: with all the different experiences she had before she left the island and after, Steve was indeed above average, but because she was in love with him.

And the fact that he was taking such great care to make sure she would get all the answers she wanted from her mother, even preparing himself for spending days if not weeks confined on a boat because there was still the chance he wouldn’t be allowed to set foot on Themyscira, that alone made her want him even more.

That man was a gem, and she was sure they had broken the mold, after he had been born.

With a soft grunt, she finally escaped her memories and thoughts so she could go back to her packing. The sooner she’d be done, the better. After all, it wasn’t like Steve was wrong about her, being a little greedy when it came to sex. She had her moments, that moment was one of those.
The flight to Italy got a slight delay due to a little bit of a messup of control tower that nearly caused a crash between two planes about two hours before their planned take off hour, but except setting foot at the Guglielmo Marconi airport in Bologna half an hour later than expected, there were no problems at all with the flight. As they were waiting for their baggages to arrive on the conveyor belt, right beside the exit, suddenly Diana had a random thought running through her mind.

“Steve, can I ask you a question?”

“Uh? Sure, ask away!”

“About a week ago, you said you wanted to ask my mother the permission to marry me. But yesterday you said you didn’t want to, that I am more than capable to handle things on my own and make my own decisions. What made you change idea?”

His lips twitched in a short, but gleeful smile. “Not what, but whom. I told you I asked a couple of favors from your family, specifically from your uncle. When I told him I wanted to ask your mother permission to marry you, he said she would never consent, because I asked her and not you. I realized I was being a little too backwards, both for this century and for your mother, that I didn’t need her permission because you’re your own person and you can make your own decisions as you think it’s best. But I do want her to know her beloved daughter will be treated like the princess she is, and that I will make sure she will be happy, as long as I live.”

“Oh… I never thought about this aspect from that point of view. But Hades is right, my mother would never consent to our wedding if you ask her permission. I’m not an object after all. She would never allow you to marry me if you asked her the permission like she owned me.”

He nodded. “Exactly. That’s what Hades said. You’re not an object and while I never thought of you as one, the custom of asking the father of the bride permission to marry his daughter, or in your case asking your mother, does make a wedding look like a sort of trade. And I don’t like it one bit.”

“Did I remember to tell you that I love you today?” she asked him, playfully. Having spotted both their bags on the belt.

“Not today, but I think you screamed it, yesterday. Just before midnight.”

“Oh come on I didn’t scream!” she laughed, hard.

“My dear Diana, you certainly did. What can I say, you seem to enjoy sex a lot. If I remember correctly, you weren’t exactly silent that night in Veld too.” They grabbed their bags and headed for the exit. “Not that I’m complaining.”

She gave him a quick and playful slap on the butt. “I certainly hope not!”

They finally walked in the general area of the airport, where people waited for their loved ones or generic people they were supposed to pick up and take anywhere. The airport wasn’t massive, so the area wasn’t that big, but it was big enough to host a lot of people. “Now what do you have planned?”
“Now we should look for…”

Diana felt an arm wrapping around her shoulders and it wasn’t Steve’s. “Me?” Came a voice to her left. “Hi Diana, it’s finally a pleasure meeting you. And it course it’s nice to see you again, Steve.”

The tall man behind them had actually hugged them both, one arm each. With long, dark sleek hair pulled back in a ponytail and a long braided beard. By the description Steve had given her, and the voice from from the short phone conversation they had in December, she guessed that man was Hades.

“I suppose you’re my Uncle, right?” she asked, a little wary of the whole situation. He sounded nice enough on the phone, but she had no idea he would be so friendly.

“The one and only God of Underworld. But you can call me Hades, or Jack if you prefer using the name I usually go by. My, look at you. You’re a splendor, Diana. You remind me so much of your mother… except the colors. Those are all my brother.”

She nodded. “Zeus said the same.”

“I bet he did. He used to pride himself of his thick dark hair and look at how he walks around now! He’s immortal, and he wants to look like he’s in his sixties. I get that women these days seem to appreciate a mature lover but still…” he shook his head and smiled. “Anyway, come with me. I’ve got the car parked just outside and we have a lunch appointment and thanks to that itty bitty issue at the airport, we are kind of running late. Good thing I called to change the time of the reservation.”

He led them to the parking lot. As soon as they stepped out of the front door, out of the air conditioned area, they were hit by the hot air of the Italian summer. It was a bit of a shock to both, but while Diana’s godly nature allowed to keep going without an issue, Steve seemed a little distressed by the sudden change of climate. “Is it always so hot down here?”

“Steve, it’s Bologna. In the middle of August. It can only get worse,” replied Hades as they finally reached the car, a bright red Alfa Romeo Giulietta. “Get inside, I’ll set the baggages in the trunk.”

“Where are we going?” asked Diana.

“Told you, lunch. A little belated, but I know the owner of the restaurant. He’s going to keep the restaurant open for a while longer. It’s not 2 PM yet after all, and it takes about ten minutes to get there. Hop up, I’m kind of hungry!”

He drove quite conservatively, but his prediction turned out to be true. They reached the center of the city and managed to find a spot in a parking lot close enough to the restaurant in fifteen minutes or so.

“Traffic was easy today. Come, we better hurry.”

Much to Diana and Steve’s astonishment, he walked with a sense of security in the maze narrow streets sided by porches all over the place as if he knew it by heart, like he was a frequent visitor of that part of town. All they could do was following him and let him be their guide, but Diana felt like there was more than hunger in the speed of his steps. He looked like he couldn’t wait to see someone. He was fretting, his steps were longer and faster the closer they got to their destination. And when they finally reached it, he burst through the door like he owned the place, breath shallow and eyes darting all over, looking for something. Or someone.

She threw a hesitant look at Steve, but they followed him. The moment they stepped inside the restaurant they heard a high pitched scream and the noise of a chair being dragged on the floor.
“Hades!” someone said, in such a joyful tone Diana felt her heart soar for a moment. “I missed you so much!”

“I missed you too my love… It’s so good to see you before September.”

There was a woman with long dark hair and piercing blue eyes, she was the only client in the restaurant and she was currently hugging the God of Underworld like her life depended on it.

“Is that who I think she is?” asked Steve as they observed the couple momentarily lost in their own world.

“I…” Diana didn’t really know what to say. “I guess she’s Persephone.”

The woman, in a fleeting moment of attention to someone rather than her husband, finally noticed them as they stared, quite impolitely, and immediately let go of Hades. “By Zeus' thunder Diana!” She stepped away from the god and walked towards them. “Finally I get to meet you!” They shook hands, a warm and comfortable handshake that made Diana feel very welcome, in total contrast of her idea of the Queen of Underworld. “And Steve, my dear Steve Trevor…” She actually hugged him, a hint of longing in her voice. “The Underworld is not the same without you. But it’s better to see you here rather than down below.”

He was baffled. He didn’t really know how to reply to such a warm welcome. “I guess it is…” he murmured, slightly embarrassed.

“Oh, of course, you don’t remember! Well, it’s better this way. For both of you. Dark and gloomy don’t fit neither of you.”

She talked so fast and with a voice so full of joy Diana couldn’t really believe she was the spouse of the God Of Underworld, but in any case she couldn’t really believe said god had a soft spot for Disney movies. Instead there they were so bright and full of life, she could barely believe her eyes. The look in Hades' eyes, so soft and loving as he looked at his wife made her heart melt.

“Well, I guess…”

“Uncle Hades!”

They turned towards the door that led to the back of the restaurant and saw a man in his thirties, wearing black pants, a white shirt and a loosened black tie standing on the doorstep with a wide smile on his face. “Uncle Hades is so good to see you!” He walked towards the older man and hugged him tight. “What kept you so long?”

“Delayed flight, nothing too bad. Hope the kitchen is still open!”

“For you and Aunt Persephone, it always is. Just give me a moment to change. I know I need to keep up the appearances for the sake of the restaurant, but that doesn’t count with the family. Hey Diana, nice to meet you. And Steve, right?” he asked. The situation was getting more and more absurd. “I’m Dionysus, welcome to my humble abode. Sit down and check the menu, I’ll alert the chef!”

He disappeared once again in the back and Hades turned towards them, chuckling. They must have had a very baffled and stupefied expression stamped on their faces. “Too much?” he asked them. “I’m sorry, but I had little time to organize this thing. You could have called a little earlier, you know?”

“Hey, I have a job too!” replied Steve. “And Diana didn’t get the official vacation plan until I called
Anyway, it’s not too much,” added Diana. “Just unexpected.”

He nodded. “I get it, and I’m sorry, but I wanted to see my wife and this was the best chance to do so. And Dionysus has the best restaurant in town, I thought…”

“Stop, Hades,” interjected Diana. “It’s alright. No need to apologise for anything. Why don’t we just sit down and get something to eat and drink? You’re not the only one who’s starving.”

She could barely believe she was having lunch in Italy, in a renowned venue, with her uncle, aunt and half brother.

They ended sitting around the table for hours, enjoying the food and the wine Dionysus, also known as Enea in his normal life, provided from his personal wine cellar, just talking and getting to know each other. Diana couldn’t help but feel a slight warm sensation in the pit of her stomach, being surrounded by these legendary people that, for the longest time, she had believed dead and gone. People that had been described to her in a way, then she learned to know in a completely different light when she had read what the ancient myths told about the Gods. Seeing them acting like a big family that rejoiced in each other’s company like her sisters Amazons would do back on Themyscira showed them a third, more inspiring point of view on them. On the other side of her family. They were so much different from Ares, there was no will to impose on humanity, they didn’t want to be acknowledged as gods, they had no wish to be crowned once again as rulers over their creatures, created at their own image. They actually looked, acted and talked like normal people, not different from the people she had shared the table with less than a day before.

It was both amusing and confusing. But food and wine were great.

“He makes it, you know?” said Persephone hinting at Dionysus, as she poured another glass of wine in her glass. “He’s the owner of one of the most important vineyards in Italy.”

“And not only Italy!” he added. “I have some in Greece, France. Spain… lately I’ve expanded my brand and bought a couple of small breweries, upgraded their systems and we produce small scale, locally sourced beer. It’s not as remunerative as wine, but it’s nice to change scenery, sometimes.”

“Hey, you promised me some kegs and they never arrived! I get it, it small scale and locally sourced, but give me something to sell and you’ll get some good publicity!”

“Beer is volatile, uncle. The kind they produce wouldn’t stand the journey, let me see how the industry goes, then I’ll see if I can buy a brewery closer to Metropolis so I can provide fresh beer anytime you need it.”

Steve looked completely baffled. “Let me get this straight. You’re the God of Winemaking, right?”

Dionysus nodded. “Yes. And many other things. I’m the god of wine and Winemaking, of ecstasy and in small part, fertility. Mostly when it comes to fertility of the soil, but it’s actually Aunt Demetra that takes care of that. And Aunt Persephone, in smaller part.”

“So you use your special abilities to produce wine and run a restaurant?”

Again, another nod. “What can I say, it’s what I love. It’s remunerative enough but I don’t have to be a constant presence in the vineyards, so I concentrate on this place and have fun with mortals. You like the food?”
The man was incredibly affable and handsome, thought Diana. A youthful kind of handsomeness, completely different from Steve. He was tall and lean, with jet black hair and dark, piercing eyes. He was clean shaven, but his hair could use a haircut. He reminded her a little of Barry without the awkwardness.

“Oh yes, it’s great,” she replied. “Listen, I don’t really want to impose if you have to open tonight.”

“Diana, please, you’re not imposing at all. Nor is Steve. I like you guys. Also, Uncle Hades couldn’t manage to get you here earlier than this, you know, with planes and stuff. It takes nearly eight hours to get from here to Amalfi by car. And trust me, you should take your time going south. And it would be a good idea to stop by Montepulciano, in Tuscany. I know you two live in France, but the wine there is way more than amazing.”

“Maybe on the way back?” proposed Steve. “I mean, we wanted to leave as soon as we could.”

“I get it. But I wouldn’t really try to take the highway today. Way too many people start their vacations today, you don’t want to travel today. Take your time, visit the city and leave tomorrow at first light,” explained Dionysus. “That way you should find less traffic and you should arrive in Amalfi just in time to eat and then leave. Oh and please, go and visit Uncle Poseidon’s restaurant.”

“They are kind of forced, he keeps all the documentations they need for the boat. It might be Zeus’, but Poseidon keeps it for him.”

“Wait a moment…” snapped Diana. “We’re going to use Zeus’ boat?”

“One of the many,” clarified Hades. “What? You don’t want to? He rarely uses it anyway, it’s better you borrow it and take it out to the sea rather than let it rot in the harbor. My brother… Poseidon I mean, took great care of it and even made sure it is seaworth. You can trust him, he knows his way around boats.”

“That’s not what I meant, I thought we would rent something or… anyway, no problem. I was just surprised, that’s all. Can I ask you all a question?” The three gods nodded. “I gathered that you Dionysus own this place and a large winemaking business. You Hades own a pub and so does Aphrodite, my father deals with energy. But the others? Do they all have a day job like you? And me too, I guess.”

“I teach agriculture technology here in Bologna. During spring summer I stay here permanently to help both with lessons and with actual crops. I take care of Dionysus' vineyards for example, or do consulting work. During fall and winter, I come up only when I’m needed.”

“Does that ring a bell?” asked Hades.

“Yeah, the myth we were taught in school,” replied Steve. “That you kidnapped her, but her mother was so sad that the earth started dying so you came up with the system of six months up here with your mother and six months down with him.”

Both Hades and Persephone burst into a fit of hysterical laughter. “Oh Gods… they still teach it that way? I never kidnapped anyone!” snickered Hades.

“Make it he begged me to marry him. And while my mother never really got over it, earth wasn’t dying, it was just winter. But yes, I come up here in spring and summer to help earth to bear fruits again, along with my mother, but it’s getting harder and harder these days, with all the pollution. But, to answer your question, yes, most of us have day jobs like us, and you.”

Hades nodded. “Yep, we still meddle into mortal affairs, only in more… normal ways? Hermes got
in IT, communication systems, instant messaging between smartphones and email cryptography for example, but he also does a lot more. Apollo and Artemis recently got in the business of eco sustainability aimed to develop cleaner ways to breed cattle and grow crops, you know… systems powered by solar energy and non intensive breeding farms. Athena is one of the most important law professors in England and often travels around the world for conferences and such. By the way, Aphrodite doesn’t really own that pub she just drops by when she wants to. That one is still mine, she just likes to go down there from time to time and have some fun. The rest of us… let me thing.”

“Hephaestus is still a blacksmith, right?” asked Dionysus. “Last time I checked, he was still working in Norway.”

“Oh, yes, he’s still up there, banging steel with his hammer,” said Persephone. “I heard he’s into high end reproductions of movie props. I’m really not surprised, he’s a bit of a geek after all.”

“Right. Then let me think… what is Hera doing these days?”

“Civil rights movement for equality between men and women. She’s been behind the movement from the very beginning, she still hasn’t let it go.”

Steve smiled. “I like that!”

“Tough fight, but she’s done a lot. Before she started the movement, I spent all winter down in Underworld and while I love my husband with all my heart, it can get a tad too dark for my tastes down there,” said Persephone.

“So you chose a line of work close to your previous occupations and roles?” asked Diana.

“Kind of. Most of us did, I… I would have been a highly paid gravedigger, if I had chosen a job close to my role or standard occupation. Getting in the industry of entertainment sounded nice. Owning a pub or two allows me to be close to some people that sometimes need someone that would listen to them without judging them. I like to think that somehow I relieve the load of Underworld a little, preventing some untimely death caused by alcohol poisoning or worse, suicide.”

Diana nodded. “You must have seen a lot of people throwing their lives down bottles of liquor.”

He sighed. “Or slaughtered in senseless wars like their lives meant less than the soil they were standing on when they died. Sincerely, I hurt every time the Fates send down a soul, because that means someone up above is mourning and grieving for their loss. The only loss I ever had to endure was that one of a choleric nephew who wanted to destroy everything for no reason at all, so I can’t compare, but it still hurts, mostly when they were good people. And about Ares, thanks again Diana. He got what he deserved.”

“You’re welcome,” she replied.

“Hey, you alright?” murmured Steve, grabbing her hand and holding it tight.

She gave him a quick nod, and sighed. “Yes just… bad memories. I’m not proud of that night.”

“You should be,” said Hades.

Dionysus sighed himself and stood. “Anyone wants coffee? I’m going to make coffee.” He excused himself and stood from the table.

“What’s up with him?” Steve wondered aloud.
“He doesn’t like to talk about Ares,” explained Persephone. “He was almost killed, back during the war. Ares went to him first, hoped to entice something in Zeus and to force his hand to join him in his deranged plan of purging the world of mankind. It took him decades, if not centuries to get over it. He just doesn’t want to talk about it.”

A God with PTSD? I guess they’re similar to humankind than what I imagined. Thought Diana. “Why should I be proud of it?”

“First because you overcame your doubts and your own insecurities. Second, you didn’t allow him to exploit your of grief to turn you into something you’re not. Third, you did what a platoon of gods never even got close to achieve. Diana, you’re a wonder!” he exclaimed. “You are the best of two worlds that one way or the other failed humanity. We gods disappeared because we had enough. The Amazons, who were brought to life specifically to inspire humankind to be better but all they do is train for a war they will never fight. That’s why I say you should be proud of how you behaved that night. Because you went above and beyond any expectation, and you unleashed a power I never thought I would ever see. You hold the power of creation in you, Diana, the rawest, purest form of power there is in this world. You could use it to destroy, to kill and maim and ruthlessly rule. You’re more powerful than Superman in many way and yet your self control is so great you managed to kill only a handful of people in your life. Do you have an idea of how many have been killed as collateral damage by Superman, Batman and all the other superheroes? You could have hacked your way through No Man’s Land and the German trenches, blood dripping from your sword and drenching your hands but no, you stayed true to your teachings.”

“What teachings?” asked Steve.

“Don’t kill if you can wound, don’t wound if you can subdue. Don’t subdue if you can pacify. Don’t raise your hand at all until you’ve extended it,” she recited, her voice filled with sadness and longing. “I know. But there were moments when I… when I faltered.”

“Who wouldn’t?” said Dionysus, coming back with a tray with five cups of espresso. “Diana, you may be a demigoddess born from the fiercest Amazon that ever walked on earth, but you’re still human. Your nature, it makes you a caregiver, not a warmonger. Tell me, when you go the hang of what was happening during World War II, when you understood what the Final Solution was going to be, what did you do, uh? Did you go straight for the battlefields, to kill as many Nazis as you could, overloading Uncle Hades’ system?”

The God of Underworld chuckled. “You went to the concentration camps, to the ghettos around Germany, Poland and the rest of the area. You smuggled people to Switzerland so they could fly away to the United States and be safe. What did you do, two years ago after Doomsday murdered Clark? You took care of Lois, became her friend and helped her back on her feet. That’s your nature, and as long as you follow it, you should be proud of every breath you take.”

“He’s right, you know? There’s so much more in you, you can’t even imagine. I can’t really wait for you two to have children. I mean… you’re going to have the most beautiful babies in the world!”

Steve snorted so hard Diana saw tiny droplets of coffee coming out of his nose. She couldn’t really not laugh at both the joke and his reaction. She grabbed a tissue from a packet in her purse and helped him clean up while he tried to recuperate his dignity, coughing and sputtering.

“See what I mean?” prompted Hades. “I think you’re the only person in this deranged world that loves for the sake of love itself. You’re not capable of hating, not even if you tried with all your might. You are Wonder Woman, but not because you can do unimaginable things just as easy as you drink a glass of water, but because you are and despite all the grief, the pain and the suffering you’ve endured, all the crap you have seen going on in this last century alone, you still care, you’re still
uncorrupted. You managed to change Batman’s heart too, and that guy’s messed up pretty bad.”

She took a deep breath, mulling over their words. Was she really uncorrupted? Was she still really capable of loving for the sake of it? She glanced at Steve, who was smiling lovingly at her, his thumb tracing ghost patterns over the back of her hand. He looked so proud of her, because she knew he thought the same about her and sometimes exposed his admiration in even more hyperbolic words. They all seemed on the same page, when they spoke about her.

“Still undecided about believing us or not?” prodded Hades.

“Kind of. It’s tough, you know? It’s hard, accepting compliments like these.”

He nodded. “I see and I understand. But tell me, would you consider accepting the offer of the best ice cream you can get in town? My treat.”

Knowing very well of her weakness towards ice cream, Steve started convulsing on the chair trying to suppress his bout of uncontrollable laughter.

She rolled her eyes and nodded. “I will gladly accept the offer.”

The god smiled. “Persephone, lead the way. I can’t remember the way to the shop from here, so… lead the way.”

True to Hades’ words, the ice cream was truly phenomenal.

Chapter End Notes

Two things. I picked Bologna as the starting city just because I live here. Well, close enough to be there in thirty minutes or so. Also because I know the airport fairly well. Also because... I simply love my city and I can’t really promote it enough. Great food, great sights, one of the tallest medieval towers you can’t find (and not a belltower, just... a tower. You can see the sea more than 100 km away if the sky is clear enough). Also, the best historic ice cream shops you can find in Italy.

Second: the arrival in Themyscira has to be delayed a little, but I felt like I needed this chapter to set some things about characterizations and evolutions of the various characters that have appeared (and maybe WILL appear) in the future. Next stop, Amalfi!
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As the sun went down, the temperatures dropped and the air finally got breathable as a cool breeze swept through the streets coming down from the hills. As Dionysus and the rest of the restaurant staff started preparing for the evening service, the rest of the small group separated and let the young god get back to his job.

“So…” started Hades, shoving his hands in the pockets of his black jeans. “Diana, Steve, hear me out. These are the car keys for the Alfa Romeo. It as a push device to turn it on, so you will need them only to open and close it, as long as this little thing is close enough to the car, it will turn on pressing a button. Leave it to Poseidon when you sail to Themyscira and call Persephone when you’re back here, she’ll come and take it in her custody. It’s fully accessorized and the engine runs superbly. Just… avoid going too fast and respect the speed limits, or I’ll divert the tickets to you, alright?”

On the other hand, Persephone pulled a small package of sheet. “And here’s the documentation you need, just in case you get pulled over or whatever. There’s the address of the restaurant, a copy of the documentation of the boat, just in case Poseidon forgets it. He’s a little lost in his world, you know? Oh, I almost forgot! Here’s the hotel reservation for tonight. It’s close enough to the entrance of the highway, a little bit on the outside of the city. We already checked in for you, thanks Steve for the copy of your documents. Those are the keys,” she explained pointing at two keycards. “You should be set to go. Say hi to the girls from me!”

“And from me too,” added Hades. “I kind of miss them, you know?”

“Oh, definitely, they were great company, back in the day. Anyway, we won’t keep you any longer. Take your time to walk around town for a while, I know it looks kind of dead but just because it’s August. It’s a pretty lively city when people are not on vacation.” Persephone gave them a quick hug. “Have a nice trip and enjoy yourself.”

“Thanks, Persephone,” replied Diana. “I really appreciate the help.”

With a smile, the Queen of Underworld gave her a quick pat on the shoulders. “I just wish your father had come to you earlier. I would have loved to meet you earlier, but he wouldn’t let us get close to you before he did.”

Her husband rolled her eyes. “Egocentric bastard…” he mumbled. “He’s always been like this. A good ruler, mind it, but damn it’s always his way or the highway.”

Steve barely suppressed a chuckle. “Now I know where she got that from,” he replied, nudging her in ribs with his elbow. She decided to let it go, mostly because she knew he was right. At least partially.

“Hippolyta can be just as hard headed though, don’t forget that. Two strong characters and dispositions like those couldn’t really conceive nothing less than someone like you, Diana. Now go and have some fun. I’ll go back to my place then, Hades. See you in a couple of months, alright?”

He nodded and leaned closer and kissed her. “Alright my love. I’ll be waiting for you.”

“Love you!”
“Love you too!”

For a moment, they watched as Persephone walked away, and Diana noticed a tear slipping down Hades' eye and into his beard. “Hey, everything alright?” she asked softly, a hand on his shoulder.

He shrugged and sighed. “Yeah it’s just… it’s hard, you know? Watching her walk away like this. I know she’s here for a good reason, to keep the seasons going, but… I miss her. A lot. It never got easier, despite the fact we’ve been doing this since before time was even conceived. It tears my heart apart every single year.”

“Hey, come here.” She hugged him tight and felt him deflate, like tire that just got punctured with a large nail. He did miss her, and it hurt him a lot. “She’ll be back sooner than you think. Just keep yourself busy and everything will be alright.”

He nodded against her shoulder and sobbed a little more. “I know, it’s just that it feels… Damn, you know it very well how it feels, I don’t even have to explain. He helped, you know? I was selfish, I didn’t let him go to his allotted and well deserved place, I kept him close so I could have some company, when she was gone.” He pulled himself up and wiped his face and nose with a tissue Diana was handing to him. “He’s a good friend, wise beyond his age.”

In the corner of her vision, Diana noticed Steve shrugging, slightly embarrassed, trying desperately to look as small as he could. “Yes, he is. I’m glad he was in good company, and so were you.”

Hades gave her a curt nod. “I’ll right, I got my moment of meltdown. Happens at least once or twice a year, don’t worry, I’ll be just fine… now that I think about it, there’s a nice place where we could… Ah, nevermind the musings of an old deity, just go and enjoy your evening. I’ll find a place where I can drink good beer and lick my wounds. It’s nothing you. Now go and have some fun, there are tons of places worth visiting round here, just feel free to roam around as long as you want.”

“Are you sure you’ll be alright,” asked Steve, definitely worried for Hades. Those two were thick as thieves, apparently, and he looked genuinely distressed for the God Of Underworld.

He waved him off. “I’ll be fine. We’ve been doing this crap for thousands of years, what could two months more be? Agony? Nah, I’ll be just peachy, just give me time to calm down. Go and start your vacation. I’ll see you two when you’re back from the island. And I count to see some killer tan on you both, just remember sunscreen. See ya when you’re back!” He waved at them then pushed his hands in the pockets of his jeans, hunched his shoulders and headed west, alone and in grief.

“You were right,” said Diana when the God had got out of earshot. “He’s really a nice guy.”

“Told you. Should we really leave him alone now? He seemed pretty down.”

She sighed. “I think he wants to be alone. I have the feeling they broke some kind of unwritten rules, meeting before Persephone was allowed to go back to the Underworld. I don’t really want to think about the possible consequences. So, what are we going to do?”

After an evening spent roaming around the narrow medieval streets, enjoying the warm but not scorching air and the local tourist attractions, they finally got to the hotel for the night. They had a pretty early wake up call if they really wanted to reach Amalfi before lunchtime so they just went to bed. The next morning, after breakfast and nearly enough espresso to give them palpitations, they were getting ready to leave town when Steve’s phone ringed. Looking down at it, he released a sigh that looked both like a sigh of defeat and on of contempt. “The director of the FBI. Damn that man doesn’t know how to take a no for an answer.” He swiped his thumb on the screen and picked up.
Diana could just watch him deal with what was his job now: public relations. “Yes, director, how can I help you today? Again, director, I won’t release any specific detail on any member of the Justice League. You can insist as long as you want, you can pester me with phone calls at six AM local time, but I won’t give them away. I was hired to keep their privacy intact, and that’s what I’ll be doing until I take my last agonizing breath, got it?”

He shook his head and Diana couldn’t help but smile at him and run a hand through his thick, dark blond hair. She was ready to start the engine and leave, but she wanted him to finish with the call before she moved. “No, I am NOT going to do anything that would endanger the private lives of my employers. That’s it, we’re done. Case closed. It’s been months and you still keep asking me the same questions over and over at alarmingly regular intervals, it’s increasingly starting to look like stalking, so unless you have new questions and new matters to discuss, we’re over. Also, I’m going on vacation on an island without cell reception for a month, so you can suck it up and learn to live with the certainty I will never give away details about the League other than what is already public knowledge. Now, if you agree, I’m going to hung up and turn off this phone, because I’m totally fed up with this crap you’re putting on. And I don’t care if you’re the director of the FBI, I’ll still hang up on you. Have a nice day. Or night, given the time difference. Good night.”

He hung up and turned off the phone, then for good measure threw it on the backseat. “That man is so full of shit he must be really hard to stand close to him.” He took a deep steadying breath. “We’re on vacation now, officially.”

“Yes we are. Shall we?”

Steve nodded. “We shall.”

Diana pressed the button to start the engine and its low hum filled the cabin, before she also turned on the radio and music overpowered it. “To Amalfi?”

“To Amalfi!” He waved his fist out of the windshield in a moment of frenzied happiness. “Last few hours on soil for how long exactly?”

“Three to four days depending on the wind. Let’s hope we get Poseidon on our side and he keeps the sea calm enough until we get there.”

“Hey, let’s concentrate on the task ahead. We have 625 kilometers ahead of us and according to this thing,” he looked at the GPS screen. “Traffic is regular and it should take us about six hours to get there. Let’s go then!”

So early in the morning, the roads were almost empty. As soon as they got on the highway and Diana could push the car a lot faster than standard roads, the incredible landscapes they encountered left them breathless. First the mountains with their slopes covered with green trees and dotted with pastures and fields, the small towns nestled between the peaks or on top of them, bright spots hit by the morning sun, shining like small pearls in a sea of dark green. Then the hills and the vineyards, the planes around Rome and only later, when they finally approached their destination, the deep blue hue of the Tirrenian Sea, dotted with white speckles that in reality were ships and boats coming and going from the numerous dockyards that lined the coast from north to south. It was mesmerizing.

They had been travelling for about an hour when big green signs that measured the distance from Firenze started appearing at regular intervals, when Steve interrupted their inconsequential chatting. “You travelled a lot during the past century, have you ever been in Italy?”

“Of course I have, but never this way. I mean, driving so far south. I lived in Roma for a couple of years while attending university for the umpteen time, visited many other places like Milano,
“Torino… Venezia. Never this way though. I would usually fly wherever I would need to go, but I admit this is nice. What about you?”

“Mostly frontlines,” he explained. “I spent about a month coming and going from Austria. I was one of the few that could speak German fluently enough to pass like one, so I would move behind enemy lines, befriend one or two soldiers, steal the plans and orders then go back and deliver them to the Italians. About a year before I crashed on the island. All I know about Italy comes from books, newspapers and now internet. It’s… refreshing, you know? I never knew all of this existed.”

“It changed a lot, during the past century. The economic boom of the early sixties brought a sudden wealth they weren’t exactly prepared to face. When things got harder a decade later, the economy sort of crashed and it never really got back to its feet. Not to mention the criminal organization, the corrupt politicians… it’s a mess, but the country itself is absolutely astounding. The coast of the southern regions are probably the closest places to Themyscira I’ve ever seen.”

“Do you mind if we come back, sometime next year? Not to Themyscira, to Italy I mean. I would love to visit Rome.”

“Sure thing,” she replied, actually glad of his suggestion. “I’d love to go back, enjoy the city as a tourist and as a student. Not that the studying part was bad, just a rehash of things I already knew, but it had to respect demands, then work so I could afford university… you know, being immortal sometimes is more a hassle than a blessing. I need to move from identity to identity, often changing field of work completely… It’s tough. Each iteration of Diana Prince has to…”

Steve stopped her, placing a warm and slightly calloused hand on her own as she held the clutch of the shift. “I understand, Diana. I also know that one day, not too far away, I’ll have to do the same. You’ll have to teach me!”

“How about we let Bruce do the dirty work? He’s done amazing job with your documents, I think I’ll let him work his magic next time. Also, what do you think about learning how to drive, since you have a license?”

He shrugged his shoulders then stretched a little in his seat. “You seem to enjoy driving a lot!”

“As a matter of fact, yes, I do enjoy driving, but that’s not what I meant. What if one day I’m not there and you need to go somewhere where the subway can’t go or trains don’t reach? It’s not so different than the cars that were built in your time, things just go… smoother, I guess.”

He laced his fingers at the back of his head. “I know… I guess I’ll will relearn how to drive. You know what I would like though? A motorbike. I’ve seen some great models around, black and chrome and so freaking gorgeous… I would love to have one of those.”

Diana smiled. It wasn’t the first time he expressed his appreciation for twenty first century bike designs he had encountered during the past months, she knew he would have loved to have one. Maybe she could use his desire as a leverage.

“Let’s make a deal. As soon as we come home, you will reacquaint yourself with modern cars and driving, then when you have mastered the art of driving on a four-wheeled vehicle, we’ll start looking for a bike, alright?” she proposed.

He opened his mouth to reply, but closed it as soon as he realized the magnitude of that statement, his face scrunched in the cutest smirk she could imagine. It actually made her laugh a little bit. “That’s… neat.”
Oh he so loved that word. “So? Deal?” She extended her right hand, which he grasped and shook.

“Deal! I’ll learn to drive and then we’ll try to find a bike we both appreciate. Oh I can’t wait to take you out on the weekend when the weather’s good!”

“Is this the reason you want a bike?”

“One of the many. I always loved the freedom bikes gave you, both as a the fact that they move quicker in traffic and that you can actually feel the wind, you know… it’s the closest way to feel the rush of flying without actually flying.”

“I see your point. And I have to be honest with you, I’m very fond of motorbikes too. I used to own one, ages ago. I sold it when my job at the time wouldn’t allow me to use it as much as I would love to, so instead of letting it rot in the garage, I let someone else drive it. Fun guy, he had just got his license, he was really young. Turned out he married a musician I appreciate a lot.”

“And that would be?”

“P!nk.”

They reached Amalfi a little later than half past noon, after a drive over six hundred kilometers long and only two brief pit stops to refill the tank and walk around a little. When Diana parked the car in the lot just beside the restaurant owned by her uncle, Steve immediately jumped off the car and stretched his back. He took a deep breath and wore his sunglasses. “Oh man this place is awesome!”

She couldn’t agree more. Nestled in a sweet spot right in front of a pristine, sandy beach with the sea washing ashore with a low, rhythmic thrum, the restaurant was a little jewel. It looked like a very old stone building, probably a fisherman’s hut given the presence of an old wooden dock where there was a fishing boat anchored to it, but it had been completely restored to look both ancient and new at the same time. Bright white walls with stoney foundations, green wooden shutters, flowers at every window… it was really cute and evocative.

The sun, now at the apex of its trek in the sky, was really hot and she could feel it on her skin, while a slight but not intrusive breeze helped mitigate the effect. Around them, people came and went, some on foot and some by car. Good thing. With customers around, in case something didn’t go as planned with Poseidon, he couldn’t really lash out too bad at them, or else he would possibly ruin the reputation of his venture.

“So? Are we going in?” she asked.

Steve nodded. “Sure thing. Let’s go!”

She wished his enthusiasm could be contagious. As much as all her recent meetings with gods had been pleasant, in the back of her head there was that nagging sensation that something was going to go incredibly wrong. Not that it was bound to go wrong, but she was still very preoccupied about this specific meeting. According to Hades, his brother Poseidon was moody and voluble, just like the sea itself, while all the other gods she had met, Ares excluded, were more poised and down to earth.

“She give me strength,” she mumbled as a prayer. It had been ages since she had used that formula. It felt a little strange, like a ghostly shiver down her spine, but the weird sensation disappeared the moment Steve grabbed her hand and gently pulled her towards the entrance.

Once inside, she was pleasurably surprised by the inside of the restaurant. It had a cozy, familiar feeling, like the atmosphere itself welcomed the customer from the very moment. The interior wasn’t
that big, barely enough room to place tables and chairs for fifty people. Only about half of the tables were occupied at the moment, and the air was filled with the amazing scents of grilled fish and cooked shellfish and molluscs, not to mention the pungent but not overly so scent of the typical **frittura di paranza**, the traditional dish of the area made of fried small fishes caught by a specific type of boat typical of the gulf of Napoli and the coast of Campania. Suddenly, she was hungry.

“Welcome, table for two?” asked a girl in her twenties in Italian with a thick accent.

“Yes,” replied Diana in the same language, minus the accent. “We have a reservation, for Diana…”

“Prince!” someone screamed in the back of the restaurant, probably from the kitchen. “Diana Prince!” the same deep voice repeated. It belonged to a fifty something man with short dark hair streaked with grey at the temples, a long, bushy dark beard and piercing green eyes. “Don’t worry Giulia, I’ll take care of them, she’s my niece.”

The similarities with both Zeus and Hades were undeniable, the same build, the same thick beard and hair, and the same eyes. They could have been triplets, if they hadn’t decided to show different ages or have different hair styles and styles of clothing. Maybe Hades was a little leaner than his younger brothers.

“Oh, alright boss,” she replied with a smile. “Just call me if you need help.”

“Well, finally you’re here. My brother just called, he wanted to know if you had arrived. He was really worried about traffic. How was your trip?” He guided them to a table in the corner of the room. “Sit down, I’ll alert the cook you’re here, she came up with a special menu just for you. Give me a moment. Want something to drink in the meanwhile?”

Steve looked at her and she shrugged. The other gods had described him as moody and irascible, but the god they had in front of them, despite the deep, gruff voice, looked like he was a nice person in the end. “Uh, water I guess. For now.”

“Right, I’ll have Giulia bring you a couple of bottles right away. Do you drink wine? I just got a shipment of wine that would go great with some of the food, do you want to try it?” He seemed kind of worried about their wellbeing.

“Yes, that would be nice,” replied Steve. “But don’t worry too much about us. Just… do your thing. We’ll wait here.”

Poseidon nodded, a sharp movement that shook his long beard a little. “Alright I’ll…”

“Pietro!” someone screamed in the back, and Poseidon rolled his eyes. Evidently that was the name he usually went by when among mortals. “Are they here?” the voice asked, in Italian.

“Yes, they’re here! You can start cooking.” He shook his head and ran a hand through his hair. “I’ll bring the beverages. Wait here.” And he walked back towards the kitchen to fetch whatever he was going to bring to their tables.

“Didn’t your father describe him as a grumpy old bastard?” asked Steve.

“I’m as baffled as you are. He surely doesn’t look like he could impersonate Santa Claus, but he looks way less grumpy than what I had thought. Or maybe he wants to leave a good impression.”

“Could be. The place looks great though. And with this delicious scent coming from the kitchen, I’m getting hungry!”
Poseidon came back with a bottle of white wine and two bottles of water, which he placed on the table, then he sat on the spare chair, in front of Diana, crossing his arms at his chest. “So, I heard you’re going to embark on a journey to the unknown.”

“Sort of, if you consider that not so many people know the way there,” she replied.

“I know. Actually, if you think about it there’s no mortal who knows the way to Themyscira. You don’t, right?” he asked Steve.

“No, I crashlanded there when my plane got hit by enemy fire. One moment I was flying from Turkey to Greece then next my engine was damaged and I crashed near the coast of the island. An island I never knew existed.”

“And it’s better this way.” Giulia, the young waitress, arrived with three plates of appetizers. “Thanks Giulia. Anyway,” he continued when the girl was out of earshot. “I’ll make sure to keep the sea as calm as it can while maintaining a decent wind be for the duration of the trip. The boat is a top of the line modern sloop. It can be manned by one expert person alone, together you two can make it sail easily. If I made my calculations right, and when it comes to seas and winds I’m rarely wrong, as your friend Arthur can attest, you should get there in about two days and a half, three if you slow down for the night. It should be a pleasurable sail, I’ll give you a couple of maps where I’ve drawn the currents and the winds myself, it should be enough to optimize your trip.”

As Poseidon spoke, calm and stern about some little things he had devised for their trip, including some upgrades to the sailboat itself, Diana listened, slightly enthralled, at his explanation as she ate. He spoke with authority of thousands of years of reign over the seas, but not preachy at all. Even Steve seemed to be affected by the way the old God of Seas spoke. Despite the gruff tone that made his voice slightly raspy, it was light the washing of a wave on a rocky shore heard from a slight distance. It was oddly hypnotic.

It didn’t help that whoever was cooking in the kitchen was feeding them a ton of fresh fish, crustaceans and molluscs perfectly prepared, no matter if they were grilled, fried, broiled or used a condiment for the largest plate of spaghetti allo scoglio she had ever seen, of which the more than abundant sauce had Steve’s face covered with red tomato - and that the supply of wine from his cellar was steady and equally good. Not that such small quantities of alcohol could really make her drunk, or Steve, but too much food, no matter how great, could make her groggy.

“Now, with the matter settled, tell me: how’s the food?”

Diana looked down at the now half-empty plate of grilled fish in front of her and smiled. “Amazing.”

Steve chewed hard on the bite of paranza he had just shoved in his mouth and swallowed to answer. “Fenomenal! God, this is so great! Loved the spaghetti.”

“Sure your napkin loved them too!” Poseidon smiled, looking down at the smeared white piece of cloth hanging from Steve’s collar. “Anyway, let’s finish here, so I can take you to the dock where Zeus’ sloop is anchored and you can leave.”

It was after they finally reached the last course that Steve was introduced to the concept of caffè e ammazzacaffè, literally coffee and coffee-killer. The all-Italian ritual consuming a small shot of liqueur, in this case limoncello, after a cup of espresso. The child-like wonder on his face as he discovered such little details of a nation he had only experienced through the pages of books made her heart melt. Diana knew he could be ruthless spy, a cunning smuggler and at times an efficient killer when need arose, but deep down, Steve Trevor was a good man and an explorer. His nature drove him to discovery, to knowledge. Perhaps it was the reason why he had gotten used to life in
They finally rose from the table well into the afternoon. “Come with me, the sloop isn’t too far from here,” said Poseidon. As they walked out the restaurant, he gave a shout to the cook to report that the lunch had been greatly appreciated and told the waitress he was going out for a while, but he would be back in less than an hour. “Take your baggages,” he instructed them.

Right as he had said, the boat was close, less than five minutes on foot from the restaurant. It was a magnificent modern sloop, with two sails and a white painted hull. Printed on the bow there was the name of the sloop, Olympian. “Nice name!” quipped Steve.

“Apt, too,” commented Poseidon. “Here she is. You’re free to go as soon as you want to. There’s enough foot to last a few weeks, unfortunately it’s nowhere near as good as what you had today, be it freeze dried or canned.”

“We can manage, Poseidon,” replied Diana. “It’s not like we’re going to live off of this forever.”

“I like the way you think. Now… all the documents are downstairs in a small safe, the combination is 22071942 and it’s written here.” He slipped a tiny piece of paper in her hand. “Enjoy your sail, the seas will be favorable.”


Smiling, the old God shook his head. “No Diana, it’s me, us, who should be thankful for what you did. Where would we be, if it wasn’t for you? It’s the least we could do. When was the last time you went back home?” he asked.

“About eleven years ago,” she told him. “I… lately I haven’t been feeling too welcome so I kind of stopped going.”

“I see. Well, listen to the delusions of an old man: flip the haters off. You don’t need their approval. Your mother allowed you back on the island and she would do the same for anyone that would decide to leave so… go back and be proud.”

“How do you know that…”

He raised a hand and shushed her. “We gods have our methods. Not intrusive, but very efficient. Now go, before you lose the tide. You should manage to pass Scylla and Charybdis before sundown. After that, it’s open sea until Greece. Be sure to answer any single call from any coast guard you will encounter because with all the refugees incoming both in Italy and Greece, many military ships patrol the coasts. They could request to board too. The documentation it’s legit, so you don’t need to worry about it. In any case, don’t avoid the law enforcement.”

“Will do. Again, thank you. We should be back in four weeks, maybe five.”

“There’s a satellite cell phone on the boat. Use it as soon as you’re out of the fog surrounding the island to call me, the number is memorized in the phone’s memory bank, and you can come back even in November for all I care. Now go. And say hi to Hippolyta and Menalippe.”

“Are you aware that Antiope…”

He nodded. “Yes, I am. For real though, go. I can’t control tide, that’s Selene’s task. Go, before you lose it.”

And so they sailed, heading first south and then east, as soon as they turned the southmost point of
Calabria. As Steve helmed the boat, she took care of the sails, but the wind was stable enough that she didn’t need to work much with them and once she got them set correctly for the amount of wind and its speed, she sat for a moment on the bow, facing forward in the open sea.

She felt like she was walking to the gallow’s pole. And she was sure someone back on Themyscira wanted her to literally walk to the gallow’s pole, be it literal or metaphorical. She just hoped her mother would welcome her and Steve back on the island, or that vacation would be the shortest one she had ever taken.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: the beach battle of Wonder Woman was shot near Amalfi
As Poseidon had predicted, the coast guard contacted them and asked them to relay all their paperwork to identify the boat, but once they got a confirmation of their identity and their travel plan, they were free to go.

As the sun set behind their backs, the GPS tracker signalled they had just circumnavigated around the Strait of Messina and were now headed East keeping the Ionic Sea on their left and the northern coast of Africa on their right. With all that precision instrumentation, navigation had become way easier, almost boring.

Diana found herself often wandering off with her thoughts quite often as she helmed the boat, which was proceeding at remarkable speed. The Olympian was a gem, fast and sleep and easy to maneuver. It was also really comfortable, with the areas below deck looking more like an expensive suite in a luxury hotel than a sloop. It had a large bedroom with a queen size bed, a living room with attached kitchen and a bathroom that could very easily be larger than some in houses Diana had occupied through the years. It was amazing. Considering the ways she had travelled in the past century, she wished she always had that kind of boat, while most of the time she had little dinghies that looked more like rafts than real boats.

“Are we going to sail at top speed through the night?” asked Steve emerging from below deck with a mug of fresh coffee in each hand. He handed one to her and then leaned against the railing, taking a sip from his own.

“Why not? The weather’s nice and forecasts are excellent, the sea is easy and the wind favourable. Why should we slow down?”

“I don’t know, resting maybe?”

Rolling her eyes, she sighed. “I’ll take the first shift, alright? You go to sleep and I’ll wake you up when I’m tired. How does that sound?”

“Sounds reasonable, but how about we switch? You go to sleep and I do the first shift?”

“Steve, I’m not tired! I slept soundly last night, and the night before. I can stay awake for some more hours, even if you’re not here to keep me company.”

It was his time to roll his eyes. “How come every time we’re on a boat of any kind we argue for something?”

“What? We’re not arguing! And what are you talking about?”

“Oh come on Diana, don’t you remember? We spent days arguing while we were sailing to England when we left Themyscira!”

“That’s because you were insufferable. So used to technology I had to teach you how to sail because you were too cocky and proud to admit you weren’t able to do more than tying knots!”

“Alright, I was cocky,” he admitted with a large smile. “But admit it you liked it!”
“Now you’re exaggerating. And no, I didn’t like your cockynes, I liked you. On a physical level. But definitely not the arrogance. It was kind of putting me off, actually. Took me a while to realize I was falling for you.”

“Oh really? When did you exactly started falling for me?” he inquired, again with that cocky smirk twisting his face in the dimming light of the later stages of sunset.

“After you stopped telling me that I couldn’t do things! I mean, you were slash are good looking but damn you were insufferable. You thought you knew everything!”

“Oh and you think you were so easy to deal with? Running around half naked in the middle of London? At that time? Walking in the war room during a meeting? I think that would be unacceptable even by today’s standards. Do you have an idea what I risked because of you?”

“Well if I remember correctly it took us days to reach London, if not weeks, and we got some speed just because that steamer towed us on the Thames, you had all the time to instruct me about your customs and what did you do? Spent those days trying to teach me how to play baseball! In the middle of the sea!”

“I was trying distract myself, divert my attention from…” he yelled and then stopped all of a sudden, biting his lip, then releasing a low pitched groan. “Diana, sometimes I think you don’t realize how beautiful you are, of people’s attention diverts to you every time you walk in a room. You’re… I don’t know, otherworldly, you’re so beautiful there are no words to describe how beautiful you are and at the time… hell it was less than a year ago for me, at that time I was going through a pretty long and forced dry spell. There were moments I got lost looking at you and I so wanted to kiss you and…”

He was getting all flustered in his attempted explanation of why he forgot to explain the customs of Man’s world during their trip to London, and he looked so cute as be babbled about it. He was really embarrassed by his lack of perspective he looked like a child caught trying to steal cookies from the jar.

With a slight shake of her head, Diana blocked the wheel and turned towards him. “I get it, Steve. It’s lust, it’s normal. What do you think happened to me the morning Barry brought you back? Between the adrenaline from the battle and the fact that I couldn’t really believed it was happening and that you were real, I literally jumped your bones in Bruce’s kitchen! Or nearly did.”

“Oh you did, as soon as Alfred closed the door. Can’t really say I didn’t enjoy it.”

“Believe me, I noticed. You were more than enthusiastic, despite the near death experience you just had gone through.”

“Still am, you just need to ask.”

Diana smiled and leaned closer to kiss him, almost melting into his tight embrace when he wrapped his arms around her and held her close to his chest. For a moment, she felt like she wasn’t going to face a substantial group of people that didn’t really want her back on the island but also the very probable chance of meeting her own mother’s ire by bringing Steve back to the Island, not only going back when technically once a person leaves it they would be banned from returning, but also because men were banned from Themyscira. He had already been there, that was true, but taking him back a hundred years after he had departed and, most of all, when everyone on the island thought he had perished was going to be a surprise for all the Amazons.

A not so welcome surprise.
And yet, for a moment, she was able to forget everything, the stress of the previous months, the ever present worrying of something too big for mankind to happen in the world. Something that would require her intervenance or even worse, the intervenance of the Justice League as a whole, her own crushing fear of disappointing her mother and the rest of her sisters in arms… gone. Forgotten. For a fraction of a moment, she was free to breathe without feeling that ever present restriction that sometimes made her feel like she was going to drown on dry land.

All because of him.

And she was oh so tired of that impending sense of doom that pressed down on her shoulders, so heavy sometimes that she felt she couldn’t walk with her head high, always a step away from cracking again and just let the world rot in its own misery, in its own inability to collectively feel a gram of empathy for one another and always required something out of their control to come together for the briefest of time.

He was her island, her own Paradise Island. So caring, so supportive, so attentive… he had learned how to live in a century so different from his own at the speed of light, and he had done so only because he wanted to be there for her, not being a dead weight making her sink in his own wretched situation. He was home away from home. And she could never be grateful enough to Barry for bringing him back and being so careful of not causing a temporal disruption by doing so.

Steve pulled back and smiled down at her. It was funny, she often looked taller than him because of the high heels, but now that she was wearing a pair of worn Chucks it felt eerily good, being a little shorter than him.

“Should we stop the boat for a couple of hours?” he asked her, his face twisted in the naughtiest grin he could sport.

She nodded against his chest. “We should stop the boat for a couple of hours.”

His trick had worked wonders, reflected Steve as he got dressed. Diana slept peacefully at his side, undisturbed by the slight swaying of the boat. Sometimes it was so easy to trick her… but only about little things. Diana was way too smart to be fooled about more important stuff, but tiny, inconsequential things like bedtime? That was easy enough, if you knew her well.

He left the room and went upstairs on deck and pulled up the anchor, then set sails making sure he was had se the right course. It was a splendid night, the moon and the stars shone brightly above him in a way he had almost forgotten. It was probably during their trip from Themyscira to London the last time he had seen the night sky so well, thought the lights from the ground hindering the view.

He ran a hand through his messy hair and sighed. So much time had passed… but to him, it was barely ten months. He thought he was now used to the feeling of being misplaced in time, and instead… it still affected him, from time to time.

Shaking his head violently, he went back at checking the navigational instruments to see if they were heading East and he had unwittingly turned the boat in the wrong direction, to distract himself. Once he was sure they were heading towards Greece, he locked the helm in the correct position, sat on the incredibly comfortable chair beside the command station and exploiting both the bright light coming from the moon and the more feeble but still usable hue coming from the instrumentation, he picked up the book he was currently reading and resumed from where he had stopped just the night before.

Growing up isolated from the rest of the world at the family farm, there was not so much a boy could do after doing homework, tending the animals and helping around with menial tasks even a little boy
still unsteady on his legs could do, but his parents had made sure there was always something to read
in the house, be it books from the public library in town or the morning newspaper and with time, as
soon as he had learned how to read, books had become a sort of friend. He lived tens, if not
hundreds of adventures in his childhood and teenage just with books alone. Even during the war, he
had come to know that books were a commodity in the trenches, often allowing soldiers a moment of
respite in a situation that allowed none. They were passed around and treated like the most precious
things and that’s why he had started carrying more than one wherever he went, most of all those he
knew allowed the best diversion, as tradable items. And Edgar Rice Burroughs worked wonders and
were highly sought.

This was a little different though. It was a very thick book, a long intricate story set in Medieval
England, during a period of instability due to the lack of a clear heir to the throne. One of the main
protagonists was a poor builder that took on the assignment of rebuilding a cathedral while the world
around him changes and noblemen fight each other for power. After a long streak of modern spy
novels by Tom Clancy, he thought that going back in time for a while would be a good thing and
Diana had this book in her own library, along with the two sequels and they were perfect for this
kind of trip. While fun and well written, it required a great deal of concentration to follow the story.
If the two followers were written the same way, he had at least three or four weeks of reading ahead
of him. He also had the first two books of the series *A Song Of Ice And Fire*, fresh from the
bookshop in the airport and also those two were big books… even if the Amazons banished him on
the boat for their visit, he could manage. He had never had many issues keeping himself entertained.

Heck, that thing was truly complex and intriguing. Not as long or complex as *War And Peace* but it
was a truly entertaining story.

“But of a brick you will love taking with you though,” he commented aloud a little after dawn when
the nav computer beeped and he had to readjust the cruise.

According to the GPS system, they were approaching Greek waters and they would soon be subject
to their rules of laws. Not that it mattered, they had all the correct documents and by law standards,
they were clear. There was even a document signed by Zeus himself under the name he went by that
authorized them to use his property.

Later, while he was adjusting the sails to catch more wind and speed up a little bit, Diana decided it
was time to make her appearance. He almost tripped in the rope he was wrapping so no one would,
well, trip on it when he saw her. If there was something he still had to wrap his mind around was the
concept of some women clothes, included the barely there swimsuit she was wearing. Not that he
minded seeing her more naked than clothed but from his perspective that sometimes was still stuck in
his own time in some aspects of life, some clothes were too much. Or close to nothing, like in this
case.

And yet, he managed to regain some sort of composure and don’t look like the ogling perv caught in
the act before she walked up to him and offered a mug of coffee. “Nice trick you pulled last night,”
she told him as she handed him the mug. “I almost fell for it.”

“More like you fell asleep!” he exclaimed, raising the mug and drinking a long sip. “Slept well?”

“Like a baby, surprisingly. What about you? Have you slept?”

“Nah, not really. I dozed off, that I did, but mostly I read.”

“Uh, getting a kickstart on your cultural vacation. Are you planning to be a bookworm the whole
time or there’s a chance to drag you down to the beach for a swim or two?”
Steve quickly gulped the coffee in his mouth to answer her. “Of course! I may have brought more books that I can read in a month… I hope at least, just in case your mother banishes me to the boat. And believe me, I fear she will do it.”

With a groan, she sat on one of the many seats scattered around the living part of deck, right on the prow. “Yeah, I’m afraid she will. I’ll try to get her to reconsider it, though, if she does, don’t worry about it.”

“Just asks her if I can at least go for a run in the morning. I’ll accept every conditions she wants, I’ll even accept being constantly watched, having a watchdog or two, I don’t care. Everything, as long as she lets me go on runs and you talk to her.”

“I think I can manage. Zeus has given me some tiny little details about my mother I bet she doesn’t want to rehash, maybe I can use them as a leverage. Anyway, where are we now?”

“Still in international waters but closer to Greece than Italy. Your uncle was right, we should get there by tomorrow afternoon if things go really bad. The wind is strong but not enough to cause troubles with the ship. It’s a pretty smooth sail, I’d say.”

“Eh, I could get used to this. Listen, let’s make some breakfast so I can take the helm and you get some rest, what do you think?”

He tried to suppress an incoming yawn but failed miserably. “I think it’s an awesome idea. I just hope I won’t fall asleep on the plate though.”

Well, he didn’t fall asleep on the plate, but nearly so. Despite the more than abundant dose of coffee he ingested, Steve fell asleep about half an hour after they had finished washing the dishes he fell asleep while reading his book on a lounge chair beside the helm. Despite the bright morning sun shining straight in his face as a disturbance, he seemed oblivious to it behind the dark sunglasses as he slept. Once she noticed the slight snoring beside her, she found him sprawled on the padded chair, book still in his hands lying open on his chest.

“At least you got sunscreen on before you fell asleep,” murmured Diana as she pried the book out of his hands and set it in a safer area of the boat. She softly ran her fingers through his hair to pull back a rogue strand and smiled. “What have I done to deserve someone like you?”

She let him sleep, just like he had done for her that night, and took care of the navigation. With the on board computer it was almost too easy, they were crossing the border and entered Greek waters when she started wondering why legislations around the world required a sailing licence when nowadays most of the job was done by computers and one needed only to correctly the sails to catch the wind. Almost. It was nearly boring, but she had to admit, the technology made it easier to reach home, made her worry less about what was about to come.

“Hera, give me strength…” she murmured, adjusting the course just a little bit. “Everything will be fine.”

And if it didn’t, they could always sail away and go wherever they wanted. She had packed both their passports, just in case.

The day went smooth enough. The only, very minor, issue came when she tried to wake Steve so he would turn and get an even suntan, and also apply more sunscreen just in case. He was apparently in the middle of a very pleasant dream and the moment she turned towards him and noticed a certain detail she nearly doubled over so hard she was laughing. She made such a noise Steve woke up with
a violent startle and in great distress for more than obvious tenting of his swimming trunks, and trying to hide such problem he fell from the lounge chair with a loud thump that caused a bruised elbow and a wounded pride.

“It’s normal, you know?” he groaned rubbing the hurting joint. He was adorable when he was sulking, Diana couldn’t help herself from smiling wide as she watched Steve collecting his thoughts and get back in control of his body.

“I know,” she laughed. “I’m sorry I woke you that way, it was just too funny. I didn’t mean to scare you like that though.”

“Don’t worry about it, I’ll get my revenge one way or another. Can you hand that bottle of water please?”

She launched him the bottle of fresh water. “There, hydrate yourself. I woke you to tell you to roll over, or you’ll get an uneven and slightly awkward tan.”

Steve nodded as he chugged down the cool beverage. “Got it. I think I’ll tan standing up for the next few hours. How long did I sleep?”

“About six hours. It’s nearly lunch time. Are you hungry?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Not so much, more like really really thirsty.”

“There’s some fresh fruit down in the fridge. How about it?”

“God, yes!” he exclaimed. “It would be awesome! Want some? I’m gonna fetch it right away. Jeez, in this heat I can’t think about eating anything else but fruit and veggies,” he said as he walked below deck. “I think I ate too much in the past couple of days. Whoever cooks for Dionysus and Poseidon are true masters of their craft,” he continued as he came back with a bowl full to the brim with peaches, apricots, grapes and other fruits.

“That’s very true,” she commented, a little absent minded as she grabbed a peach and bit into it. “Oh damn it’s been awhile since I ate a peach like this…” she said, whining a little bit as she chewed the sweet, juicy pulp.

“There’s something about the sun in Italy that makes fruits taste better.”

“More like magic, Steve. I don’t think this is just a standard peach, I bet Poseidon performed some magic on all the food below deck to make them last longer and even taste better. I would bet on it.”

He opened an apricot and pulled the pit out. “I’m not complaining. I don’t know why but even after nearly a year of normal food, I still think that my next meal is going to be another stale army ration or worse, stale German army ration. Those sucked even more than the British ones.”

“Don’t remind me. It’s not like rations improved much during World War 2,” she explained. “I had to eat a number of them during the war and… no, better not to think about it.” She shrugged at the memory. “Not when there’s better food awaiting for us.”

“Now that you make me think about it, ETA?” he asked.

“If the wind remains constant, we should arrive in twenty two hours. Why? Seasickness is creeping up?”

“Oh no, don’t worry, my stomach is just fine. I just… I don’t know, I kind of want to get things done
with your mother and enjoy this month. You know… the sooner the better.”

“Aren’t you afraid she won’t take it the way you want her to?” she wondered. “I may be hardheaded, but she isn’t exactly a lightweight, when it comes to stubbornness.”

“I’ll see how it goes. In any case I’ll try to use all the aces up my sleeves. If she doesn’t want to listen, or even talk to me, I can’t force her, but at least I’ll know I’ve tried my best. Her loss, not mine.”

Diana took a deep breath. “Yeah… her loss.”

She truly hoped her mother would see the light of reason and let him talk, because she didn’t really want to be forced to choose between her own mother and the man she loved. And that was what she feared the most.

The rest of the navigation went as smooth as the first day. They took turns at the helm, Diana did the night shift so Steve could sleep. She felt like the last three nights of deep rest had nearly taken away all the stress of the past few months, and the vast open sea around her somewhat energized her. And she felt the energy singe beneath her fingertips more and more as they got closer to the island.

The next morning, when Steve woke up and brought her breakfast and relieved her at the helm, she couldn’t even feel the tiredness from staying up most of the night. Sure, she had dozed off long enough to rest and be very alert when the sun rose, and it wasn’t like she had spent the day doing strenuous jobs, but by Steve’s standards she had pulled an all-nighter and he was worried about her, as always. He was always very careful of her levels of stress, how much she slept and ate, he even took great care with disinfecting and bandaging scrapes and cuts when she got them during her escapades as Wonder Woman, despite the fact she didn’t need it. But it was cute and she let him do it because she knew he cared and it made him feel a little useful being just human while she was a demigoddess. He was adorable when he did it, concentrated like an expert surgeon and careful not to hurt her more. He even apologized for the sting caused by the antiseptic.

She was submerged in her thoughts when he heard Steve banging on a hard surface. “I think we’re getting closer!” he declared. “Electronic stuff is starting to go berzerk, we’ll soon have to navigate the old way.”

“Not for long,” she replied. “Look ahead!”

The fog that protected Themyscira was getting closer as seconds went by. Soon they were completely engulfed by the thick dark mist and Diana felt her breath catch in her throat. That was it, no turning back. She was going home for the first time in eleven years. Fifth time since she had left back in 1918.

And for the first time, he felt like this could be the last visit she’d ever pay to her home unless official League business came up.

“We can always turn around, head to Athens and spend the month there!” screamed Steve. The wind had picked up and it was hard to hear him from the helm, since she was perched on the very tip of the bow, fretting to see the sun again shining on the shores of Themyscira.

“No, it’s too late!” she replied. “We have unfinished business here, better take care of them now than delay them until further notice. I’ve ran away from this for too long, I’ll get my answers from my mother now, one way or another…”

When they finally crossed the fog and emerged from it, Diana felt her heart both soar and cringe at
the same time. It was a strange sensation, being extremely happy to be home and at the same time fearing she could be kicked out the moment she set foot on the beach. But damn she couldn’t wait to reach the dock, secure the boat and just… be home. She could already see some figures on the top of the steep rock formations that lined that part of the beach actually. The news of their arrival had probably already reached her mother and Menalippe in two, and she was sure the two of them would soon lead a scout party to the same spot where the two figures on horses stood in that moment.

“Go Diana!” screamed Steve behind her. “You can swim faster than this thing can go. Or you can leap there, do as you please. I can handle the boat on my own.”

“Are you sure?”

He nodded. “Sure, go! I can take it from here. Also, I’ll be there in how long? Ten minutes? I can already see the dock. Go now. I can take care of this myself so stop fretting and just go!”

It had been nearly one hundred years since the last time she had dived in the waters of Themyscira with that enthusiasm. Almost of a century of avoiding such a little thing and now she was doing it on her own volition.

Steve was right, she had been fretting and she was indeed faster than the boat and she reached the beach in seconds, just in time to see a quite large cavalry party ride down the beach to reach the dock where she was hanging on. She saw Menalippe riding in front, quickly followed by Artemis and other warriors, weapons ready.

They stopped the horses just meters away from the dock. Menalippe raised on the stirrups. “Diana?” she called, bafflement and uncertainty written on her face. “Is that really you?”

“Of course it’s me!” replied Diana as she pulled herself up from the water. “Who else knows the way to the island?”

The commander in chief of the Amazon army jumped off her horse and ran towards her then hugged Diana tight, not caring that she was soaked to the bone. “It’s so good to see you girl… how long has it been?”

“Eleven years.”

“By Hades’ grace that’s way too long! You should come down here more often you know you’re welcome! Oh your mother will be so happy to see you, she’ll be here in seconds. Is that your boat? Who’s helming it?”

Damn, now came the bad part. “Uh… Menalippe… listen to me, you’re not going to like it. No one here is going to like it.”

“Diana, what are you talking about? Don’t tell me you brought someone here!”

Diana cringed. “I… Did?” Menalippe’s face twisted in a wrathful grimace that scared her to death. “But wait, he’s already been here in the past!”

“He?”

That was her mother. A second, even larger party of warriors arrived and they were escorting Queen Hippolyta. A very angry Queen Hippolyta.

“Mother, I can explain…”
“Well then do it quickly because I want to hug my daughter without being angry at her for bringing a stranger on the Island!” prodded Hippolyta.

“Mother, it’s Steve!” she blurted out with way more force she required. “It’s Steve!”

Everyone around her was beyond confused, except for her mother. She didn’t look one bit worried about her apparently foolish statement. She just sighed. “I should have imagined. Is he here to stay?”

“Just as long as you're allowing me, Your Highness!” he screamed from the boat as he slowly maneuvered it so he could secure it on the dock. “If you’re allowing me. I’m alright with staying on the boat too, I won’t hinder your business, I swear! I know I’m not welcome here, and that I bring back only bad memories, but I don’t mean to cause more stirring than I already did one hundred years ago.”

Much to Diana’s dismay, his appearance, no matter how peaceful, was met with hostility. All the warriors around them raised their weapons, be them swords or bows and arrows and pointed them at Steve. He raised his hands above his head, on instinct, trying to show he wasn’t a threat.

“Should we kill him?” asked Menalippe, her voice still full of bitterness about that day down at the beach.

“Stand down!” her mother ordered, and Diana could draw a relieved breath. “Steve Trevor, you’re going to stay here on the boat until further notice. Food and fresh water will be delivered daily. We’ll have to discuss if you’re safe to step on dry land.”

“Of course Your Highness,” he nodded and lowered his hands as the Amazons put down their weapons.

“Diana, gather your things. We have many matters to discuss.”

She sighed, heavily. *It's going to be a very, very long month.*

Chapter End Notes

Can anyone guess which book Steve is reading? 
BTW: sorry for the very long wait, I had little time to sit down and write, I recently got back into martial arts and they got me to teach the younger kids, and that means I'm stuck at the dojo four hours a week, coming back late at night... it's fun really but it's sucks for writing. Anyway, we're finally on Themyscira. It's going to be a long journey.
“Are you sure you’re going to be alright? My mother ordered a surveillance detail on you, day and night.”

Steve chuckled. “I’ll be just fine. She said I will receive food and fresh water right? As long as you come down here from time to time and keep me company, I’ll be fine.”

Diana gathered the things she knew she would need from her baggage and kissed him on the cheek. “I’ll have you released in a matter of hours. A day, tops. There’s no way I’ll leave you rotting in here.”

“I’ll be working on my tan. Again, don’t worry about me, I’ll be just peachy. The surveillance detail speaks English, right?” She nodded. “Then I’ll be safe. Go with them. I’ll wait here for you.”

“What did I do to deserve you?” she told him with a smile as she hugged him tight.

He leaned closer to her and kissed her for a long, blissful moment. “You exist, Diana. That’s all. Go now, before your mother charges in here like a tank battalion and snatches you away. And if you worried about me, just come down and see how I’m doing on my own with your own eyes.”

Reluctantly, she did leave. “I’m here, Mother,” she said.

Hippolyta nodded. “Good. Mnemosine, give her your horse. You stay here with Eubea and guard our guest. He’s not allowed to step off the dock, allow him to stretch his legs on the dock but if he sets a foot on the beach he’ll regret it. Understood?”

The two selected guards nodded. “Understood, Your Highness.”

“Mother, don’t you think it’s a little excessive? He means us no harm!”

“Don’t, Diana. Not now. You shouldn’t have brought him here, you know the rules!”

Diana sighed. “I know mother, it’s just… you know who he is, he’s been here before.”

She jumped on her horse with certain angry sprint in her movements. “Yes, that’s exactly why I’m doing this. Do you remember what happened when he crashed here? He brought nothing but death. I won’t risk it a second time. He stays on the boat.”

“But Mother…”

“Enough, Diana!” shouted Hippolyta. “This is not the moment. Now, get on that horse and come with us.”

Again, she sighed. “Yes, mother.”

All her plans to stand up for herself and for Steve… gone down the drain. The lingering feeling of inadequacy was back in full force, mixed with the reverence she felt towards her mother for very obvious reasons. It’s going to be tough. She thought as they quickly rode up towards the citadel. Nothing had changed, every rock, every patch of green grass, every single tree and building were in the same place as they had always been, and it felt weird. Outside the world was in constant motion, a never ending change that wouldn’t allow anything to remain the same for too long. It didn’t work on Themyscira. Time didn’t pass, people didn’t age. The weather rarely was different from warm
and sunny, rain only fell when the crops needed it.

She was riding behind her mother when Menalippe pushed her horse closer to hers. “Why the sulk, Diana?” she inquired. “Aren’t you happy to be home again?”

“I am, but… I was hoping you wouldn’t freak out like that, about Steve. I swear he doesn’t mean to cause trouble he just…”

“Hey, girl, listen up. I’m sorry I said I wanted to kill him, I was just a little surprised. But… maybe I remember wrong but you said he had died.”

Diana nodded. “I know. And he did. Until… Menalippe, it’s a really long story. Do you mind if I get changed into something more comfortable before I explain what happened?”

She gently rubbed her shoulder. “Don’t worry Diana. There’s time. How long are you going to stay?”

“A month, maybe six weeks tops. We need to get back to work and it takes about a week to get back to the place we live so…”

“I understand. Will you tell us what happened though? I think we will all benefit from a thorough explanation, that way we will understand better what happened. Because believe me, I’ve lived long enough to know that dead don’t come back to life on a whim. Not with Hades guarding Underworld.”

Diana chuckled. “I have a lot to explain even on that side. It’s going to be an interesting evening, believe me.”

She nodded, a warm smile on her face. “I believe you, Diana. Now, tell me something; the boy down at the beach, is he fussy about food?”

That made her laugh. “No, not at all. He’s a soldier, he’s used to gruel and stale food. I think whatever you’ll feed him, he’ll be happy. Oh and he loves your spanakopita.”

“Oh, you still make it like I taught you? Good to know, at least we know what to give him. I’ll make sure he’s safe and sound down there. Can I trust him and be a little lenient about his condition?”

“Yes, you can trust him. I swear he’s a good man, he’ll do as told as long as no one tries to kill him.”

Diana took a deep breath and mustered all her courage, because she was going to ask a favor that would go against her mother’s orders. “Menalippe, can I ask you something? It’s really minor, but Steve loves to run in the morning. Like, you know… for training reasons, to keep fit. He’s not exactly a marathoner, but he goes out running almost every morning, it’s a habit, do you think…”

“Don’t ask. I’ll make sure he gets at least some time on shore for a morning run. Tell me though, how is it going in Man’s world?”

“Well, if you excuse the language, it’s a fucked up crapsack, that’s how it’s going,” replied Diana, bitterly. “It’s a mess, no matter your point of view.”

“Language excused, but don’t get caught cussing like that in front of your mother. You know she hates it.”

Diana smiled, albeit for a very brief moment. “All too well.”

They reached the citadel in a few minutes of steady ride and from there, she followed her mother up
to the keep, where the Queen, and in this case the Princess, resided. On the way up she saw the
tower of the armory, the side she had climbed still showed the holes she had punched in it to use as
leverage. She smiled, for a brief moment, as she recalled the exhilarating sensation she had
experienced climbing that wall, getting another glimpse of her true potential that she never knew she
had until that night on the airstrip in Belgium.

They left the horses outside the keep and Diana followed her mother inside, carrying the bag with
her things over her shoulder. She tried to straighten her shoulders, making sure she wouldn’t look
like she was intimidated by her mother, but the look in her mother’s eyes showed she was clearly
seeing through her feeble attempt of appearing strong.

“Diana, don’t look at me light that!” she heard her mother say as she walked towards her room. “It’s
for our own protection!”

“Protection from what, Mother? Steve’s a human being, he came with me, he’s not a threat! Why did
you have to treat him like one?”

“Because he’s a man, a stranger, one that you assured me died in a ball of fire and he suddenly
returned on Themyscira like nothing happened. He also happens to be very intimate with you, from
what I saw so don’t look at me like I am torturing him. He’s perfectly safe and sound down there!”
she exclaimed. “Also don’t think I didn’t hear what you asked Menalippe, and what she told you.
And I had nothing to say about it, so take it as a gesture of goodwill.”

“You’re treating him as a prisoner!” exclaimed Diana.

“Because until further notice, he is a prisoner!” rebutted Hippolyta. “Now get changed so you can
join the others. They’ll be delighted to see you.”

Yeah, sure… whatever… she thought as she dropped her bag on her bed and immediately looked for
clothes that wouldn’t look as out of place on the island in the big armoire in the corner of the room.
She had just opened it when her mother walked up to her and hugged her from behind, placing a
quick, sweet kiss on her temple. “Welcome back Diana. I missed you so much.”

Diana felt all the air in her lungs being pushed out by an invisible force clutching at her chest. “I
missed you too.”

“We have things to talk about. Many things.”

“So he’s been here.”

Her mother nodded against her shoulder. “Yes, he came. But it’s not something I want to discuss
now. Get cleaned up and join Menalippe, she’s doing some elaborated training today, I’m sure you
can appreciate it. And she’ll be very happy to have you back there.”

She took a deep breath. “Sometimes I feel like you two are the only ones that appreciate when I
come back.”

“That’s absolutely not true and you know it. I’ll leave you now. I have some matters to discuss with
the Senators and I don’t want you to get bored. Feel free to come and go as you wish.”

“But… we’ll talk, right?” asked Diana.

“We will. This time, we will. I’m done running from my past. See you later.”
Her old clothes felt a little tight at the shoulders. Had she put on some muscle bulk there, in the past years? Sure, she worked out, but mostly to keep up appearances and pure enjoyment of the thrill she got from the adrenaline kick, but her body would never get much benefit from a standard workout regimen tailored for humans, even if she pushed harder than most. It took her a moment to adjust to the feeling, but by the time she had walked down the training ground she had got used to it, at least enough to push through the Amazon’s daily workout.

But most importantly, when she finally reached the grounds, every warrior down there stopped what they were doing to come and greet her, cheerful and clearly happy to see her and to have her back again to train with them. It was invigorating, to train in the old ways, to rehash old concepts she had nearly forgotten but that were still deeply embedded in her muscle memory, fight hand to hand with equals who might have been not as strong as her, but surely they knew how to fight. Sparring was brutal on Themyscira, and while no one aimed to kill anyone, but they were aiming for direct hits, like a full contact sport. And damn they hit hard. Had she be human, she would have ended the day pushing an icepack on her left eye. After all, Niobe had always been a hard hitter, she shouldn’t have expected nothing less.

Later, after training, they all enjoyed a gargantuan banquet at dinner. It had been a very long while since Diana had eaten dishes prepared the way she was used to from her life on the island, and it almost melted her heart, experiencing those scents and flavors she had nearly forgotten. She did know how to cook those dishes, but produce in Man’s world wasn’t as fresh, as fragrant as they were on the island. As much as a good at cooking she was, it was never the same.

“Gods…” she moaned as she dove in her plate of moussaka. “This is just so good…”

“Only the best when it comes to my favourite niece!” exclaimed Menalippe, sitting beside her. “And don’t worry, Steve is getting his fill too. I had some of every dish served tonight delivered to him. He’ll be in a food coma by the time he’s finished. If he doesn’t gorge on the wine before that, in that case he will probably be hungover next morning.”

“Don’t worry about him, he can hold his alcohol pretty well. The morning after he drank Zeus' strange immortality potion he only needed an aspirin and a gallon of water to get over it.”

The General looked very baffled by that comment. “Wait a second… Zeus’s immortality potion? Is that how he got resuscitated?”

Diana shook her head. “No, that happened some days later. He wasn’t resuscitated anyway. I have a friend that can run so fast he can travel back in time. And that’s what he did. He travelled back in time, snatched Steve out of the plane just a moment before it went ablaze and brought him back to Bruce’s kitchen right under my eyes.”

“Wait a second.” It was oddly entertaining, watching the strong, intelligent woman at her side being thrown into uncharted waters to the point she couldn’t really believe what she was hearing. ‘Time travel? You mean… he’s the Steve that crashed here with that… what was it called… with the plane? Not a reincarnated or magically resuscitated Steve? And who’s Bruce?’

“The one and the same, with all his memories, his quirks, his qualities and his flaws. And Bruce is’ another friend. I got better at making friends in the past eleven years, you know?”

The older Amazon looked astounded. She pulled off her headgear for a moment, pushed her hair back and set it back in place. “That’s why he addressed Hippolyta the correct way, insisted on not being opposed on staying on the boat… I thought he was… someone else! I don’t know, someone that was posing as him to hurt you but… Then why wasn’t your mother…”
“She knew. Zeus came here, months ago I think, and they spoke. He must have told her something about him, because she didn’t even question his presence. I think she was expecting him to come with me, somewhere down the line. After all, it turns out most of the Gods back then were pining for us and they were planning on giving him a little edge against mortality, before he blew himself up,” she explained. “They managed to do so only after Barry brought him forward in time.”

“Diana… I’m astounded. This is… something you hear in legends or in plays and epic poems. I never thought this could happen, again at least. It was common practice some thousands years ago but now? I had no idea they would still act like this!”

“Oh, believe me, it took me more than a few days to realize it was true and not just some kind of sick joke. I witnessed all of this and I can barely wrap my head around it. You’re in good company.”

Menalipped nodded and took a long, thoughtful sip of mead from her cup. “I see. By the way, I took the liberty of speaking with your mother about Steve’s living arrangements. I managed to convince her to let him set up camp on the beach, right beside the dock. He’s still under close scrutinize, but he’s at least allowed on shore. We gave him firewood so he could light a fire and other things to help him with his necessities, along with the food. Eubea told me he was very thankful and dearly appreciated the help we gave him. He was so different from the other time he was here, now that I think of it… more respectful of our ways.”

“Yes, he’s that kind of guy. And yes, he’s grown a lot. He said that coming to terms with his mortality on that plane and being so close to dying gave him a lot of perspective on life and the different aspects of it… he doesn’t remember dying because it never happened to him, but his death gave me some perspective too.”

Menalippe smiled and hugged her tight with her free arm. “You really love him, uh?” she asked.

With a sigh, Diana nodded. “I think I fell in love with him the moment he tried to save Antiope.”

She chuckled. “And to think I wanted to kill him with my bare hands right there and then… poor guy. He must be pretty remarkable, for you to turn yourself inside out like this. You left the island with him as a cheerful, slightly naive girl and came back as a hardened warrior, that spark of joy, that lust for life you had was gone. Look at you now… it’s almost like he was the source of your joy.”

“Not exactly,” replied Diana. “mean, I love him with all my heart, that’s true, in the last few months he became one of the reasons I wake up in the morning, but you see… when I left the island and reached Man’s World, everything was dark, covered in soot and smoke, people were… I don’t even know how to describe them, they were desperate and everyone just saw the world as if it was going to end the next day. Steve instead… he was like a beacon of hope, hope that humanity was still good as I had always thought. My beacon of hope in a world I didn’t know, that I didn’t understand and that didn't understand me. It took him a while, but he trusted me.”

“Well, you saved him from certain death, he had to give you some credit.”

“He did. Not immediately, but he gave me more than some credit. Last time we were in Metropolis I overheard him and friend of mine talk about me. Steve described me like the person that hung the moon in the sky. He convinced me to come back and face those who don’t want me here. He said that if I can face monsters from other planets I can face my detractors at home. And talk to my mother, shed some light upon how I came to be, from her point of view. He was very adamant about this.”

“He’s right. He’s very right. You should have faced them long ago Diana, they’re just a bunch of bitter people. You went for a very good reason, and you had good reasons to return too. You didn’t
even force your way here, you asked your mother if you could come to shore. She allowed you
back, and I think you deserved to be back. Those who can’t accept your mother’s decision can go
and join Hades, for all I care.”

to Tartarus, for all I care.”

“Yeah well… I’m still an outcast, Menalippe. I’ve always been an outcast, everyone has always
treated me differently. Why should they stop now?”

“Oh dear, I think of a long list of many painful things you could do to them, but I’m not going to
suggest you should diminish yourself dealing with them in a violent way. Diana, you’re a proud
Amazon, just as they are. Thing is, they’re envious. That’s it. You did what we never even dared to
think about. You fulfilled your destiny but also did so much more than that, and they’re envious. I
think they’re going to be a little more malleable though, after that happened last year.”

“You think?” asked Diana.

She nodded. “I do. And if they’re not, just bang your gauntlets together and shove them a hundred
yards backwards. They’ll learn.”

Diana sighed and smiled. “I missed talking to you, a lot.”

Menalippe, smiling herself, dragged her in a tight, one-armed hug. “And I missed talking to you. Are
you going to talk to your mother, tonight?”

“I’ll try. I’ll go down to the beach and see how Steve’s faring though, before I try.”

“Yeah, go and have fun before she potentially ruins it.”

As Menalippe was speaking, Diana was taking a sip of wine from her wine, but the innuendo wasn’t
lost to her ears and, caught off guard not expecting it, she inhaled some of the liquid and started
coughing spasmodically in order to breathe normally again. Promptly, Menalippe patted her back to
help her a little. “Hey, don’t tell me you get so hot and bothered about sex even with him?”

She coughed again. “Of course I don’t, I just wasn’t expecting the joke from you!”

“Oh please Diana! You heard me say way worse things in the past! Go on though, finish dinner and
go to Steve. I’m sure he’s waiting for you.”

Diana looked at the end of the table, ten yards at her left, and observed as her mother was deeply
engrossed in an animated conversation, most likely an argument of some sorts regarding her and
Steve’s presence on the island, and drew a deep breath. “Are you sure? I don’t want to disrespect my
mother any more than what I have already done.”

“She’s occupied at the moment. She won’t even notice you’re gone. And in case she does, I’ll keep
her in check. You’ll be safe. Come on, go and have some well deserved fun.”

She found him sitting in one of the many folding chair that were available below deck, reading a
book by the light of the roaring fire, the bright licks of the flames projected shadows that danced on
his skin in the most enthralling way. In a certain way, it was almost erotic, the way the light moved
over his figure, ever changing and somehow making him look bulkier. She had to swallow a thick
lump that had formed in her throat before she spoke to him in order to get his attention.

Not that she needed to, he saw her approaching as soon soon as she came close enough to the light.
He raised his eyes from his book and his face lit with pure unabashed joy. “Wow!”

“Wasn’t it the first thing you ever said to me?” she asked him, plucking the book from his hand so she had more room to kiss him.

“Uhm…” he mumbled against her lips, before pulling back. “Yeah, and I think you were wearing the very same clothes when I said that.”

“Could be. I see you got yourself a quite comfortable spot.”

“Ah, yes. Menalippe came down this afternoon with a couple of your sisters with food, water and enough firewood to last me a couple of days. I’m doing pretty good, everything considered. Seriously better than what I had thought. Even the surveillance isn’t too invasive. I can’t really complain.”

“I see… listen, I don’t have much time, I’ll try to talk to my mother tonight, I don’t know how long it will take me or if I even will be back for the night.”

Smiling, Steve wrapped his fingers around her waist and gently pulled until she was sitting in his lap. “I don’t mind. Take all the time you feel you need, I’ll be waiting and if I fall asleep, wake me up when I’m done. Or just sleep up there in your old home if it gets too late, I’m fine with that too. Just… talk, be sincere. Poke and prod a little more, shout if you feel the need to, but get the answers you need from your mother. You’ve waited long enough, she owes you at least the truth.”

She nodded as he kissed her forehead. “I’ll try. If she doesn’t relent tonight, I’ll try tomorrow. I’ll be a pestering little brat if I need to, but I’m going to get those answers, I swear.”

“Ah, that’s the Diana I fell in love with! Go and get those answers, you crossed No Man’s Land, you killed a god, you helped kill a Kryptonian abomination and you were essential for stopping an intergalactic alien invasion. You can face your own mother holding your head high!” he exclaimed. “Now go and kick some royal, toned butt.”

Gods, Steve’s pep talks were the best! “Either I come back victorious, or I won’t come back at all! Thanks Steve, I’ll come back as soon as I’m done.” She kissed him again, before she stood up “Love you!”

“Love you too Angel!” she heard him yell as she walked towards the road.

*Let’s just hope she drank enough.*
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

I'm truly sorry for the delay of this chapter, but my work & sports schedule has been ghastly these past few weeks. Between my job during the day and the dojo by night, I barely had the time to sit down and write. I'll try to be faster in the future, but I'm leaving for Berlin this weekend and I don't really think I'll get much work done there. Be patient.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Hippolyta took her own sweet time to return from the banquet. It almost looked like she was stalling on purpose, leaving Diana up in the keep to wait for her, all alone, just to make her sweat a little bit, just like when she did something wrong when she was a child. Which happened fairly often. She sat in her old room, on the bed where she had spent many nights letting her mind wander through her fantasies of war, of joining her sisters in battle when Ares would rise again and strike humanity, alone with her thoughts. Little did Young Diana know that all the time the Amazons had been preparing themselves for battle, Ares had changed tactic and was letting men and women do all the work, inspiring them from the darkest corner of their minds.

Taking a deep breath, she turned towards the large shelves that lined one of the walls, filled with books, rolls of papyruses and random parchment sheets held together by twine that was now strained by many years of use. Those shelves held everything she knew about the world, up until Steve crashed on the island. Back when she was a child she thought those books contained everything she needed to know about humanity and growing into adulthood that concept stuck, to the point she was blinded by it.

How different could things have gone, back in 1918, if her eyes and mind hadn’t been so occluded by all this antique knowledge that mattered no more?

With a remorseful chuckle, she passed her fingertips on the spines of the books, on the handles of the papyruses and the jagged rolls of parchment scrolls, threading lightly over the old and frail items, until she found the wooden enchanted board her mother had used to tell her the story of the Amazons and the War of the Gods. Smiling, albeit wryly, she pulled the board out and opened it. It looked so much smaller now that she was an adult, but it was still a wonderful piece of art in its own way. She had no idea who had made it, who had enchanted it so the images, almost like, would slowly move and morph into the different chapters of the story, but whoever had they been, they were skilled. Very skilled.

When the story reached the part where Zeus struck Ares down, she gently closed it and put it back on the shelf. “These books need an update…” she exclaimed to herself.

“Yes,” came her mother’s voice from the doorway. “They need it. Most of it is outdated, as you have demonstrated.”

She was standing, a step away from the doorstep, as if she was afraid to walk in. “You can come, you know?”

“Not without your permission,” she stated. “Remember the rule: you can walk in a room only with
the permission of the owner of said room.”

That had been one of her childhood staples. Never go somewhere you’re not invited. It made her laugh a little, considering the very bad habit of bursting through doors and walls she had developed while rushing to battle. “How about we take this to the armory?” she proposed.

Her mother nodded. “Neutral ground. Good idea. And in case I feel the sudden urge to beat you, I’ll just need to grab a stick.”

Diana wasn’t expecting that kind of quipping from her mother, she had to admit it. “And where does that come from?”

“Contrary to popular belief on this island I have a sense of humor, Diana. I just don’t feel like I need to put it on show every moment of my life.”

“Like the fact you used to drink many mighty warriors under the table in the good old days?”

Hippolyta grunted, softly. “He told you that, didn’t he?”

“He told me many things, Mother,” replied Diana as they walked towards the big tower where the real weapons used in battle were kept. “But he also told me to reach out to you, get your side of the story.”

Her mother nodded, solemnly, but she didn’t say anything, at least for a long while. They walked in complete silence, broken only by the soft thump of their steps on the dirt road that led to the octagonal building that protected the armory. Diana wanted so much to ask her questions and be done with it, but she knew this was going to be a long, exhausting night. Frustrating too. What she was going to discuss with her mother wasn’t something that could be liquidated with a quick yes or no type of question, there were going to be many long moments of silence, like this one.

When they reached the door, Hippolyta pushed it open and let her in. It had been almost a century since Diana had last set foot in that building, and she hadn’t walked in through the main door. There was a long table and some chairs scattered around the main room, where people could grab their weapons, clean them and sharpen them before battle. They gathered a chair each and sat on the opposite sides of the table, facing each other, like two warriors ready to wage war against one another, with only a thick slab of wood darkened by the heavy use to stop them. The torches hanging from the wall projected dark, trembling shadows around them.

Diana kind of wished she had brought something to drink. Something strong.

Uh, Arthur was rubbing off her way too much for her own sake.

“What do you want to know?” asked Hippolyta.

“More like what I need to know,” she replied. “First of all, why keep me in the dark for so long? It has been one hundred years, I’ve come back many times and you never wanted to answer my questions. Why now?”

“Pride, I guess. The lengths I went to have you Diana… I’m not proud of them. Some would call me a prostitute. I gave my body to Zeus so he would have a weapon and I would have a daughter. And then I came up with the lie about sculpting you with clay and him breathing life into it so you would live. I lied for so long that I started believing it was the truth. And when you left… then came back knowing the truth, I didn’t want to admit it. To myself, mostly,” she explained, oddly at ease, even though she was talking about something she apparently wasn’t proud of. “Zeus offered me something I desired, in exchange for your abilities, in case Ares hadn’t died at the end of the war.”
“So it was nothing more than an economic exchange. As he said, he wanted a weapon, you wanted a daughter, one small sacrifice and you would both have what you wanted, no strings attached.”

“Oh, the strings were more than attached, Diana. They weren’t even strings. They were thick ropes, tied in a noose hanging from my neck. That noose was cut loose only when you definitely defeated Ares, fulfilling the purpose you were born for. That doesn’t mean it stopped choking me though.”

“Well, what about me? What about the fact that once I fulfilled the purpose I was born for, as you said, I was left hanging myself? I had no place in Man’s World, I gathered that pretty quickly. I couldn’t come back, and it was only because of your magnanimity that I was allowed back on the island, though clearly not welcomed. What was I supposed to do, uh? Have you and Zeus thought about the consequences of bringing someone to life, just because you two wanted something? Yes, he got a weapon, you got a daughter, but what about me?”

Hippolyta nodded, gravely. “I admit we hadn’t thought about it. Despite everything though, it seems like you have found your place in Man’s World no matter what. You could have stayed, I told you that, long ago.”

“And as I replied, long ago, no thanks. I prefer spending my life where I have no place but I’m welcomed, than where I do have a place, but people resent me.”

“Oh come on, Diana!” Hippolyta exclaimed. “No one resents you! There are some people that… would have preferred I had adhered to the rules I set, but no one resents you!”

Diana chuckled. “They would never say anything negative about me in front of you, Mother. There’s a small but pretty vocal group out there that resents me for leaving, resents me for coming back, and now I bet they want to murder me in my sleep because I brought Steve with me!”

She shrugged her shoulders. “Can’t say I don’t understand a certain reasoning behind the last motive.”

That hurt more than all the lies she had been told in her life. “He’s not a threat,” she seethed through clenched teeth.

“I didn’t say he was,” replied Hippolyta. “But he can perceived as such by many. After all, you remember what happened last time he was here.”

Diana was exasperated. Her mother was being so difficult and hardheaded she had no idea how the hell she was going to even make a small dent in her beliefs. “You talk about that like he intentionally crashed here! He was running away from the Germans, not willingly leading them here!”

“I don’t care, Diana!” she exclaimed, banging her hands on the table, eyes wide and face scrunched in a tight, angry grimace. “He brought war where there was peace. He convinced you to run away from home with his misleading words and…”

“Misleading?” Diana almost screamed. “Misleading? How many times have I described what I saw? How many times do I have to tell you that there were people crawling in the icy mud, bullets flying over their heads, weapons that poisoned the very air they breathed… and that was only one of the many places where people fought for no reason at all if not the greed of glory of few men. You saw it last year, the world you remember… it doesn’t exist anymore, for a thousands of good men and women there are ten evil people that still honor the dreadful heritage Ares left when I killed him, and now they’re way more efficient at killing each other I can’t…” She stopped midsentence, took a deep, steadying breath and shook her head. “Steve didn’t mislead me. More like he downplayed it. The situation was so much worse than just the war, it was society as a whole that was corrupted,
people were barking at each other like rabid dogs, minorities were oppressed, to an extent they still are in more subtle but constant ways… As a man of his time he knew the world was wrong but alone he had no power to change it. He did the best he could.”

Her mother didn’t reply. Not immediately at least, she just stared at her, arms folded across her chest. “I thought you had already outlived your naive stage, Diana, but I guess I was wrong.”

“Well if I’m naive you’re blind, Mother. You don’t know what it is to live out there, and you don’t know him. You barely spoke to him except to interrogate him, last time. This morning you just banished him to the boat, you didn’t even try to talk to him. By the way, he had predicted it.”

“What?”

Diana shrugged. “All of it, actually. The angry reactions to his presence, you banishing him to the boat… He came prepared, two thirds of his suitcase were filled with books, so he could keep himself entertained while waiting for me. He knew what he was going to face and he did it with pride and dignity. And he did it for me.”

“For you?”

“Yes, for me. I didn’t want to come. Last January… A big fire broke out in the city we live in. He wasn’t in town, he was out in the United States because of his job and… I cracked. I couldn’t save an elderly couple, I have no idea how many other died before I could get there… I didn’t take it well. While Steve tried to cheer me up a little bit, or at least make me feel a little less guilty, he mentioned coming here and getting your side of the story, since I now had Zeus’ one. I told him I didn’t feel welcome, but he poked and prodded me for months until I relented. And he knew he wouldn’t be welcomed. And he was ready to accept it, to be treated like the most infamous enemy of the Amazons, so I would have the chance to talk to you, and clear things between us.”

“Oh…” Hippolyta looked genuinely surprised. “He willingly agreed to come despite knowing I would most probably banish him to the boat?”

Diana nodded. “He insisted, actually. He said I needed to know your side of the story, other than Zeus’, and face those who think I don’t deserve to be allowed back to the island and that if I didn’t do it sooner rather than later, I would regret it not too far down the line. Also, he would like to talk to you in person.”

“About what?”

“I didn’t ask, he didn’t tell,” she lied. “I just know he wants to talk to you.”

Tight lipped, Hippolyta nodded. “I’ll think about it. So, getting back on track. What do you want to know?”

“Everything,” she replied. “From the very moment either of you came up with this crazy idea to the last time you saw Zeus. And don’t spare the details, I’m a big girl, I can take it.”

Sighing, her mother nodded. “As you wish. It happened a couple of centuries after the end of the war. If I haven’t completely lost track of time, roughly nine hundred years ago. One day he came to me and proposed a deal I found very hard to refuse. He was right, I wanted a daughter, and he wanted a weapon. At the time, it seemed a sound plan, and in hindsight, it was indeed. We both got what we wanted, it was a sacrifice of one night for me. I haven’t seen him for centuries, until some months ago. That’s the story. He came with an idea that required my collaboration, I accepted.”

“Wow, bam wham thank you ma’am, uh?”
“Excuse me?”

Realizing she had used a figure of speech her mother wasn’t familiar with, Diana shook her head and tried to suppress a smile. “Nothing, it’s just a saying of Man’s World, it refers to quick one-night-stands. Just that.”

“I see. I was surprised to see him though, some months back. He hasn’t changed a bit, despite the different clothing. He spoke highly of you, said he had fun, talking to you, after the initial scare. He said something about being terrorized, that meeting you scared the shit out of him.”

“So he said,” Diana confirmed. “He came to my workplace, under the pretence of making a large donation to the museum from his personal collection of artifacts and…”

“Hey, Diana, slow down a little bit. I still have to grasp what you’re doing these days to support yourself. Start from the beginning: what’s your job?”

Her mother knew how life worked outside the magical curtain that kept the island hidden, Diana had explained it down to the last detail in the past, but through the years she had changed job a number of times, and she had got the job at the Louvre only seven years before. She dared to take a look at her mother and she did look interested about her life. At least those parts that didn’t include Steve.

“The world has changed, technology has evolved, but that doesn’t mean that what was left from ancient times has been destroyed. There are people who actively work to preserve the heritage of the past, they keep things as whole as they can, often gathering them in special buildings they call museums. I work in one of the most famous museums of the world, I oversee the section dedicated to Ancient Greece and the Middle East,” she quickly explained. “It’s not uncommon that private collectors come to us to get rid of parts of their collections because they have too many objects and can’t find room for new things. That’s what Zeus did. He came as a collector, which he is actually, those items he wanted to donate, he sent them for real and they’re amazing, he kept the appearance for a while, before he dropped it and…” She sighed and shook her head. “I almost lost it, I truly wanted to hit him, hard.”

“Why?”

“Well, first because he made me waste precious time. I had to cut short an important meeting with a client because I was waiting for him. Second, because he just drops by like nothing ever happened, nearly one hundred years late?” Diana was quickly losing control of her composure, but she didn’t care, not at this point, not after so much time of simply sucking it up and let all the doubts fester in the deepest corner of her mind, creating monsters that lived on their own, feeding off her subconscious. “I needed to talk to him in 1918, not in 2017! It didn’t help that I had been asking the same questions to you for ages and you always deflected them all!”

Hippolyta looked down, visibly ashamed, but said nothing. She clearly had never thought about the consequences her behavior would have on her daughter, about the fact that even the daughter of a God could feel insecure sometimes. “You never helped me, not on this matter! How do you think I felt, learning I’m the daughter of a god? And most of all learning it from the God I was supposed to kill, who turns out to be my half brother? Sure, even the sculpted from clay thing sounds a little preposterous now that I think of it, but I trusted you. You could have told me the truth, about my father. Just hide the fact I was meant to kill Ares, if need arose!”

“It’s not that easy, Diana. You were supposed to kill Ares in a different way, in open war, not in a duel. We thought we would see him only after he had gathered an army and charged against the Gods once again, not hide for so long and inspire mortals to move war against one another, in order to gain more power. It was an outcome we hadn’t predicted.”
“Then thank you,” she spit out. “For letting me go without knowing my true potential. How many things do you think would have been different now, if I had known that?”

“How fast do you think Ares would have found you, if you had known?” replied Hippolyta. “Diana, I know the plan doesn’t seem as sound as we saw it, from your perspective, but it was the best we could come up with at the time. Diana, listen to me. What we did… it was nothing more than an exchange of favors between consenting adults. Nothing more, nothing less. I don’t know what you were expecting, to be honest, there's nothing to say.”

Not that, of course. Diana felt actually a little let down. Her mother’s version didn’t seem different from Zeus’, he too had spoken of an exchange of favors, but she was expecting something more. Have I idealized this whole thing all this time, to the point the truth sounds like another lie? She asked herself, pondering over her mother’s words. She had spent the last one hundred years wondering, making up things to fill a void, had she convinced herself that her own fabrications were the truth, to the point she couldn’t believe the real deal?

“Then why did you say you weren’t proud of it?” she asked.

“Doesn’t it sound a little like prostitution to you?” replied Hippolyta, with a sardonic grin printed on her face. “I caved in, to a plan that in the beginning I didn’t approve of, just because Zeus promised me a daughter. He paid me for my services, just not with coins, but by granting me a wish.”

“By that reasoning, every sexual relation is an exchange of favors akin to prostitution. Even those that don’t include any form of payment. One may seek a sexual encounter for the sake of pleasure alone, isn’t it a form of favor exchange?” Diana noticed a quick twitch in her mother’s jaw. “The way I see it, it’s not prostitution at all. Just two consenting adults seeking a way to achieve a goal. The fact that your goal was a living, breathing person you willingly kept in the dark about your plan is another matter entirely, but I think I understand your reasoning, even though it may be filtered through my experience in Man’s World.”

“I’m glad you understand,” she said. “But I would like to hear your opinion, no matter how filtered through your experiences.”

“Very well…” Diana took a deep breath before she spoke. “I think you feel ashamed because you enjoyed it. And there’s nothing wrong about it. You always taught me that sex isn’t something shameful unless used as a weapon to coerce other people, or abused as a form of power to impose on someone else. You haven’t been coerced or forced, it was consensual even though detached, romantically speaking. He promised you something and you went on with it, willingly. But you’re not ashamed of the sex itself, or the fact that you did it to satisfy your maternal instinct or that it would imply that I would become nothing more than a weapon in the eyes of many people on this island. You’re ashamed because you enjoyed it!”

“It could be. Still, it isn’t something I’m not proud of. I relented, I gave in to an idea I wouldn’t agree on because Zeus knew what I wanted and he could give it to me. And yes, I’m ashamed because I enjoyed it. A lot!”

“But what’s wrong with enjoying sex?” exclaimed Diana. “Isn’t it a little hypocritical of you? You spent years, decades if not centuries of my life telling me that sex is never something to be ashamed of. And then, the one time you had sex with someone for the biological reason it exists, you suddenly turn into a prude? Mother, that’s nonsensical! Just admit you enjoyed it and be done with it! You’ll certainly live a lot better with your conscience! I know I do live a lot better with myself, since I’m never ashamed of any sexual encounter I’ve ever had.”

“What about Steve? Isn’t he a little bit jealous of this? Last time I met a man, he was pretty
possessive of his wife, despite having lots of issues keeping himself from fucking everything that breathed.”

“First, things have changed. Second, Steve isn’t like that. Third… well, there’s no third but no, he isn’t jealous. He asked, out of curiosity, but the moment I mentioned that from my point of view he had been dead he laughed about it and outright stated he wasn’t jealous and that he understood. After all, it’s not like he was some kind of virgin when we met.”

Hippolyta scoffed. “Gods, he seems too good to be true.”

“If you met him, you’d know he isn’t too good to be true.”

With a sigh, the queen shook her head. “You really love him, uh?”

“So much I can’t even find words to describe it. No, wait, actually there are words, I’ve read them in a book a long time ago, but you wouldn’t like to hear them.”

“Try me,”

“*He is my ground, my favorite sound, my country road, my city street, my sky above, my only love, and the ground beneath my feet,*” she quoted the same part of the book that Clark had quoted describing Lois. It wasn’t exactly the best way to describe what she felt about Steve, because despite his presence she was still herself, he wasn’t the sole focal point of her life, but it was close enough. She just hoped her mother would see through the metaphor and wouldn’t see it as she had completely submitted her will to him, because it wasn’t the case. As much as their personalities complemented each other’s, his character never annulled her own.

*I should have quoted* Drumming Song *instead…* she thought, when she noticed the not so subtle smirk that twisted her mother’s expression.

Sighing again, Hippolyta stood. “Walk with me Diana. The air is getting too thin here, I’d prefer if we stepped outside.”

With a silent nod, Diana did as told and they moved out of the tower. They walked in silence for a while, just enjoying the cool breeze coming from the sea. It hadn’t been an overly hot day, but the cooling air was a relief nevertheless.

“Zeus gave me a quick summary, but tell me how he came back to life.”

“Technically, he never died, but long story short, I have a friend who can run so fast he can travel back in time. He… he heard the story, felt bad for me and… brought him here. That’s it.”

“Uh… and how did he learned how to run so fast?”

Diana smiled. “He didn’t learn, Mother. He was struck by a lightning and instead of being burned to a cinder, his body mutated and he gained the ability to run as fast as light. If not faster,” she explained. “He still isn’t sure about what happened, he just… became the fastest man alive. He’s a sweet kid and he felt genuinely bad for what had happened, so he tried to make it better.”

“Seems like he did! You’re glowing, Diana, I don’t think I’ve ever seen you so happy.”

“I am, Mother. I’m truly happy. Steve is… I don’t know… he’s something else. I never felt anything like this for anyone, I told you, I can’t even describe it. Oh, by the way… I made some friends in the past eleven years.”
“Oh, that’s nice. You’ve been complaining about that for decades, because you didn’t feel like you could relate with most of the people in the world. What kind of friends did you make?”

The conversation moved away from the painful and uncomfortable matters of her birth and how she came to be and turned to more mundane matters, from her friends to her living arrangements to the state of humanity and the aftermath of the battle with Steppenwolf. Diana told her mother about the Justice League and how they were actively working on trying to prevent a second invasion and they constantly kept watch on the world, just in case. She told her about Barry and Victor, about how he still lived thanks to a Mother Box, and that her tales about the previous attempted invasion the Amazons, the Atlanteans and Humans fought off in the past had helped a little in their fight. She also told her about Superman, about how his sacrifice had brought a surge of hope in her and made her don her full gear once again after nearly one hundred years of ditching them in order to work in less flashy attires.

“I think his girlfriend was the first true friend I would really trust with my heart I managed to make after Etta died,” she confessed in the end.

“Etta was the woman that helped you after the Great War, right?”

Diana nodded. “Yes, she helped me settle down, got me a place to live and helped me find a job. She introduced me to Man’s World the best way she could and we remained friends until she died. Oh, and believe it or not, one of her descendants now works with me.”

“Tell me about this Lois though. I’m curious, she seems like an interesting character.”

“Oh Mother, she’s more than that. She’s… in some ways she’s an Amazon, she just fights with words and not with weapons. She’s a journalist, you know, I told you in the past what kind of profession that is right? And she’s one of the best in the field. When she gets a whiff of something that could be even just remotely interesting or better, if she gets her hands on informations she thinks the public should know there’s no way, come hell or high water, that she would stop digging until she gets down to the very truth. Gods… I had such a crush on her…”

“A crush?”

“Yeah, a crush… it’s like… when you’re attracted to someone but you’re not exactly in love, it’s something that can turn into love but in this case it’s just that, a crush. Also, she was still grieving her boyfriend’s death, I would have never even thought about trying anything with her.”

“Out of respect, I understand. You’re still friends though, right?”

Diana nodded again. “Yes, we are. We hear from each other regularly, almost every day. And I read everything she writes for her newspaper or her personal blog. I can say she’s my best friend. Oh, also her boyfriend and Steve go along magnificently. Seems like coming back from the dead is a common theme these days.”

“How long has Steve been back?” asked Hippolyta. She seemed interested, but not the way a ruler would be interested in an invasor, but more like a mother is interested in her daughter’s boyfriend.

“A little less than ten months. He’s made leaps and bounds in order to get used to this century, but the stop forward in time was easier on him than it was for me. Many of the technologies we have today is just the evolution of what he had in his time, but when I set foot in Man’s World… we’re talking about a couple of millennia of tech gap between Themyscira and them, so it was a little easier for him. Also, he’s a spy, one of the requirements for that kind of occupation is quick thinking and ability to get used to new situations fairly quick so, I should have expected that.”
“So I noticed. I was quite surprised when he landed here that he didn’t question anything about our way of life. He actually seemed worried that we wouldn’t be ready to face an invasion, in case the Great War arrived on our shores. Another thing that surprised me was the fact he never questioned my authority,” she mused. “On the other hand, he was always extremely respectful of us and our way of life. Epione told me he was actually curious and interested, but always respectful.”

Diana chuckled, loud. “Told you he’s not just a man…”

In their mindless roaming, they reached a cliff that let them see the spot on the beach where Menalippe had allowed Steve to set up camp. From the height of their position, they could see him sitting in one of the folding chairs from the ship, deeply engrossed in a conversation with Penthiselea, who was his guard at the moment, as she sat in another of the chairs he had pulled from the boat. They couldn’t hear what they were saying, but the noises carried by the wind were those of a playful discussion, with laughter and merry tones.

“I just hope he’s not trying to dig his way into our ranks, to win them over so he can undermine them.”

“He would never do such a thing. I’m fairly sure they’re talking about military tactics and combat. They’re both soldiers and Steve was very impressed with what he saw during the battle on the beach, against the Germans.”

“You never told me that!”

“I never saw a good reason to do so. He was impressed enough that he actually took inspiration from a move he saw Menalippe and Antipe perform to help me get a man perched on a tower in Belgium, weeks later.”

“Interesting…” mused her mother as she observed the quick exchange between her soldier and Steve, both of them laughing in their seats as they talked about the Gods knew what. “Take him to the training camps, tomorrow,” she ordered then. “I want to observe him, before I decide if talking to him, face to face, is worth my time.”

That was weird. Allowing a stranger, let alone a man, to the training grounds? “Are you sure?” asked Diana.

“Yes. He’ll be under strict surveillance and you’ll be hold accountable for any issues he may cause so keep him in check. It’s time to retire now, for both of us. I’ll see you tomorrow in the morning.”

With that, she left. She didn’t say anything more about the matter, she just left.

For a moment, Diana wished she had pockets to push her hands into, even though she wasn’t exactly one to do such a thing in the first place, but she felt it would be appropriate, as a gesture. “Still better than nothing, in the end. Let’s see how it goes tomorrow.”

Chapter End Notes

Two things. First, the book that was mentioned and quoted twice in this story is ”The Ground Beneath Her Feet” by Salman Rushdie, a very recommended read. Not the easiest one, but I loved it. You may be familiar with the title because U2 wrote a song taking the lyrics from the very lines of this book, titled, of course, ”The Ground Beneath
Her Feet". It served as the main title of the movie "The Million Dollar Hotel", directed by Wim Wenders.
Second: I have this headcanon of Diana loving Florence + Machine so bear with me if I start quoting their songs in this story, because I loved them too.
Ah, last but not the least, a fun fact about F+TM: Florence Welch wrote To Be Human, which was sung by Sia and Labrinth for the soundtrack of Wonder Woman. I think it's destiny!
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

I've seen Justice League
I'll retain my judgement until I see the extended cut
Because there will be an extended cut, right?
Also
When Diana whacked Bruce, how cool was that? Way to go, girl!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Diana felt oddly relieved, as she walked down to the path that led to the beach. Things between her and her mother hadn’t exactly cleared up as much as she would have loved, but she would have to make it work. She had mulled over it for so long that probably not even the most heartfelt confession from her mother would be enough to fill the void in her soul.

Maybe in a couple hundred years she would learn to live with it, with the fact that deep down she was the product of an exchange of favors. And yes, she could live with that, it didn’t matter much in the end, her mother had always loved her and her sisters in arms were the best family she could ever hope to live in, what still made her feel like something was amiss was the reticence of both her parents to answer her questions.

It had made her feel abandoned. Zeus had all the time in the world to come and clear things up with her, it took him ninety nine years to come forward. Gods… it was stupid, but she felt like the stereotypical teenager that feels as if her parents couldn’t understand her.

And maybe that was the case, her parents didn’t understand her. Zeus, being a deity, couldn’t understand the struggle of someone who was only half as such and the same went for her mother, who wouldn’t understand how it felt to be half a goddess, even though she had raised her.

Good thing she had decided to take the long way down, since it helped her process the conversation she just had with her mother and calm down a little, so when she got to the place where Steve had set up camp, she wasn’t as distressed anymore. And as she walked closer to the place, she could hear more clearly the words of the conversation going on between Steve and Penthiselea.

“...and you know the best thing about the future? The little things. Back in my day, everything was damn difficult. Even getting from point A from point B. It took me nearly an hour each morning to get to school, and another hour to ride back. Now? Pff, it’s so easy to go anywhere! Oh, don’t get me started on the quality of food.”

“It helps a lot that Diana is a wonderful cook! The Queen made sure she would know how to survive in any situation, from open war to little day to day things and she learned how to cook perfectly.”

“Yes!” he exclaimed. “She’s so great at cooking, I need to work out double not to get fat! I wish I was a quarter as good as her, sometimes I feel like I’m just good at adding Nutella to toasted bread.”

“What’s Nutella?” asked the soldier.

“It’s a spread made of nuts, chocolate and some other things,” explained Diana, finally walking into
the light cast by the fire. “It’s delicious and extremely unhealthy. I see you two are getting along quite well!”

“He has his moments, I have to say,” replied Penthiselea with a subtle laugh in her voice. “How are you doing?”

“Fine, I guess. I just have a lot to think about. You can go and rest, I’ll take care of him.”

Nodding, the Amazon gathered her weapons and stood. “Thanks Diana. Any orders from your mother or Menalippe?”

“Yes, she wants to see him to the training grounds tomorrow. For now I’m in charge of him, you don’t need to worry about him.”

“Oh I’m not worried about him, I’m quite sure you’re indeed in charge of him.”

Behind them, Steve laughed, and Diana instinctively rolled her eyes. “Yes, Penthiselea, I’m in charge. Thanks for trusting him enough to talk to him. It means a lot to me”

“He can be pretty convincing, and contrary to my previous experience, he’s a good man,” she revealed as she jumped on her horse. “Goodnight Diana. And goodnight to you Steve. I guess I’ll see you around tomorrow.”

“Goodnight, Penthiselea. I’ll do my best not to hinder your training tomorrow.”

“You better, we don’t use dummies!”

She spurned the horse and rode away towards the city, leaving them alone. “So?” asked Steve behind her. “I’m allowed to the training grounds?”

Diana nodded. “Yes, for tomorrow. Mother said she wants to take a good look at you, and how you behave around us, before she decides to talk to you face to face,” she explained.

“Fair enough. So? You two talked?”

Dragging the now free chair, she set it beside his and sat down. “Yes, we talked. Menalippe said she brought some wine down, did you drink it all?”

“Uh? Oh, no, I barely touched it.” He turned and picked an earthenware bottle from the sand. “I was just keeping it away from the fire, no one likes warm wine unless it’s mulled.” He poured a good amount in a cup and handed it to her. “That bad?”

She shook her head as she drank. “Not really, no. Just… inconclusive? She confirmed what Zeus said, that it was an exchange of favors.”

“Then why didn’t she tell you earlier?” he asked, pouring some wine for himself.

“Turns out she was ashamed because she enjoyed it,” she revealed. “She was basically slut-shaming herself, on her own.”

“Let me get this straight, because I’m a little confused. The Amazons are basically the total cultural opposite of slut shaming… and their queen has spent the last… how long?”

“Nine hundred years, give or take a few.”

“Wait, you’re nine hundred years old? Wow… No, let’s not go down that road, I don’t even want to
think about it. You mean that for nine hundred years she’s been reticent to talk about your parentage… because she was ashamed of having enjoyed sex?” He paused, scratching his beard as he looked into the fire in front of them. “Makes no sense to me.”

“You think it makes sense to me? I don’t really know what to say, I have the feeling I’ll never get the whole truth, but for now I guess it will have to be enough,” she explained. “It’s not much, but it’s something. It’s better than before.”

Steve gave her a quick nod. “As long as you’re fine with it, it’s alright by me. Did your mother say anything about me?”

“Yes, that she thinks you’re too good to be true, from how I’m describing you, and that she wants to observe how you act tomorrow at the training grounds, before she decides if you’re worthy of a holding a private conversation with her.”

Shrugging his shoulders, he smiled. “I’ll do my best to be the best guest you’ve ever had on the island.”

“Ah,” she chuckled. “The only guest we’ve had on this island, Gods excluded.” Diana took a long, deep breath and exhaled slowly. “Come on, let’s get to bed. The training today kind of knocked my socks off, I’m not used to this regiment anymore.”

“You still have quite a backlog of lost sleep, I’m not surprised you’re tired. Let’s see what happens tomorrow.”

Steve had a hard time waking up the next morning, or better at the asscrack of dawn. He was an early riser, but hell getting out a comfortable bed before the sun rose above the sea, and abandon the cozyness of cuddling with Diana so early? That was simply a crime.

Nevertheless, he pushed himself off the bed, dressed in the most comfortable clothes he had brought with him, slipped in his running shoes and followed Diana as she jogged up the hill to the training grounds for the early morning drills. Still bleary eyed and slightly grumpy for the lack of coffee, Steve was made to stand on a cliff behind Menalippe as she commanded the early morning exercises all the fighting Amazons did, every morning. To his merely mortal point of view, though he technically wasn’t a mortal anymore, it looked like the most gruelling training he had ever seen. No wonder Diana never got tired when she hit the gym, while he was reduced to a stinky, sweaty mop of flesh and bones.

One hour later, with the sun finally up, the Amazons finally were allowed to stop training for a while and have breakfast, brought to them by the many cooks that provided food for the soldiers. They sat at long tables, cavalry beside footsoldiers, lancers shoulders to shoulders with hoplites, commanders sharing trays of food and jugs of drinks with their subordinates. Suddenly he realized how idiotic Man’s World separation between soldiers and generals must have looked like to Diana, when he had brought her to London. She came from a society where the lines that separated the most humble soldier from the commander in gilded armor weren’t just blurry, they were nonexistent. And he had taken her, completely forgetting to prepare her, into a world that not only separated soldier from commander, sometimes with oceans between them, but also shut every possible door for women who wanted to do more for the world than just sitting quietly and just be what society wanted them to be.

Deep down, he felt like the biggest idiot in the world.

But as she looked at Diana now, he couldn’t help but feel a sense of wonder deep in his heart. There
she sat, a goddess among divine creatures, sitting among her sisters in arms and treated like she was just one of the many, not special at all. As they ate what was served on the large trays in front of them - some kind of pancake called *tagenites* sprinkled with honey, and wheat gruel that some consumed with the addition of honey and others with more savory condiments - they spoke of their ideas for the day, the training they were going to do and other menial matters. All Steve could do though was sitting there beside Diana, one end of her Lasso wrapped around his ankle so he could understand them, and eat in reverential silence, as the others didn’t know he was actually listening.

“What do you think we’ll be doing today?” asked one of the soldiers.

“I have no idea what the General has prepared, I just wish she’d let us train with the lance. I’m out of practice,” replied a woman sitting in front of him. “I wouldn’t mind some training with spears too, but the lance will be more than welcomed.”

“What about you Diana? Is there anything you’d like to train in today?”

She quickly swallowed a spoonful of gruel. “Shield technique,” she said. “I could use some training with the shield. I think I’m getting sloppy with it, and that I rely too much on my sword.”

*Sloppy?* He thought. *What the hell is she talking about?*

“Yes, that would be a good training for today. How’s your horseback fighting?”

“I live in an age where horses have lost their significance in battle and they’re not used anymore, but I would love to train in horseback fighting too.”

*Uh, that could be interesting…* he said to himself as he took a long sip of milk from his cup. To him, being a witness to the Amazon’s training regime, even for just one day and less than twentyfour hours after having arrived, felt like a privilege and he wanted to learn as much as he could about their warfare tactics and training regime.

Some minutes later, when almost all plates were empty and the hungry stomachs sated, Menalippe stood and silence fell on the huge crowd of warriors. “Today’s training regime!” she announced. “Footsoldiers will train in basics!”

“Looks like Diana is getting her wishes granted!” exclaimed one of the women behind them.

“Cavalry will train in evasive tactics!”

“But not Kasia!” said the same voice, talking about the other Amazon that wanted to train with the lance.

“Ooh shut up, lances can be used as an evasive tactic!”

A short-lived moment of hilarity coursed through the table and Steve barely managed to make it look like he hadn’t understood what they were talking about, before Menalippe called for silence again. “This goes for the morning session. After lunch cavalry will take care of training the new horses while the others will train in hand to hand combat. Understood?”

An affirmative yell raised from the tables. “Good. Now you may have noticed we have a guest today. He’s here by our Queen’s order, with the solemn promise he won’t hinder our training. He’s here to observe, but he’s also here to be observed, so keep a close eye on him. Just don’t hurt him in any way if he does nothing to invoke your ire.” Another burst of laughter exploded around him and he felt Diana’s hand on his back, as if to say *you’ll be fine*. “And in any case just go and bother Diana if he turns out to be an idiot, got it? Now go back to work, or do I have to remind you how
badly we performed with Steppenwolf last year?"

With that, everyone sprung from their seat, gathered their weapons and proceeded to walk to the training grounds. With a quick flick of her wrist, Diana untangled the lasso from his ankle so he could move without stumbling with every step he took and hooked it to the strip of leather tied to her belt. “I swear to my grandfather’s grave I’m going back to the boat!” he exclaimed as he followed her. “If I have to be such a nuisance I’ll take myself out of the situation. On my own accord!”

“Give them time, Steve. Just… don’t make them angry and you’ll be fine.”

“Diana, come on, my presence is enough to make them angry. My existence is enough to make them angry, the fact that I still breathe is enough to piss them off. Some of them won’t be happy until I exhale my last dying breath! I can give them all the time in the world but… they’re immortal! They can hold a grudge on me for as long as they want!”

“Last time we checked, you were immortal too, as long as I’m alive or we’re together. You can give them time too!”

Baffled beyond belief, Steve found it really hard to get a decent comeback. And in the end, it was lame all the same. “I don’t want to wait that long,” he mumbled with a slight pout.

It didn’t matter what he thought though, the warriors were going to train, whether they accented his presence or not. At first he decided to stand in a corner and observe from a distance, constantly keeping Diana in his line of sight. From his little corner, he tried to keep track of all the activity going on in front of him and he had a really hard time doing so. There was so many interesting actions being displayed before his eyes he could barely keep track of the bigger picture, let alone the little details, no matter how hard he tried.

Until Menalippe, walking among the small different groups of warriors training with each other, noticed his struggle and the apparently clear look of curiosity printed on his face and moved towards him. “Want to come with me during rounds?”

Her voice broke his deep state of concentration and he jolted on his feet, startled.. “Uh, what?” he asked.

The general gave him a quick smile. “You’re curious, I can see that. But you don’t want to intrude, I can see that too. Come with me, so you can see better whatever interests you.”

Steve was sure his eyes sparkled like those of a child in front of Christmas presents as he jogged towards her. “Thanks General, I really appreciate it. It’s just… everything is just so… I don’t know, so different from what I know, but it also looks so effective!”

“We haven’t been training for thousands of years only to train with less than effective tactics, don’t you think?”

“Fair enough. It’s just… when I did my own training I was taught so many things that were actually useless in battle… here everything is so perfectly timed and executed! I mean, look there!” He pointed at a small group of warriors training together in a tight circle, one standing inside it with a shield deflecting deadly sword strikes from her sisters in arms around her. “I’m not a trained swordfighter so I can’t really judge, but that is… amazing!”

Menalippe took a moment to judge him, staring at him with an intense gaze from head to toe. “You didn’t seem so eager, when you first landed here.”

“I was nothing but a fool, I admit it. It’s only fair after all, I made a mistake and misjudged you. After
I saw what Diana could do though…"

“Ah, it’s nice to see a man admitting he was wrong. I’m glad.”

“General, if I may be honest… being a flick of a finger away from certain death changed the way I see life. It changed the way I value time, mostly. The fact that the Gods decided to tie my destiny to Diana’s and grant me immortality as long as we are together, it doesn’t change what happened to me. I was ready to die to stop a war and I would it again, a thousand times more. But I’ve survived, and I’m done being a foolish man who hides behind cockyness and old-fashioned male stupidity, I can admit when I’m wrong and I will do it. I will take credit when it’s due, but this is not the case. I was wrong, I made many mistakes the first time I crashed here and this time I want to change the way you see me. All of you.”

Menalippe chuckled and gently shook her head, smiling. “Gods… no wonder Diana’s so smitten. Alright, I’ll take your words as true and sincere, but that doesn’t mean you’re off my hook. Now come with me and try to be a good boy, people here train hard to fight harder, if you’re going to disturb them, they’ll easily shut you up with a freshly sharpened blade at your throat. Understood, Captain?”

Acting purely on instinct, he found himself standing up right at attention. “Yes sir!” he said, stern and quick, like a soldier.

“Oh, Hippolyta will love that! At ease, Captain, you’re a guest here, not one of my soldiers. Just let me give you some advice: try not to make yourself look weak. Stand tall, you’ve done nothing wrong no matter what they tell you. Unfortunately, Antiope and others died when you arrived, but it wasn’t your fault. You didn’t shoot them, nor you wanted them dead. It took me a long while to come to terms with it, but it wasn’t your fault. So don’t act like you have to apologize for it, because you don’t have to. It makes you look weak, and if there’s something an Amazon, any Amazon for what I know, despise it’s weakness. Now come, we have a lot to do.”

Steve may have not been one of Menalippe’s soldiers, but he was very aware of the fact that military hierarchy hadn’t changed too much from the time the Amazons lived among men and his own days in the Navy. A lowly captain walking right beside a general wouldn’t be seen that well, so he took great care to always walk a couple of steps behind her as he accompanied her in her rounds to check on her training warriors. As they were split in numerous smaller groups, she often stopped close to one or another in order to observe and possibly show them a way to improve their techniques. She was kind enough to do it in English, so he would understand, and he tried his best to keep up with her and retain every single new information he got. He also tried with all his might to not smile like a schoolboy standing in front of his teenage crush when they approached the group where Diana was training, to make the best impression he could.

He knew very well that he had hundreds, if not thousands pairs of murderous eyes trained on him, but those eyes were also trained on Diana, as they would judge her for every mistake he made, so he tried very hard not to make any.

Every step he took was carefully measured. Every word he spoke thought twice if not three times. He would actually speak only when talked to, as he preferred to remain silent and listen to what others said. More often than not, the Amazons were considerate enough to use English to speak when he was present, and when they wouldn’t, Diana would quickly wrap her lasso around his wrist or ankle, so he would understand the same.

This routine lasted for a good week. He and Diana would wake up right before dawn and join the others in the morning routine. As they did their exercises, with Menalippe’s consent he would go on his daily morning run, then breakfast, more training and so on, until the sun went down, they shared
the last meal together with the Amazons then why would retire to the dock, to rest. A quiet routine, lather rinse repeat almost.

Until one night Hippolyta called for celebrations, with music and readings of poetry and dramas and so on. That meant shortened training in the afternoon, a more lavishing meal and a little more freedom before bedtime. But it was clear that Steve wasn’t invited, he felt it on his skin, a sudden buzz of animosity in the air after days of watchful calmness on the Amazons’ part. Therefor, as soon as he had finished his dinner, he quietly took leave.

“Are you sure you don’t mind?” Diana asked him as he stood from the table.

“I’ll be fine, don’t worry about me, I’ll be just fine. Stay here and have fun, I’ll wait for you.” He gently squeezed her shoulders and with a smile, turned towards the road and walked away. He truly didn’t mind, being alone for a few hours to give her some time alone with her friends. Getting some time alone would do him good after all.

He took his time, walking slowly with the gravel crunching with each step, and enjoyed the cool breeze coming from the sea. It had been a good, tiring day. He had been invited to spar too, an invitation he had promptly accepted, only to regret it about two hours later. He knew for certain that the Amazons trained harder than any division he had been with, but hell they handled him like he was a punching bag. He was sore in places he had no idea they existed, but he was oddly glad about it, since finally some of the Amazons were accepting his presence, enough to at least acknowledge his role as a fellow soldier and ask him to train with them.

When he finally reached the dock, he amassed a large quantity of wood and proceeded to right a fire with the modern flint and tinder he had found on the boat, courtesy of Poseidon. Once the fire was finally lit and on its way to become self sufficient, he grabbed a chair and the book he was reading then, stretching his legs, reprised where he had left the day before.

He had no idea how much time he spent reading, he could vaguely hear the noises of a large crowd in the distance but most of the ruckus was covered by the gentle lapping of the water on the shore behind him, but the mix of the two sounds, along with the cracking of the fire, was oddly soothing, and with time he felt his sore muscles relax and the pain slowly go away.

Yes, it had been a good day.

And it looked like it was going to be a good night too. Despite the fact that the party was still raging up in town, Diana had come down. She had come around the area lit by the fire, but she had made no effort to hide herself, he saw her in the corner of his vision without effort, but said nothing.

When she loosely wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed his cheek, he felt his heart skip a beat or two, in a pleasant way. “Interesting read?”

“Yes, not bad. A little too wordy for my tastes, but it’s not that bad.”

“I agree. I read it when it came out, but I never understood the appeal. The story is interesting, but the way it’s written? War And Peace flows better in my opinion.”

Steve closed the book and let it fall beside the chair. “What about your party? Not interesting enough?”

She smiled against his cheek. “No, it was interesting. It’s just that I’ve never been one for partying myself. I’d rather be down here with you.”

“And what should we do, down here, all by ourselves?” he asked her, standing up and facing her.
He pulled her close and turned so he could see her in the light of the fire. God, she was so beautiful.

“Oh, well, I can think of a lot of activities we could do all by ourselves…” she whispered in a sultry tone that made chills run down his spine as she played with the short hair on the nape of his neck, twisting the strands in a dire need of a trim.

“Really? Uh… let me see if I can think of something too…” And then he heard the distant sound of drums, coming from the citadel. “Oh that reminds me of a song!” he exclaimed.

Diana turned towards the source of the sound. “Which song?”

Steve thought hard to identify what song he was thinking about, but at the same time he grabbed her hand and, as she had said so long ago, started swaying, much to her entertainment. “Ah, there, got it! Accepting all I’ve done and said…”

She laughed, hard. “Oh no come on you know that song turns me into a puddle of emotions!” she yelled trying to shut him up.

She only managed to make him sing louder. “I want to stand and stare again…”

“Steve stop!” She was already teary-eyed. “Really, stop it!”

He pulled her even closer against him and kissed her, hard, one of those kiss that gets a lot of attention in public. Diana carded her fingers through his hair and moaned loud, before she pulled back. “Steve… if you keep singing I’ll cry like a baby girl.”

“Till there’s nothing left out…”

Chuckling, she pushed him away. “Damn the day you learned how to use a computer…”

With a wide smile, he gently pulled her close to him again, his arms loose around her as she lay her head on his chest. He splayed his hands on her back, the stark difference between her naked skin and her thick leather armor made his fingertips singe with a strange, unknown sensation that traveled up his arms and to his heart, which he was ready to bet on that it was beating in tune with hers, following the rhythm of the music in their heads. “Oh, it remains there in your eyes Whatever comes and goes I will hear your silent call.”

She shook her head and sniffled, hard. “I love you so much…”

Choking up a little bit himself, he just kept going. “And I will touch this tender wall,” he singing softly in her ear, the flow of the music now unbroken by any external sound like the water or the fire. He could actually hear the song in his head, as if he was listening to it with his iPod. “Till I know I’m home again, in your eyes.”

Chapter End Notes

In case you're interested, this is the song Steve is singing
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evN6D1GPlUM
For a more modern recording played live with the actual people that played on the original recording in 1986 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdCZH_ppmek (fun
fact, I was there when they recorded this live DVD, not even 24 hours in London to go
to a concert and then back home in Italy, one of the best adventures of my life)
Other fun fact, the female vocalist of the first video I linked is the singer that wrote and
performed the theme for Dawson's Creek. Those around my age maybe know her for
that.
Hippolyta didn’t really know what to think about Diana’s sudden but not unexpected disappearance from the celebrations. She had never been one for large gatherings like this one, she had always been more interested in battles and training instead of big social gatherings, or at least not those so big so she wasn’t exactly surprised to see her leave. It had happened before and she didn’t mind.

But knowing where she was going, watching her leave left a bitter taste in her mouth.

She had taken great care in observing her in the past week, as she examined how Steve acted. It was like turning time back one hundred years, to a time before Diana had left for Man’s World. Somehow, the veil of sadness that had blanketed her ever since she had left the first time seemed to be gone, and her bright smile had returned in its purest, most sincere form. And Hippolyta couldn’t be happier about it, but there was still something that felt wrong to her.

Steve Trevor.

She wanted to believe Diana’s words about him, that he was different from other men and such… but her own experience was clashing with the notion that there could be a man that could be different from the lot.

She was also curious to meet him. Very curious. In the past few days he had behaved impeccably, showing nothing but respect for everyone on the island, taking great care of respecting hierarchy and addressing the higher ups with the appropriate rank, also he never spoke unless someone spoke to him first, except with Diana of course. Even Menalippe and Artemis were praising his attitude, with the former admiring his curiosity and will to learn and the latter his skills in combat. He didn’t stand a chance with the less capable Amazon soldier, yet he showed signs of improvement and most of all the desire to learn. Practically everyone she had spoken to had at least something good to say about him, deep beneath the prejudice born from his gender.

“Hippolyta?”

Artemis’ voice pulled her out of her thoughts. “Yes?”

“You can go, if you want. Check on them, I mean. We can hold on our own here.”

She sighed. “Am I really that predictable?”

“Well, it’s not like we have lots of experience with children, but we all helped raising her, together. And right in this moment most of us want to know what those two are doing. Unless they’re having sex, then I don’t want to know,” added Menalippe with a disgusted smirk. “Go, see how he is around here when we’re not around, ready to slash his throat if he only dares to treat her unfairly.”

“You think he’s that kind of man?”

Artemis shook her head. “No, he’s not that kind of man. He adores her, he probably worships the earth where she walks, I highly doubt he would ever raise a hand on her other than to touch her in the most reverential way you can think. Also, she would probably kill him, if he tried. But you need to see for yourself, so go.”
She shook her head and sighed. “Alright, I’ll go. Diana told me he wants to talk to me, one on one. I’ll see how he is around her then I’ll decide if he deserves this conversation.”

Menalippe nodded. “Good idea. Just… be kind on that boy. He’s a man, and we know we have a bad history with males but he’s different, Diana’s right. He’s one of the rare ones that actually admit when they’re wrong.”

“Right, I’ll see what happens.” With that, Hippolyta stood and excused herself. Not that many people cared about her leaving, between the music, the food and the mead flowing like a river, the Amazons weren’t really interested about the whereabouts of their Queen.

She hurried to the cliff where she and Diana had spied on Steve and Penthiselea about a week before and managed to get there a little while before Diana got to the dock. Steve was quietly sitting beside the fire, reading a book. From the distance, he looked at ease, if only a little tired, as he concentrated on his reading. For what she could see, he was simply relaxing a little before going to bed, but deep down, Hippolyta felt that if she let her guard down, that man would once again bring misfortune to the island, just like the other time.

It didn’t matter much if he did it on purpose or by accident.

Just as she saw Diana approaching him on the beach, she felt a gust of warm air behind her, then the sound of heavy footsteps coming closer. “They’re cute, aren’t they?”

She took a deep, steadying breath before she spoke. “Zeus, what are you doing here?”

“Zeus, you made it clear the night we conceived her that she isn’t your daughter!” she exclaimed, turning towards him.

She found him in modern clothes, from what she could tell. Dark trousers and a white shirt, with sleeves rolled up to his elbows. He just shrugged his shoulders. “What can I say, after I met her I kind of grew attached to her. She’s a great girl, you did a great job raising her.”

“Well, thank you very much,” she replied with a soft grunt. “What are you doing here, for real?”

“I’ve heard that you’re having a little trouble trusting Steve. I just wanted to come and see what the problem was, because when I met him, he didn’t seem much of a problem to me. He’s a better man than I’ll ever be, if you’re worried about that.”

“And when the hell did you meet him? Diana spoke about meeting you, but said nothing about you meeting Steve!”

Zeus chuckled and walked closer to the edge of the cliff, hands pushed deep in the pockets of his pants. “Because she doesn’t know. Steve too doesn’t know too actually. I wanted him to feel free to talk about whatever he wanted, I didn’t want him to change the way he acted around me, knowing who I was. I disguised myself as a businessman and we travelled together on a flight from Metropolis to Paris, for eight hours or so. We talked a lot.”

“How about what?” asked the Queen.

“Many things… fools and kings. Life, love, books. We changed subject every five minutes. He’s very affable and can hold a conversation for a long while.”

“Uh… and what’s your opinion on him?”
Zeus took a deep breath and released it in one strong puff. “I think he’s a good guy. I’m sincere here. Steve Trevor is a gem of a person. He’s great, he’s kind, attentive, smart and wise way beyond his age. He knows the meaning of sacrifice and he’s ready to do things that most men would never even dare to think about, if he thinks it’s the right thing. But the most important thing is that he loves her. No, better, Steve adores her.”

“People keep telling me that,” she added.

“Because it’s true, Hippolyta. He’s changed a lot for her, because of her. He turned his view on the world upside down because of her, in the span of a few weeks, did you know that?”

Hippolyta shook her head. “No, I had no idea. It’s not like I knew him very well, before now.”

“Then try to get to know him now, you’ll understand what Diana sees in him.”

“What if I don’t really care about what she sees in him?” she snapped.

He closed his eyes and sighed. “Then you’re going to lose her. And Hippolyta, please, don’t lie to me. I’ve known you since your first breath, I’ve created you. I know you’re not like this. You’re not one to hold a grudge like this to someone that has never done anything to you.”

“He took her away from me, Zeus! He took her away from the island and he made her suffer so bad that she was the one that really changed! She wasn’t the same when she came back, only now I can see glimpses of the Diana I used to know!”

Zeus shook his head. “Hippolyta, he didn’t take her away. He was merely a messenger from the Fates. It was time for Diana to come forward and do what we made her for. Remember what we agreed on that night, she’s your daughter, but she’s also my weapon. Steve… he was just unlucky enough to be caught in a game bigger than him. And unfortunately, it cost him his life. But now he’s here, and like it or not he’s here to stay.”

They remained silent for a long while, just observing the two youngsters as they danced to the rhythm of the drums being played in town. When she heard Diana laugh, Hippolyta couldn’t help but smile wide, despite her overall bad disposition towards Steve. It didn’t matter that he was the cause of that laugh, she was just happy to hear her daughter laugh again, so bright and carefree.

“Oh, he’s singing to her!” said Zeus, apparently very entertained.

“What?”

“He’s singing! Here, listen!” he waved his hand and made some kind of magic allowed her to hear them. “Oh my dear boy, you’ve got good tastes!”

“You know this… song?” she asked, trying to listen closely.

Zeus nodded. “Oh yes, it was a major hit thirty-something years ago. Listen to the words… they’re magical.”

“Then why is she crying?” she asked, flexing her fingers as if she was holding her sword.

“Oh shut up for a moment and listen! Diana isn’t sad, she’s moved. By the way, let’s… enhance the experience a little bit.”

He flicked his fingers and suddenly the air was filled with the rest of the instruments, sounds she had never heard but that formed a pleasing melody. As she listened, paying close attention to the words
she actually understood why Diana felt moved to tears. It was a sincere declaration of love.

“Oh…” she murmured. “I see your point.”

Zeus smiled. “I’m happy you do. Are you ready to give him a chance?”

She sighed “Do I really have to?”

“Hippolyta, listen to someone that knows a thing or two about estranged children. There’s a rift between you and Diana, a rift I’m partially responsible for and that is getting bigger and bigger. We took decisions that in hindsight were just wrong, because unconsciously we undermined her confidence. And guess who’s helping her getting that confidence back?”

“Steve.”

“Exactly. If you show her you are at least trying to get to know him, the rift will start closing. It might take some time, but you’ll get your daughter back,” he explained. “Or at least you’ll see the Diana you knew before she left way more often.”

Much to her chagrin, Zeus was right. There was a rift between Diana and her, for which he was one of the causes because of decisions they had made a very long time before, not really knowing what would happen or what kind of twists and turns destiny had undergone through, changes they hadn’t predicted or hadn’t thought about, and most of all, he was right about how she could help that rift close.

By accepting Steve Trevor and stop showing animosity against him. Animosity he had done absolutely nothing to deserve. Given her past experiences and what Zeus had said about Steve being a messenger from the Fates, everything that had happened from Diana’s birth to that very day was probably part of a bigger plan that except for little glimpses here and there was hidden even from the Gods. But considering the past one hundred years, she could take for granted that Steve was indeed written in Diana’s fate, no matter how much she could despise it.

It would only take her a little effort on her part to start mending a wound that still bled profusely, even after a century, give or take a few days. Diana had tried multiple times, but she had been too proud to see her daughter’s attempts to come clear with her.

*Gods, I’ve been so stupid...*

Standing up straight, she nodded. “I’ll give him a chance. I just wish none of this had happened.”

“You mean you wish she never fell in love with him?”

“That too. I thought I had made sure to bring her up in a way she’d never tie her existence to someone else, so that she would rely on herself and be independent but I guess I made a mistake or two here and there.”

Zeus, chuckled and ran his fingers through his hair. “What if I told you everything you did was right, and that falling in love with Steve was written in Diana’s destiny the day she was born?”

“Yes, I’ve considered it might be an option.” Folding her arms across her chest, Hippolyta turned to look at him with a twisted smirk stamped on her face. “Why am I not surprised? You Gods tend to have a sick sense of humor, I’ve learned that a very long time ago. I wouldn’t be too surprised if you already knew what comes next for them.”

He groaned. “Of course I know! I checked if anything had changed the moment her friend Barry
went back in time and brought Steve back before we could go forward with our reincarnation plan. Let’s just say they’ll soon have their hands full,” he said, very amused. “Way sooner than they think to be honest.”

Hippolyta felt the blood drain from her face. “You mean she’s…”

“No yet. Not that I know of at least,” he replied, shaking his head with a sly smile. “But let’s say they came here as a couple, but they might leave as a trio.”

“Oh come on…”

“Hey, it’s not sealed yet! It isn’t bound to happen right here, right now, you know better than me that the fate of a person isn’t exactly set in stone so things may still change, I just wanted to warn you. Don’t tell me you hadn’t thought of this possibility!”

She gave him one of those killer looks she knew scared the crap out of everyone. Right on cue, he grimaced, finally wiping that smug grin from his face that gave her a not quite so metaphorical heartburn from the sheer frustration. “Right, got it. You thought about it. And I guess you’re not happy.”

“Should I be?” she asked him, bitterly.

“I don’t know… it would be nice to have a child on the island again, you know… for a change. Don’t you get bored here?”

For a brief moment, the prospect of seeing a child again on Themyscira didn’t look too bad, but then she remembered they were talking about Diana and most of all about Steve Trevor and such a prospect didn’t look so good, all of a sudden. “Don’t…” she started. “Don’t make me think about that. It’s too soon. They’re not ready yet.”

“Ninety nine years, nine months and twelve days, Hippolyta. She’s been in love with Steve for that long. Not infatuated, mind that, but in love. Aphrodite is still giddy about it, she calls them one of her greatest accomplishments as a matchmaker. I think it’s long enough. Also, were you ready to have a baby, when you had her?”

The Queen groaned in frustration. “What about him? What if one day he realizes he doesn’t love her and leaves?”

Zeus sighed again and pinched the bridge of his nose, frustrated himself. “Hippolyta, what part of it’s their destiny, or Aphrodite’s greatest matchmaking accomplishment isn’t clear? They’re bound to be together for the rest of their lives, unless something catastrophic happens. And by catastrophic, I mean something way worse than Steppenwolf, like… ten times, no better, a million times worse than that. Don’t worry about that, we’ve got that covered.”

“Well allow me to be a little skeptical about your concept of covered. Last time you said you had it covered your son nearly annihilated us all, and you had to go into hiding!” she replied, words seething through clenched teeth.

“Well do I have to remind you that out of all the Amazons that still live only Diana is trying to do what I created you for?”

Hippolyta grunted. “That was a low blow.”

“It doesn’t change the fact that it’s the truth. But I’m not here to judge anyone, I gave you free will and this is what you chose. I’m just glad you came to help Diana and her friends last year, when they
needed it. Listen, I’ve got to go and I’m quite sure you have a lot to do and even more to think about, I’ll leave you to that. Just… give them a chance.”

“Tell me something, Zeus,” she prompted, after a brief moment of thoughtful silence. “Why are you so adamantly about this matter? You never imposed your figure in Diana’s upbringing, you barely know her and you’ve stepped down from your pedestal a very long time ago. Why coming up now and be their most strenuous paladin?”

The God shrugged his wide shoulders. “As I said before, I made errors with my own offspring and I learned I think or two about estranged children, in the past few centuries. Diana’s probably my last chance to look back and say to myself that I actually did something good among the millions of mistakes, even though my role in her rearing was nothing more than providing an overpowered semen sample. And before you cringe, it Hera that invented the term, not me.”

“Ohm,” she chuckled, sincerely entertained. “I must say the definition fits you very well.”

He smiled. “I knew you’d agree. And before I leave, one last thing. Diana may have not turned out the way you intended her to be, but she’s grown to be the best paragon humanity could strive to be. And that’s all your doing. I know you don’t deem humanity worthy of her, but he is. Worthy of her, I mean. Now, goodbye Hippolyta, I’ll leave you be. Call, if you need anything.”

With one last quick nod, he walked away from the ledge and disappeared in a gust of wind behind her back.

True, she had a lot to think about, but she wasn’t exactly keen on pondering on the matter, to be completely honest with herself. But looking down at Diana and Steve, swaying around the fire to the ghostly music of a song she had never heard of but they seemed to enjoy a lot, and they both looked so happy it made her heart burst with joy. She could hear Diana giggle, a sound Hippolyta had missed for the past one hundred years. It was heartwarming.

Doubt though still nagged at her, in the back of her mind. She knew that Zeus was right, that giving up the animosity towards Steve would help her and Diana healing the still oozing wound between them, but as a mother she couldn’t help but fear that one day he could just get bored with time and leave her. Sure, he would lose his immortality, but he had already received a second chance, he could just be happy with it and forget her, live his own life as he wished. She dreaded that possibility with all her might.

“So? Any naughtiness? Scabrous details I wouldn’t want to see?”

That was Menalippe, quickly climbing the decline that led to the ledge from the gravel road. “No, they’re just…” Hippolyta looked down at the couple and sighed. “I guess that’s what they call dancing in Man’s World.”

Her general looked herself and her face twisted into a puzzled grin. “That’s… swaying, not dancing.”

“Don’t look at me, I’m as puzzled as you are.”

“Uh… what’s this sound?”

“Oh, that? It’s Steve. He’s singing to her.”

“And the rest of the music?”

Hippolyta chuckled. “That’s Zeus’ doing. He just left, he wanted me to hear what he was doing,
because apparently Diana loves this song and he decided to give them the full experience. And make me listen to it too. Seems quite a long piece.”

“Uh… Zeus was here. Twice in a year, that’s a record. When was the last time he visited that often?”

“Never happened,” replied the Queen.

Menalippe remained silent for a while, just observing Diana and Steve down on the beach. “It’s cute though. What he’s doing. She seems happy, don’t you think? Happier than I’ve seen her in the past century at least.”

“Yes,” she mused. “She does. Seems like it’s their destiny, to be together. And apparently Aphrodite calls them one of their greatest matchmaking accomplishments.”

Behind her, the second in command barely managed to contain a boastful laughter that sounded a lot like a cheerful told you so , but she decided to let it go. “Yes, I know. The Fates and the Gods have a strange sense of humor.”

“I guess you’re now forced at least to talk to him and hear him out. What do you think he wants to tell you? Do you have any idea?”

Taking a deep breath, Hippolyta took a step back from the ledge and turned towards Menalippe. “Oh I have a very clear idea of what he wants to tell me. And I don’t like it one bit.”

Chapter End Notes

From the very beginning of this story, I had two scenes in mind. This one, and another that has been hinted but not showed yet, though it will be seen in the future. Hope you just didn’t mind the spoiler too much!
“How the hell can you do this every single day of your life?” Steve whined as they jogged up the dirt road to the citadel, with the light rays of the rising sun behind them warming their backs.

Diana turned around to look at him, struggling behind her on the uphill road. He was used to running on flat surfaces, not on mountain paths, and despite the daily trek, he still had to get used to it. And maybe he had the wrong kind of running shoes, everything considered. “We do… that’s it. It’s called training, we train for many reasons, one of them is simply fitness.”

Panting, he stopped and leaned forward, setting his hands on his knees as he tried to catch his breath. “Your concept of fitness is way… way different than mine. This is torture! Even Bruce would tell you the same, and his training regime is ridiculous!”

“You don’t have to do it, you know. Menalippe offered you the possibility to train with us, that doesn’t mean you have to.”

He shook his head. “It wasn’t an offer, I didn’t have the possibility to refuse. That was an order, from a general to an inferior officer. They’re testing me, they want to see if I’m good enough for you.”

Smiling, Diana grabbed one of his hands and pulled his arm so he would stand up right and face her. “You are good enough for me, no matter what they say or how long you run for them. And no matter how good you perform, they’ll never think you are worthy.”

He nodded. “I know. I know they’ll never see beyond the fact that I’m a man. But I’ll never give them the pleasure to see me give up. I’ll follow your trainers’ lead down to the last rep, until my body fail me.”

“Oh, Steve…” She hugged him tight. “I don’t care what they think of you, you don’t have to do this for me!”

“I know you don’t care,” he replied, a sly smile curving his lips in the most delightful way. “But I care. And I know it’s just my ego that makes me do this, and that it is absurd, but I can’t do much about it, it’s who I am. Do you still want to marry this pile of old fashioned bones with an oversized pride?”

Ah, pride… she thought. In her century in Man’s World she had become closely acquainted with boisterous males who cared more about their pride and less about their health. In fact, she had the
feeling half of the Justice League reasoned that way. Only Barry seemed completely devoid of pride and more interested in self preservation than to be a cocky boaster.

“Well, I like the full package, the mix of pride, cockyness, kindness and bravery, and it’s kind of a take or leave it deal…” she explained, chuckling. “And I’m all for taking it.”

“Great. Now let’s see if Kasia manages to break my ribs.”

Well, she didn’t, but not for lack of trying. Kasia held a grudge on Steve, even more than all other Amazons, because of the nature of her relationship with Diana before she left, which was… closely knitted to say the least. Diana had made no secret of the nature of her relationship with the Amazon, and Steve seemed to be fairly unfazed by the reunion, if it wasn’t for the slightly murderous approaches Kasia had made to him during training.

She wasn’t really trying to kill him, or so Diana hoped, but she tended to hit him fairly harder than she’d hit other trainees, if she ever had the chance to do so. And she made sure to have at least one every training session. Good thing Steve was a quick study and had learned how to correctly use a shield or the scabbard of a sword to parry or deflect her vicious attacks.

That day she wasn’t in their group though, she was assigned to a different area so for the day, Steve’s ribs were safe. But that didn’t matter, there were at least a hundred other Amazons ready to take Kasia’s place and punch him a little harder than what was actually needed, no matter how hard Menalippe catered for him and his safety.

Ten days into the observation routine turned into training regimen and still no incident worse than a few bruises and a scraped elbow, but Diana knew that the good streak was going to end one day or another. Sure, Steve wouldn’t train with the Amazons forever, in fact they still had about three weeks of stay on Themyscira left before they had to leave to sail back to Italy and then return to Paris, but for now, Diana just kept her guard up, in case something happened.

One little consolation came from the fact that Epione was still in charge of the medical team, and if an accident was ever to happen, she was the best healer the Amazons ever had. A small detail that made a whole lot of difference.

Because the day Steve’s body failed him, unfortunately, hard arrived.

He was training in hand to hand combat and unharmed defence, changing partner after each exchange. It was a common teaching tactic Menalippe had borrowed from Antiope, as their former general used to think that a stab could be attempted in a thousand different ways by a thousand different opponents, and a warrior should be able to defend from all those thousand attempts. Steve had been doing mostly fine with the sequence, improving his technique with each repetition, and he seemed to get the hang of the exercise pretty well, but he was suffering a little when it came to be the attacker and endure the defensive maneuver. After at least a hundred, if not more, repetitions, he was clearly worn out. It was late afternoon, he had given almost all he had left that morning too during the resistance circuit training Menalippe had come up with, he got distracted and Danai, the Amazon he was sparring with, didn’t notice his lack of concentration and proceeded as if everything was just fine.

As a result, Steve fell badly on his back on the hard ground so all air left his lungs in one short burst of breath, he didn’t break the fall or if he tried he didn’t succeed, he banged his head and last but not the least, dislocated his shoulder. What surprised everyone was the fact that he didn’t scream in pain. In fact, the only noise he made was a soft, painful grunt as he hit the ground. Still, as low as it was, it echoed in Diana’s ears like the loudest gunshot, turning her blood into ice in her veins.
“Diana!” called Danai, as she knelt beside Steve to check on him.

As she turned and started moving, already fearing the worst, his uninjured hand shot up in the air. “I’m alright!” he panted, trying to take a strained breath, his lungs still half empty with the shock of the fall.

“No you’re not!” exclaimed his sparring partner, putting a hand on his chest to keep him down. “I’m sorry Steve, I shouldn’t have…”

He shook his head, just as Diana reached them and made her way through the small crowd that had formed around them and knelt herself by his head. “You’ve done nothing wrong,” he whispered. “I fucked up. Damn that hurts…”

“What happened?” asked Diana, her hands already bracketing his head so he wouldn’t move it and possibly cause damage to his neck.

“I got distracted, didn’t break the fall. I’m sorry…” he breathed. “Give me a moment to catch my breath and I’ll get out of the way.”

“You’re out of your mind…” commented Menalippe. “Danai, go and call Epione. This guy here needs her help. Again.”

“Oh cut me a break, last time was one hundred years ago!”

He was joking, he was timewise oriented and he seemed to know where he was. Maybe he had a concussion, but it didn’t seem that bad. Diana drew a relieved sigh. “You remember Epione?”

Steve looked up at her, his blue eyes slightly hazy. “The doctor? Sure! She was one of the few Amazons that were kind to me, last time I was here. Well, except you of course.”

Smiling, Diana leaned over and kissed him. “Yes, the doctor. You’ll have to go through her healing procedures again, I fear.”

He tried to shrug, but it hurt him and he grimaced. “Nothing to fear, she had a nice touch, she didn’t hurt me that time when she patched me up.”

“Didn’t she throw you in the healing pools to be done with it?” asked Menalippe.

“Not really. She stitched a couple of cuts, checked for broken bones… she even tested me for something called secondary drowning,” he explained, his voice now normal and breathing pattern more regular.

Menalippe smiled and gently squeezed is healthy arm. “Good, you don’t have a concussion. Or if you do, it’s mild at worst. Just take it easy for a couple of days and you’ll be just fine.”

He smiled, bright. “Oh, I get to sleep in tomorrow? That’s neat!”

The Amazons around them laughed, loudly. “Wait, all you care is getting to sleep longer tomorrow morning?” asked the general.

“General, with all the due respect, I spent the last… well, don’t count the last year but the three years before I crashed here… I spent them continually sleep deprived. I’m still catching up on sleep I lost during the war. So yes, I’m thinking about sleeping in. Being hurt isn’t a big deal, not this way at least. I’m a soldier for fuck’s sake, I eat stitches and broken bones for breakfast!” he exclaimed.

“Give me a couple of days and I’ll be back. I’m not leaving his opportunity to go to waste, this
And that was the moment Diana knew at least a small handful of her sisters in arms got to respect Steve Trevor.

Epione and part of her entourage of healers arrived a few minutes later, she gave him a quick check up and gave him permission to stand up, carefully, so she could bind the injured shoulder to his chest in order to avoid further pain and issues, then ordered him to follow her to the infirmary.

“Diana,” called Menalippe. “Go with him. We’re almost done here and you know this drill very well. You don’t need more reps.”

She nodded. “Thanks, Menalippe.”

The general shrugged. “No problem. Go now, see you two at dinner.”

It took them a while to reach the infirmary, but Diana was relieved to see Steve walking on his legs, apparently unfazed by the injured shoulder. He stood straight, his eyes weren’t glassy anymore and he was talkative as usual. Thank Hera… she muttered to herself as they ascended up the road.

“Does it hurt much?” she asked, halfway through the road.

He shrugged the healthy shoulder. “No, not much. Ears still buzz a little bit, but not too bad. Surprisingly, I feel a lot better than after the battle with the Germans. I was pretty banged up that day, this isn’t nearly as bad.”

“It’s still a dislocated shoulder, it can’t feel that good.”

With a smile, he used the uninjured arm to pull her to his chest and kissed her cheek. “I’ll be fine. Don’t worry too much. A couple of days and I’ll be good as new.”

Once in the infirmary, Epione set his shoulder back into place and turned Steve inside out. She made sure to check every bone, tendon and muscle that could have been injured in the ruinous fall, and then some. She paid great attention to the bump in the back of his head and gave him a good neurological examination and found no evidence of a concussion, which was what scared Diana the most. Just a bang to the head, nothing too bad.

Once the very thorough visit was over, the skilled healer applied a cool salve to the shoulder and covered the ointment with some tissue then tied a large piece of cloth around his neck to support his arm. “There you go. You should be fine in a couple of days, but expect a surge of soreness in two, maybe three hours. If it’s bad enough that you can’t sleep, ask Diana to take you to the healing pools. A quick dip there and you’ll sleep like a baby. Drag him, if you need to,” she told Diana. “Your boy needs to sleep, and he can’t sleep if he’s in pain.”

She nodded. “I’ll take care of that. And if he gets difficult, I’ll throw him in, clothes and all.”

Epione chuckled, while Steve rolled his eyes and huffed. “Good girl. Now, take this,” she gave him a satchel. “One spoon before dinner, one before sleep, one tomorrow before breakfast and one before lunch, in a large glass of water. It will help with the pain, but it’s more important for inflammation, so don’t worry too much if you still hurt.”

“How is that what I think it is?” asked Diana.

The healer smiled. “If you think about that remedy I had to shove down your throat countless times after your training sessions and that you hated, then yes, it is what you think it is.”
“Oh great, you’re in for a treat Steve.”

“Yeah, whatever…” was his sole comment. “Can we go to dinner? I’m kind of hungry, you know?”

“Oh look at him, he’s hungry. He can’t be that hurt, if he wants to eat.”

And eat he did, probably trying to wash away the terrible, foul taste of Epione’s medicine. Though grimacing like the sour and bitter potion slid down his throat, he drank it all, emptied the cup down to the last drop as if it was the most delicious ale and once over, he set the vessel on the table and shook his head. “Wow, that was something new!” he exclaimed, already pouring himself a generous helping of mead from a pitcher. “What is it again?”

“No one knows, Steve,” replied Menalippe. “Epione just gives it out like candy, when someone’s hurt. We’ve all drank gallons of that awful drink, but it does help.”

“Even you?” he asked Diana.

She nodded in reply. “Sure. She means everyone, and that includes me. I may be half goddess, but that doesn’t make me invincible or invulnerable.”

“Speaking of which… aren’t you goddess of something?” he wondered. “Don’t you have a role, like Hades or Aphrodite?”

“Technically, she’s the Goddess Of War, having slain Ares,” explained Philippus. “But she never ascended Olympus to take his place and I doubt she wants to, so she isn’t exactly the goddess of anything.”

“How about the Goddess of lost things?” he proposed. “I mean, I had lost hope when I met her, and I found it again. The war was almost lost, and then she barges in and we actually win over the Germans. The whole world had lost its way, and now also thanks to her, people are finding it again! She’s like Saint Anthony, only prayers to her do work!”

Diana smiled, sincerely amused, while all others close enough to hear him looked at him like Steve was an alien. “He was raised following a different religion, Saint Anthony is that religion’s patron of those who lost something. Akin to Hermes or Hecate, in a way.”

Philippus, one of her mother’s closest advisors, seemed intrigued. “Ah, a different religion? Can you tell us more about it?”

Thankfully, the subject of conversation quickly moved away from her state of divinity, while remaining interesting enough to keep her entertained. As the conversation turned more philosophical than she had expected, more people joined it and they became curious about religion in Man’s World. Such talk went on through the whole time they spent at dinner, and for the first time, Steve’s perspective and opinions were accepted as they were. It helped that Philippus did most of the talking and since his first time on the Island she had been one of the few who wanted to try and speak to him, rather than killing him immediately, but as more voices added to the choir, he was questioned more often because of his direct experience in Man’s World and his own religious upbringing.

Countless of cups of mead were consumed that evening, which did wonders for the spirits, but on the long run, it didn’t do much good to Steve’s shoulder and most of all, head. When they finally reached the boat and prepared for bed, he almost immediately started complaining about a headache and discomfort in his shoulder both, despite Epione’s concoction. He tried to find a comfortable position, to no avail, and he kept wiping the back of his hand over his eyes as if they hurt. His head
was probably pounding like a jackhammer, even without the concussion. From personal experience, she knew how bad a headache caused by an impact could get, most of all when you finally lay down to rest. Still, he refused to go to the pools, saying he didn’t need it.

“Steve, you don’t have to prove anything anymore. No one will fault you if you decide to use them.”

“No Diana, don’t worry, I’ll be just fine next morning. I just need to sleep.”

“If you can get to sleep at all!” she exclaimed. “Steve, come on, you’re in pain and believe me, I know it’s hard to sleep when you’re in pain.”

With a sigh, Steve nodded, then winced. “Yeah… my head is killing me. And the shoulder’s just trying very hard to do so. I just don’t want to make you waste time, you need to rest before your training tomorrow.”

She tried with all her might, but she couldn’t really hold back the sudden, raucous burst of laughter his last statement drew out of her. “By Hera’s grace, Steve! Really? You think I need to rest after today? I didn’t even break a sweat!” She shook her head and pressed a quick kiss on his cheek. “Come with me, I’ll take you to the pools.”

With some effort, he climbed out of bed and off the boat to the dock, where she grabbed his uninjured hand and led him to the pools. “Are they far?” he asked, a hint of discomfort in his voice.

“Not much, twenty minutes on foot, tops. I can carry you, if you’re too hurt to walk.”

Steve smiled. “Thanks for the offer, but I feel good enough to walk. I’ll keep it in mind, in case I get hurt during one of your superheroine escapade.”

“What makes you think you will ever be involved in one of my superheroine escapade?”

“You never know… You know I’m not one to stay home, sitting quietly and watch you do all the work on TV. I wouldn’t mind… you know… coming out with you guys from time to time. Even if it’s only crowd control or helping getting civilians out of the way. I know it isn’t much but…”

“Hey, stop right there. It is more than enough, ground support is always welcome, no matter where it comes from.”

He nodded. “Speaking about ground… I wanted to ask Bruce if he could teach me how to pilot modern planes so… you know… in case the League needs quick transportation means or if civilians need to be evacuated. That sort of thing.”

“Oh I’m sure he will say no, then Alfred will make him reason, Barry will pester him until he relents and Clark will be very pleased. Not in that particular order though.”

“What about you?”

Diana bit her lip, thoughtful. “I don’t know… I mean, I know you want to be more involved in the League, and I appreciate the thought, it’s just that I don’t want you to get hurt.”

“As much as I don’t want to get hurt, because let’s be realistic, it sucks… but I don’t want to become the stay-at-home-husband of a superhero. It’s not who I am.”

She gave him a quick hug, careful not to disturb his injuries. “And as I said, I appreciate it. Let’s just… listen, let’s start with the car, alright? When you master the art of driving, we’ll talk to Bruce about flying.”
He nodded. “Seems reasonable. Small steps, I think it’s the best way.”

“Good,” she agreed. “Now, speaking about steps, careful now, these can be slippery.”

She led him down to the cave and as they made their way down to the cave, she noticed how Steve suddenly became very silent, until they finally arrived in the large natural chamber where the magical springs formed a number of rocky pools, the eerie blue light coming from the magic imbued in the waters making the place look a lot smaller than it really was.

“Why do I suddenly feel slightly embarrassed to be here?” he asked.

“Maybe because the last time you were here I walked in on you stark naked and you still weren’t very accustomed to being naked around women?”

He grunted, a soft rumbling sound that made her smile for a moment, knowing it was an attempt to ward off awkwardness. “It’s not that I wasn’t accustomed to being naked around women, I was just used to getting to know them a little more, before dropping clothes.”

“Yeah well, it doesn’t really work like that here. And those clothes need to be dropped before you hop in.”

He gave her a sly smile. “Yes ma’am.” And he quickly took off the t-shirt, shorts and underwear after having kicked the sneakers off. “Should I take the bandage off?”

“Not right now, only after you’ve been in there for a while.”

“Got it.” He made to jump in the pool, but he stopped with only one foot in, gloriously naked and slightly bruised. “How long should I stay here?”

“Usually half an hour is more than enough, but the longer the better,” she replied, folding her arms across her chest. “Don’t stay too long though or you’re going to look like a prune.”

He plopped down into the water where it was deeper and sunk down until his head was completely submerged, stayed beneath the surface for a few long seconds then reemerged. “Finally!” he exclaimed. “A bath in unsalted water!”

“Feels good, uh?”

He laughed, already feeling better from what she could see, and threw himself on his back, letting his body float on the water. “Better than great. You’re not coming?”

Diana shrugged. “I’m not in need of any healing.”

“But I am, and healing alone is boring,” he replied, with that sly grin still printed on his face. “You could come here and keep me company.”

“I could,” replied Diana. “But I was taught that healing is a private time, so I was ready to leave you alone.”

“Last time you didn’t seem so keen on leaving me alone healing,” he stated. “You kind of barged in, if I remember correctly.”

“You had been here for over an hour!” she exclaimed, walking closer to the edge of the rocky pool. “And you were getting out of there, it was hardly barging in.”

“I don’t really remember it like this.”
She leaned against the border of the pool as he waded towards her. “And how do you remember it?”

“I actually remember seeing an angel walking down those steps, her head down as if she carried the weight of the world on her shoulders, worried and grieving, but still the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. And I remember how awkward our conversation was, how idiotic was my remark about being above average and I remember I kind of wanted to be dead because… because I just felt so unworthy of being in your presence I…”

She shut him with a long, languid kiss. What she wasn’t expecting was how quick he managed to be even without an operating shoulder when he pushed himself half out of the pool and with his uninjured hand he managed to grab her belt from behind her back and pull her down in the water. He caught her completely off guard and she briefly struggled to rise above the surface, but when she managed to, she was oddly amused by his behavior. “You could have just asked a little more, no need to drag me in like this!” she exclaimed, wiping a rogue strand of hair out of her eyes.

“I know, but it wouldn’t be as funny as this.”

“You just wanted to get me naked and wet, didn’t you?”

“That… was half of the intent. What I really want to do is what comes after I get you naked and wet.”

“Is that so, uh?” she replied with a sultry tone that made him visibly swallow hard, even as he tried to keep up the cocky appearance. She stood up, water lapping at her waist, and pulled off the elastic band that kept her hair bound in a tight braid. “Aren’t you a little too battered for that?”

“Not really. I mean, my arm’s a little sore but nothing I can’t handle. And it’s getting better.”

“You definitely look better.” She deftly undid the buckles that held her armor together and it fell apart in her hands and, leaving only a thin layer of soaked linen around her chest and hips to cover her. Holding back the laughter when Steve rolled his eyes and dunk his head in the water, blowing a large bubble of air from beneath the surface, she threw the now soaked armor outside the pool. If that was Steve’s reaction when she wasn’t even naked, she wondered what would happen in a handful of minutes.

“How about we take the binding off?” she proposed, swimming towards him. “You look like it doesn’t bother you that much anymore.”

He nodded, energetically. “Oh yes! My shoulder’s just fine, doesn’t hurt one bit.” She could tell he was lying, but he did look convincing enough. “I could play a match of rugby union tomorrow with this shoulder.”

“Oh really?” chuckled Diana. “We could organize something, I bet rugby is a sport the Amazons could appreciate.”

His Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed a thick lump that had formed in his throat. “Well… I was kind of…”

“Exaggerating? I noticed, don’t worry.” She ran her fingers on the wet bandages to find the end of the long bandages around his shoulder and once she got it, she slowly started unwrapping the tight bandaging that held his arm in place. His chest quickly inflated in a rushed intake of breath when the joint became mobile once again and she had to move it in order to remove the cloth. “Does that hurt?”

“Not much,” he told her, a hint of a pained grunt in his voice. “But nothing like earlier.”
“Uhm… This shoulder got dislocated before, am I right?”

Steve nodded, with a sigh. “Yes, when I was in high school, during a friendly hockey game that turned rather unfriendly when my team started scoring the crap out of the others. We didn’t have the padding guys use nowadays, shoulders popping out like this were the norm.”

“I see… well, I guessed you had at least some experience with this type of injury, you were way too calm and collected this afternoon, as Epione fixed you up.”

“What can I say, I’m a man of action.”

When she was finally done with the unwrapping, he took a relieved sigh. “That feels so much better…” he moaned as he scratched a spot on his bicep.

Diana threw the bundle of soaked cloth on the floor out of the pool. “Was it tight?”

“No, not much, it just itched a lot.”

Chuckling, she swatted his hand away and started scratching the same spot for him, so he wouldn’t contort himself so bad. “I know the feeling very well. There, move the shoulder, how does it feel?”

Steve tentatively moved his arm. “It doesn’t feel bad, at all. I won’t be doing any shoulder heavy workouts anytime soon, that’s sure, but I truly feel good.” He dunked his head in the pool again so his shoulder would get soaked in the healing waters again. “Nothing like before, the pain is almost gone!” he exclaimed.

“Good,” she replied. “You should stay here a bit longer, give your shoulder some time to heal.” She moved away from him and towards the edge of the pool. “As Epione said.”

“Hey, where are you going? I didn’t get you nearly naked for you to just swim away like this!”

Steve followed her and quickly wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her away from the edge, swimming back to the center of the pool. Diana laughed softly, but made little effort to get away from him. Not that she wanted to. “How about you stay here with me and keep me company?”

She turned around and faced him, feeling his fingers slip beneath the soaked cloth she wore beneath her armor. The soft touch on her bare skin shot a pleasurable shiver down her spine. That man had the innate ability to have her fired up in a split second, she still had to find out how he did it.

“I’m not the one in need of healing. I can keep you company from outside the pool.”

He huffed. “That would be boring! You know I like it better when you’re close by!”

“And I like it better too, you know that. But…”

For a moment, she got lost in the deep blue pools of his eyes, pleading her to stay close to him. He had that sad puppy look stamped on his face that melted her heart away, even if she knew that deep down, he wasn’t a sad puppy at all, but a predatory wolf stalking its prey. And she was his prey.

She couldn’t deny she hadn’t noticed a certain tension between them since they had entered the cavern, not ten minutes earlier, a tension that was coiling so tight in the pit of her stomach that it almost hurt. There was no denying that they had a pretty awesome sexual life, but things had slowed down a little bit since Steve had been allowed to train with the Amazons, since he always got back to the boat too tired to even lift a finger, let alone additilian physical activities, it was no wonder that after a whole afternoon of rest, despite the injury, he would be so eager and willing.
“But what?” he prodded, his hands inching their way up her back and dragging her meager item of clothing upward. She shivered again.

“But you’re injured, and I don’t want you to get hurt more than necessary.”

“If I get hurt the pools will heal me again. Now that I mention it… isn’t it disrespectful to… you know… do it here?”

“As if it never happened!” she exclaimed. “Don’t worry about it, it’s… I’m not going to say it’s common, but it has happened. At least I know I did it here, multiple times.”

Steve grunted, a low rumble that reverberated through his chest to hers. “You naughty little…” He never completed the sentence, he kissed her with such ardor it took her by surprise. With little regards, he tore the tiny dress she was wearing and pushed her against the wall, pressing his body against hers. “Gods, I love you so much…” he nearly screamed.

“I know, but try not to get too loud now, I don’t really want to traumatize any patrol passing by the entrance of the cave.”

“As you wish, Your Highness.”

Chapter End Notes

Also, I wasn't really sure if I wanted to introduce explicit sexy times in this story so I just... faded to black. Maybe if it's alright with you I may add something in the future, but for now I think I'm going to just mention their totally healthy and satisfying sexy life.

One last thing, totally unrelated to this story: if anyone out there states that being a judge or a referee of any sport is lame and you don't really do much, well, I tell you: they're idiots. My quads and calves are ON FIRE!!!!
“Do you really have to go?” Steve murmured, sleepily, as he tried to keep Diana from slipping from the bed.

“I’m not the one that got injured, I won’t get a pass for your distraction,” she replied, as she quickly got ready for her day. As she buckled the simple armor on, she let out a long sigh. “It’s still wet… you did have to drag me down into the pools with all my clothes on, didn’t you?”

He chuckled. “Totally worth it. Best sex we had in a while.”

“You say that every time we don’t have sex for a couple of days!” she replied, smiling wide. Gods, he could just stare at her smiling all day for the rest of his life and he’d be the happiest man in the known and unknown universe.

“Well, it was more than a couple of days!”

“Oh please, don’t tell me you never had a dry spell longer than six days!”

“Technically, not since Veld,” he replied, stretching on the bed. “Before… that’s another story.”

Diana smiled again and leaned on the bed and kissed him. “Go back to sleep. You earned it. Come up for lunch.”

“Do I have to run there?” he asked, sleepily. He was already falling back in Morpheus' warm and welcoming arms. For a quick moment, he wondered how much he had changed the way he thought and said some sayings, being so influenced by Diana. In the past months he had found himself using more and more Greek exclamations, though translated, or metaphors that included Greek Gods. It felt a little strange, if he had to be honest with himself.

“Only if you feel like it, if not, just walk. Gotta go now. Sleep some more, then go swim for a while. Your shoulder will thank you.”

Steve nodded. “Will do. Have fun, Diana.”

“Oh I will, don’t worry.” She kissed his forehead. “Good napping.”

And sleep he did. Not for too long, he didn’t wake up at noon, but instead of getting out of bed before dawn, he got out after the sun had risen for the first time since they had reached Themyscira. And it felt great!

He wasn’t a lazy person, he was used to getting out of bed early in the morning, between his upbringing in a farm and the war, but even then he managed to squeeze in some more hours of sleep at least once a week, but in the past three weeks it was early risings and late hours in the night, constantly. He was overworked and sleep deprived, and the two things combined had a terrible effect on him. Sure, he had been helped a little by the Gods, but deep down he was just a human being. Above average, in certain ways, but still someone whose body could withstand only a certain amount of physical strain. He had a limit, and three weeks of ten hours of working out with Amazons, as hard as Amazons, had made him reach his limit.

His body needed to slow down, catch some sleep and heal at his own rate, not the Amazons’. As creatures of divine design and birth, Amazons had recovery periods way shorter than a normal human being, and that was just on top of the rest of their great abilities on the battlefield and off.
People sometimes forgot that the Amazons were the last recipients of a vast ancient civilization that was only remembered when children studied it in school or was relegated to museums, but it was all filtered through the centuries that followed them, while on Themyscira the Amazons still lived like they did thousands of years before. That alone was a thought of impossible magnitude, during his stay on the island, both in 1918 and now, Steve had wondered how would a normal person from Man’s World react if they could set foot there and see an approximated but still coherent way of life the ancient civilizations had. He bet it would have blown anyone away, even a scholar that had spent thousands of hours studying ancient civilizations.

Such deep thoughts before breakfast… he thought to himself as he emerged from below deck wearing only his swimming trunks and basking in the warmth of the early morning sun on his skin.

Finally restored by the longer sleep, despite the little interruption to say goodbye to Diana, he had left the bedroom of the boat with a smile, for once. With little effort or ache in his shoulder, he jumped straight into the crystalline waters, reveling in the cool feeling against his skin, in stark contrast with the warmth of the sun. He pushed himself farther from shore then started a slow, rhythmic swim along the sandy beach, always keeping the dock in sight. His shoulder truly thanked him for the low impact exercise, as Diana had said.

He swam for a good half an hour, letting the low intensity of the activity soothe the overworked muscles and the bruised joints and Gods it felt good, but after a while, the usual pangs of early morning hunger showed up. He had forgone breakfast to avoid nasty repercussions with the swim, so he moved back to the dock and pulled himself out of the water, but he had not set his feet on the wooden structure yet that he nearly jumped back in the sea.

“Your Highness!” he yelled, slightly scared by Hippolyta’s imposing presence as she stood, proudly, on the dock beside the walkway that led to the boat. “I’m sorry, I wasn’t expecting to find you here.”

“You weren’t supposed to,” she replied, sternly. “Diana said you wanted to talk to me, right?”

“Yes, Your Highness. Just… Would you give me a few minutes to get presentable and maybe eat something? I’m sorry but I woke up half an hour ago and I went straight swimming.”

She nodded. “As long as you need.”

“Great. Uh… Feel free to come on board the boat and… I don’t know, make yourself at home. I’ll be here soon just… Can I offer you something, I don’t know…” He felt extremely awkward, he had no idea what the etiquette was with royalties in his own time, let alone how he should act in front of a Queen from another civilization entirely. “Coffee or tea, perhaps?”

“There’s no need, Captain, but I’ll take whatever you’ll have. And if you don’t mind, I’d prefer if we’d have this conversation on shore. Boats tend to make me a little seasick.”

He nodded. “Sure, Your Highness, whatever makes you happy. Then coffee it is. Please, there are two foldable chairs by the campfire, I’ll be there shortly.”

As Hippolyta walked towards the beach, Steve felt a sudden shiver run down her spine. The moment had come, and she had caught him in the most vulnerable moment he could think of. Off guard, completely unprepared and most of all, hungry and in dire need of coffee. Not to mention soaked to the bone and in a state of undressing that made him feel slightly awkward and uncomfortable.

He ran on the boat, grabbed a towel and quickly dried himself so he wouldn’t drip water everywhere, then he changed into dry clothes trying to make himself presentable to his standards, which unfortunately were completely different from Hippolyta’s.
After that, he gathered everything he needed to make coffee, that thanks to Poseidon’s thoughtfulness didn’t require electricity or anything that was too high tech to work on Themyscira. He grabbed the container of grounded coffee, the french press and a pot to boil water. The rest he needed was already near the campfire, brought before dawn by some unnamed Amazon.

“Here I am, Your Highness,” he announced when he finally arrived at the fireplace.

“Oh, you took less time than I thought.”

“What can I say, four years in the Navy, two of them of war, they teach you how to get ready fast.” He set everything he needed in front of him and started trafficking with instruments to stoke the fire, added some wood and then started preparing his breakfast and the additional coffee for Hippolyta. “It will take just a moment, I just need to boil the water. Have you ever had coffee?”

“No, but Diana told me about it multiple times. From what I gathered, it’s a rather popular drink in Man’s World.”

Steve smiled. “Probably the most popular after plain water. No, maybe tea comes first… I don’t really remember, but it’s very popular. I think some people are addicted to it.”

“Are you one of those people?” she asked.

“No, not really. I enjoy it a lot, it’s more of a ritual for me, than an actual need. You know, when you do something every day so it becomes a habit, and you miss it, a little bit, if you skip it one day?”

“Yes, I think I can understand that.”

He nodded and stirred the water with a spoon so it would evenly warm up, then he added the correct quantity of coffee to the coffee maker. “I don’t mind tea too. There’s a variety that Diana drinks often that I actually love, it’s slightly smoked. Delicious.” When the water finally came to a boil, he poured it in the coffee maker and stirred again, before he covered it with the lid. “Two more minutes and it will be ready.”

“How’s your shoulder?”

Steve looked up at the Queen, a little baffled. He had never thought she’d cared enough about him to ask about his injuries. “Fine. I needed some help from the healing pools last night, but I’ll be fine. I had worse.”

“Epione told me she was more worried about your head, rather than the shoulder. From what I’ve been told, you fell quite badly yesterday.”

“Yes well… I know it’s not not an excuse, that soldiers need to always be on the ready but I was tired and I got distracted. It was my mistake and mine alone, I should have been more careful. This is the type of mistake that if committed on the battlefield could cost someone’s life, or worse, could endanger other people. It won’t happen again.”

“You’re right,” said Hippolyta as he finished his preparations for the coffee, pushing the plunger on the press and pouring the drink in two clean pewter cups. “It is the type of mistake that could get someone killed, either you or your comrades. You better be more careful next time.”

“I will.” He handed her the cup. “It’s very bitter as it is, I think there is some honey around here…”

“Let me try it first, then we’ll see if I need to correct it to make it sweeter.”
Steve nodded again. “As you wish.”

“Good.” She swished the liquid in her cup to help it cool down a little. “Now… I’ve been told you wanted to speak to me, in private. Here I am, talk.”

Clenching his fingers around his cup, he mustered all the courage he had. There was one thing he had to tell Hippolyta, and it was pretty simple, but as simple as it was, it was also incredibly difficult.

“Your Highness, I want to marry your daughter.”

The muscles at her temples twitched and her jaw clenched, but other than that, she didn’t visibly react. Steve could only try to imagine the turmoil coursing through her, seeing this man, a person that traditionally was an enemy of the Amazons, that had the gall to come up to her and tell her he wanted to marry his only daughter. From the outside, except for some twitching though, her reaction was almost glacial.

“Have you asked her?”

He nodded. “Yes, many months ago. And she said yes.”

“Mmh…” Hippolyta looked down at the cup and took a tentative sip of coffee. She smirked at first, but her lips curved into a very brief smile. “You were right, it’s very bitter.”

“A bit of honey and milk can help, if you prefer it a little sweeter.”

“No, it’s fine as it is. Now, back at the matter at hand. You’re not here to ask my permission to marry my daughter like it was customary back when we still lived in Man’s World, so I’m guessing you’re valuing Diana’s ability to choose for herself more than my opinion on the matter, is that right?”

Steve leaned back on the folding chair and nodded. “Yes. It’s something Hades told me because… well, even back in my day asking the father, or a parent in general of the woman you wanted to marry permission to actually marry her was the norm, but things have changed a lot in the past hundred years, the years I skipped. My original plan was actually to ask your permission to marry Diana, because that’s the way I was brought it, it was a way to show respect to the family, but I realized you and Diana wouldn’t have appreciated it, because of your own upbringing and consideration of the matter,” he explained. “As things work now, and for you, whether I would have got your permission to marry her or not, it wouldn’t have mattered at all, because Diana is her own person and she’s more than able to take her own decisions, on her own free will, she doesn’t need your permission to do anything.”

Hippolyta chuckled. “Nice way to show respect!”

“Had you preferred I would have come here asking your permission before asking Diana, like she was some kind of package that should be handled from you to me?”

She smiled this time, but it was brief and bitter, like she regretted what she was going to say. “Good reasoning. You came here to inform me, that’s all. And I appreciate the gesture, though I’m not a great supporter of marriage as it was intended back then, so don’t expect me to be happy about this.”

“No, I didn’t come here just to inform you about our plans to get married, not just that at least. I wanted to talk to you to assure you I will do everything and then some in my power to make sure Diana will be the happiest woman in Man’s World, or any world in the universe. This is why I’m here. I know you despise me, I know you would have preferred I had remained dead but…”

“I would have preferred you never crashed here, to be honest,” interjected Hippolyta, with a stern
tone that made his blood turn to ice even in the hot sun of Themyscira.

He nodded. “Fair enough, can’t blame you for that. But I’m here, I came here despite the fact that I know you all hate me, because I want you all to be sure I’ll do my best to make Diana happy, you can trust me on that.”

Hippolyta took a deep breath and another sip of coffee. “You see Captain…” It felt weird to be called by his rank by the Queen. “I have no doubt that you will, but what I really want to know is how long are you prepared to do this?”

The question took Steve completely by surprise, off guard. “What do you mean by how long?”

“What I mean is that Diana’s lifespan is… longer than the average human being, I guess you already know this. I also know that the Gods meddled with your mortality so that you two can be together, but what will happen when you will get tired of it?”

It dawned on him, what she meant. Hippolyta was worried that one day, sooner or later, he would get tired of being with the same person and he would just leave Diana to enjoy his immortality on his own, leaving her behind to suffer. The Queen apparently had no idea about the details of his immortality, of the way it was engineered to work. She believed he had been made immortal, or as Hades said, unable to age, for good, no rules apply.

He downed the rest of his coffee and sighed. “How much do you know about what the Gods have done to me to make me immortal?”

“Enough to know that my fears are more than founded.”

“Then you don’t know enough, and I don’t mean the minute details,” he said, running a hand through his still wet hair. “I am not immortal. I’m unable to age, stuck in time if you prefer. But that doesn’t come, for free, there’s a catch or two. My fate is tied to Diana’s, which means that if I leave her, she leaves me or Zeus forbids she dies, I will grow old and age and then I die like a normal man. Also, I can be killed. I’m not invulnerable, if I pull another stunt like that of the plane in 1918, I’m done. Up in a plume of smoke. Now, do I want to die again? No. Do I want to leave Diana? Hades, no! Do I see myself leaving her, in the future? More like she leaves me, for someone more interesting than me!”

Hippolyta smiled, to Steve’s amazement. “You don’t find yourself interesting enough?”

“Oh well, I’m just a spy from another century, her friends are multi millionaires that dress up at night and fight criminals, aliens brought up in Kansas that fly and can do the most amazing things, a guy so fast he can literally run back in time, another one that is half Mother Box and an Atlantean for Christ’s sake! I’m boring in comparison!”

That led to a long, intricate conversation that turned out to be more of a history lesson than anything else. Steve learned a lot, but in turn, he had the feeling that Hippolyta too learned something about Man’s World, from someone that had a different point of view than who she was used to. Yet, when it all came to an end and the subject of their conversation returned to the matter he had brought up, the Queen was still as icy as she was in the very beginning.

She wasn’t convinced that he could endure an eternity with her daughter, or better, she didn’t believe
it would be possible for a mortal to withstand the test of time, despite the catches in the way his immortality worked. She wouldn’t budge, she wouldn’t even give him the benefit of the doubt, no matter how hard he tried. She just wouldn’t listen.

At a certain point, he just grew so frustrated he blew up.

“You know what, with all the due respect, I don’t care. You don’t trust me, I get it. I come to terms with it one hundred years ago, actually, and I understand, very well. But at this point, I don’t care what you think about me. I love Diana. I think I loved her since the moment I saw her, a blurred figure above water as I sunk in the sea, and I don’t feel like ti will ever change. She’s my Angel on the wing,” he explained, his voice surged with more animosity than he had intended, initially. “I came here to inform you we will get married out of courtesy, because I respect you and Diana needed to clear some old stuff with you, but we never thought we would receive your approval about our marriage. That doesn’t mean we won’t get married because you don’t like it. That’s it.”

By the time he had finished, he was out of breath. “And let me tell you one more thing: I’ve tried. I did my best to at least gain an ounce of respect from you, but it seems like no matter my efforts I failed. Thing is, I didn’t even have to try, because Diana doesn’t care about how you Amazons see me or what you think of me! Time and time again she told me I didn’t need to impress anyone, and yet I tried the same, because I wanted to gain your respect, for myself, for my own stupid masculine pride! I got it from the Gods’, I didn’t see why I couldn’t gain yours, but now I don’t really know how I can even aspire to it, since you despise me!”

“But you did impress us!” exclaimed Hippolyta.

Steve couldn’t really restrain himself from vigorously shake his head. “Excuse me?”

“You did impress us. Well, at least some of us, mostly those you trained with. Artemis and Menalippe think you’re a great warrior, for a man, and coming from them that’s no small feat. You impressed me with your resilience and most of all your respect, and most of all the way you act around Diana really impressed me in a positive way. But try to see this situation from my point of view, and not yours.”

Oh. He swallowed a lump in his throat. He hadn’t thought about it.

“From your point of view what does marriage mean?” he asked, tentatively.

“I’m glad you asked. From where I come from, marriage is nothing more than the handling of a package, as you said not too long ago. A woman gets handled from a man to another. Now, you should have guessed that this type of societal requirement doesn’t exist in Amazonian society, we got over it a very long time ago. And while I realize this is the way you were brought up and I appreciate the effort you’re making to reassure me my daughter will be happy with you, I still can’t shake off the feeling that by marrying you, Diana will turn into something you own, that you will command at your own will, annulling her personality.”

He laughed. “Try to do that to Diana, it will never work!”

Hippolyta chuckled herself. “Yes, I’m very familiar with her stubbornness. Still, I don’t want her to be considered someone’s property. No matter how much I respect that someone.”

“I suppose you wouldn’t feel better if tables were turned, right? If I considered myself Diana’s property.”

“Nobody, man or woman, should ever be owned by anyone else,” replied the Queen. “People are
not items to be exchanged for money or favours. And in my experience, marriage is just that, so I cannot feel anything but sorrow about my daughter getting married. To anyone. It’s not you, Captain. It’s the concept of marriage I’m familiar with that I despise.”

“I can’t do much about that, Your Highness,” he replied, scratching his chin. Gods, his beard was in dire need of a trim. “What I can do though, is offer you my word that I will do whatever I can and then some to make Diana the happiest woman on earth.”

Hippolyta nodded, set the pewter cup she had been toying all this time on the sand beside her chair and stood, tall and proud. “You’re both set, from what I can see. Very well then. Stand up, Captain.” He hastily obeyed. It felt eerie, to stand nearly eye to eye with the Queen of the Amazons. “On the grace of the Gods, do you swear an oath of love, devotion and dedication to Diana?”

“I swear!” he exclaimed. “By all the Gods I swear!”

“Do you swear an oath of protection and abnegation?” she asked again.

“Yes Your Highness! Yes! I’ll swear on my mother’s grave if I only knew where it is, I’d swear on a Bibble like in the good ol’ days, I’d swear one thousand times more, but yes, I swear I will love and protect Diana for as long as I have a breath to exhale!”

“Then remember these words, Captain. Dare to fail even just one of those requirements, and there will not be enough ambrosia in this world or any other to bring you back to life. Understood?”

Steve nodded. “Understood, Your Highness. And believe me, it won’t happen.”

“Good. Make my daughter happy, or be ready to face the consequences. And by Hera’s grace, try not to move things forward too fast! Both of you!”

What is she talking about? He thought, slightly speechless, as he observed the Queen walking away from his camp, leaving him with more doubts than answers, but the certainty that at least Hippolyta didn’t hate him.

And that was a way better outcome than what he had predicted.
Sorry for the delay. Life, ya know... also a sudden teenage-nostalgia induced need to rewatch Neon Genesis Evangelion and InuYasha... the last month felt like 2002 again (the year both series aired in Italy). Also, new job takes me a lot of time. Anyway, thanks for the patience!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So? How was your morning?”

Diana was waiting for him just outside the large plateau the Amazons used as an open air mess hall, smiling and covered in dirt and sand.

“Uh, judging by how dirty you are, better than yours!”

Laughing, she tried to beat some of the dust off her armor and body with her hands. “Oh, this is nothing! Just some friendly sparring, that’s all. How’s the shoulder?”

“Not too bad, aches a little, but nothing that I can’t brush off. I spoke to your mother though.”

Diana seemed surprised. “Oh… and?”

He shrugged his good shoulder. “She doesn’t hate me. That’s more than what I asked for, and I’m fine with it.”

“You told her we want to get married?”

Steve nodded. “Uh, yes. She isn't thrilled, but she said she can’t stop you from making your own decisions, so she won’t oppose it.”

“Oh… I’m surprised! I thought she was going to fight a lot more!”

“Me too!” he exclaimed. “I was ready to fight against her, metaphorically speaking of course because I have no chance against her in a literal fight, but she almost seemed resigned. But she said something about not moving things forward too fast, and I have to say that I don’t have the faintest idea of what she was talking about.”

Her face scrunched up in a puzzled expression. He couldn’t help but think she was absolutely adorable when she was confused. Or angry. Or happy… Alright, she was adorable every time he looked at her. “Move things forward too fast? What the…”

She was interrupted by Menalippe before she could finish the sentence. “Diana, Steve, come up. Lunch is ready!”

The general escorted them to a long table where most of the higher ranks sat, including Hippolyta. Steve was rather wary of her presence, as he feared she would still bear some residual animosity towards him, but was surprised to see her welcome him with a smile, albeit tight and noticeably constricted. As soon as Diana sat down beside her, putting herself between her mother and him, the
Queen just ignored him, concentrating every ounce of her attention on her daughter.

They ate in comfortable company, chatting about this and that. Strange enough, no one seemed to be in much of a hurry to get back to their training, everyone was taking it easy and the lunch itself was more abundant than the usual, there was more wine too. Not that it mattered much to him, he was excused for a couple more days, but it was nice to see the Amazons just taking their time for one afternoon.

“How long are you planning to stay?” asked Hippolyta at some point.

“No more than a couple of days more. I’ve got to get back to work and so does Steve. Also, who knows what happened in the past weeks, for all I know the world could have slipped in a planet-wide nuclear conflict.”

“Oh come on, you know the Justice League is more than capable to keep up with a couple of megalomaniac governors!” added Steve. “They knew you were on vacation!”

“I know, that doesn’t mean I can misuse the time they have devoted to allow me to get here!”

“Wise words, Diana,” replied her mother. “Taking a break is legitimate, but other people are going to fill in for you as you enjoy some leisure time, so you have to take care of it.”

He nodded. “Absolutely, Your Highness.”

“Also,” interjected Philippus, “I have the feeling you miss your friends in Man’s World, Diana.”

She nodded. “Yes, that too. And other things, if I have to be completely honest.”

The older senator seemed intrigued. “Mind if I inquire a little more about these other things?”

Diana shook her head and smiled. “No, not at all. It’s not like I have an interesting life…” Steve snorted, trying to suppress a laugh and she struck his ribs with her elbow. “Aside from being Wonder Woman as people have dubbed me, I have a job that I love and gives me the chance to help the world keep the knowledge of ancient civilizations, and as you said I have friends I’ve grown very fond of.”

Someone behind them grunted, in an evident mocking tone. “Sure, leave your duties… again… for your friends…”

It was Thekla, one of the warriors. One of those who hadn’t taken well Diana’s return and that had taken even worse Steve’s arrival. Diana had explained him months before that a small but pretty vocal group of Amazons hadn’t taken well Hippolyta’s decision to let her set foot again on Themyscira and Steve was surprised it had taken almost a month for someone of that group to speak up. Most of all because this time she had taken him with her, that alone was worth a rebellion, or so he thought.

Diana sighed and shut her eyes for a moment. “Got something to say, Thekla?”

“Oh I’ve got a lot to say, Princess!” the other exclaimed, disdain dripping from her words. “You come and go as you please, you partake in Men’s affairs and disowned our ways… and most of all you bring men to the island in complete disregard with our rules and laws… yes, I’ve got a lot to say about you! You’re a disgrace, that’s what I have to say!”

Diana clenched her fists on the table, effortlessly bending the fork in her hand. “Diana, calm down…” he whispered. “She’s not worth it.”
“If she says something about my mother I’m gonna snap…” Steve dared to look at Hippolyta, who seemed completely unfazed by the other Amazon’s insubordination, maybe only slightly annoyed, like she had heard those words time and time again.

“And since we’re all here,” said Thekla looking at the Queen. “How in Tartarus could you allow her to set foot on Themyscira after she had left? This goes against the very basic rules of this island, the laws that the Gods, our protectors, established to keep us safe, how could you? How could you forget the slavery we had to go through because of men?”

Arching an eyebrow, Hippolyta sighed. “Because I know the Gods you speak so fondly of, and I know they didn’t mind at all. Also, as I said multiple times in the past hundred years, I would have done the same for any other Amazon that wished to leave the island and then come back. If they knew the way back, of course.”

Thekla snorted back a sarcastic laugh. “Really? Or was it just because Diana is your beloved daughter? How could she know the way back, when none of us should? We’re allowed to leave only when the World is in extreme danger and we did, but we can’t come and go from the Island, why can she?”

A murmur waved through the Amazons gathered for their meal. Steve couldn’t understand a word, without the Lasso, but from the general tone he understood very well what they meant. They were siding with her.

“You’re a disgrace for our people, Diana, unworthy of bearing the title of Amazon! You should be cast out of the island and banished forever, not welcomed like the most revered guest and heralded like the savior of humankind!”

“Too bad she is!”

Steve had tried, but he couldn’t stand the way Thekla was demeaning Diana that way, not when she knew absolutely nothing about her and how she lead her life outside of Themyscira. And he knew she could defend herself very well, but he had enough of people demeaning each other like that. He had seen enough of that shit during the war, he had to swallow so many bitter lumps because generals demeaned their subjects, that now he could speak his mind he was determined to not let any single chance to speak his mind slip from him. Including this one. He stood up and screamed against the Amazon.

“Too bad she is!” he repeated. “And not only because she helped repel Steppenwolf’s invasion, but also because she inspires people out there to be the best they can be.”

“And she needs a man to defend herself?” Thekla spat with hatred.

“No, she doesn’t. She’s more than capable to do it herself, but that doesn’t mean I don’t have the right to speak my mind. And while I don’t know you, in fact I don’t even know your name, I know Diana, and for heaven’s sake what she does out there is way more than stopping criminals she’s… she inspires people to be their better self!” he exclaimed. “Damn, she’s doing the job you all have been created, on her own! And what the hell are you doing here?”

“How dare you! How dare you to speak this way, when you know nothing about our ways and traditions?”

“Well I know about our ways and our traditions, and in my world you’d be labeled as hypocritical, that’s what I know! At least Diana had the guts to come out and help, when we needed it.”
“Steve, come on…” whispered Diana, gently touching his shoulder. “This isn’t your fight.”

“I know it’s not my fight, but I can’t just shut up when someone talks to you that way! Not when they know absolutely nothing about you!”

“This is my fight though,” she exclaimed.

“It’s yours, but you don’t have to fight it alone!”

“Ah, you even need a man to fight your battles!” prompted Thekla, smirking in delighted glee.

“How could you even last a minute in a real fight eludes me!”

Diana grunted, softly. “You think you can do better than me in battle? You think that all your training is better than the application of said training?”

“Yes!” yelled the other woman. “I’m sure I can do better than you!”

This isn’t going to end well for her, thought Steve as he backed away from Diana. He threw a quick look to Hippolyta, who was still seated at the head of the long table, apparently unperturbed by the arguing, but he noticed a telling sign of nervousness in her: her right fist was clenched so tight her knuckles were white, the only external sign that she, too, thought that the discussion taking place in front of her wasn’t going to end well for one party. And they both knew which one would come out defeated.

“Then prove it! Back your words with actions!” snapped Diana. “Fight me, in open battle! Pick the place and the weapons, right here, right now!”

Suddenly, the older Amazon showed signs of uncertainty. Surely she knew of Diana’s true parentage, since apparently everyone on the island was aware of Zeus intervention in her conception, and she feared that godly power coursing through her. Hades had called it the power of creation, Steve recalled, and who knew if she had completely explored it by now, or if the extent of her innate abilities was still unknown even to her at the moment.

When the Amazon didn’t reply right away, like she had done for the whole argument, Diana pressed her. “If you think you can really best me in battle, why won’t you try now?”

Thekla’s features suddenly hardened in ill-concealed disgust and determination. “Alright then. Let’s meet at the proving grounds. Sword and shield. You have an hour to get ready.”

About an hour later, most of the proving grounds, a secluded valley in the mountains of Themyscira covered in green grass and circled by tall stone walls, was filled with Amazongs, waiting for the fight to begin.

Thekla and her clique were standing at one hand, the warrior ready in her full gear, eyes sparkling with barely contained rage. Steve could see it even from that far, that glimmer of hate, like a roaring fire in the distance. She was twitchy and jumpy, an attitude someone would exchange for battlelust, but to him it looked more like fear. This wasn’t going to end well, at all. She was both angry and afraid, to what extent though, he couldn’t tell.

On the other side of the ring, as he couldn’t find a better word to describe the purpose of the proving grounds, Diana stood herself in full gear, but much more relaxed and confident. She stood proud and tall, a red and blue and golden beacon, like a magnificent statue sculpted out of marble. Shield already in her hand, her sword still rested in its scabbard, crossing her back and ready to be drawn. She seemed to be completely at ease, but he knew that deep down she loathed her decision to resolve
to violence, in order to prove, once and for all, her worth to all the Amazons.

Words and willingness to oblige every whim of them hadn’t been enough, it hadn’t been enough in the past and it wasn’t enough even this time. The detractors wanted actions, a tangible proof that Diana was still one of them, despite the years of absence from Themyscira. Steve couldn’t help but feel a little awkward in the whole situation, mostly because he had been the moot point of the whole thing, but also because he detected a strange but familiar feeling in the air, that of wounded pride, lingering among the small but very loud group of Amazons that seemed to despise Diana for both leaving and being allowed to come back.

In the end, most conflicts originated from a wounded pride. Someone wronged someone else, even unknowingly, and some type of conflict would ensue. Unwillingly, he had wronged all the Amazons by crashing to their island and taking Diana away from them. The conflict had brewed for a century, with gossip and talking behind Diana and Hippolyta’s back, until finally Diana couldn’t take anymore of it. Again, because of his encouragement.

The more he thought about it, the more he couldn’t get out of his head that this whole mess was his fault, and that he should be the one fighting in the proving ground.

“Are you sure you want to fight?” he asked, almost timid in the way he spoke.

She nodded. “Yes. It is beyond due time. Thekla has always been one of my most vocal detractors, her words were offensive not only to me by also to my mother, Menalippe and Antiope’s memory, not to mention they denigrated my mother’s authority over the Amazons. Such speech shall not be tolerated in my presence.”

Steve felt a cold shiver run down his spine at her words, cold as stone, but harsh as a ravine. He had never heard her talk that way, but he could imagine she would address any enemy this way, nowadays. Still, it chilled him down to the marrow of his bones, and he couldn’t help but feel even more guilty about all the poking and prodding he had done on her in order to get things clean with her mother and get to know better the circumstances of her birth. He never wanted her to fight any of her sisters in arms, he never wanted to reach this point. Yes, he wanted her to come clean with her mother and those that made her feel less than unwelcome, but not this way.

“You don’t have to though…” he murmured.

“She does,” interjected Hippolyta. “She was the one to challenge Thekla. She has to take this fight to its end.”

“It isn’t a fight to the death though, is it?”

The Queen shook her head. “No. Trifling matters such as this are dealt with a first blood duel. It was common practice among Amazons in the past, something we picked up from our time as slaves of Hercules, but we came over its ridiculousness a long time ago,” she explained.

“That’s a fact, Captain Trevor,” added Philippus. “That some people understand only violence. Such truth is valid for some Amazons too. Thekla, while being one of our greatest warriors and a tremendous foe to our enemies, has always been such a person. In some ways, it’s good, given her status as hoplite, but understanding the game of politics and sometimes the greater power of what is just over what comes a given law was never her forte.”

“Aren’t you worried though?”

Philippus, Menalippe and Hippolyta threw a quick look at each other, then chuckled as Diana
walked down the slope to join Thekla on the grassy knoll. “For Diana? Not in the slightest.”

He sighed. “I wasn’t talking about her,” but his soft remark fell to deaf ears.

Diana stopped for a moment on her downward path and grabbed the Lasso, as it hang from its hook at her belt. “Steve, grab this.” She threw him the Lasso. “I don’t think I will need it.”

He grabbed it mid-air and nodded. “Sure. Good luck, Diana.”

“Thanks Steve.” Then she resumed her walk.

“What a funny thing to say to a warrior before a duel…” said Menalippe, almost absent-mindedly. “She doesn’t need luck, she has training!”

A third Amazon he didn’t know walked down to the ring, right between the two contenders. “Diana,” she spoke, loud enough for her voice to echo among the mountains around them. “You challenged Thekla. Are you going through with such challenge?”

She nodded. “I am.”

“Thekla, you have accepted the challenge, chosen the weapons and the place as instructed. Are you going through with it?”

Thekla nodded herself. “I am.”

“Then it is decided. This duel will provide judgement on the matter. This is a first blood duel, the first one to shed the opponent’s blood will be declared winner and the righteous one. No moves barred, except for maiming or deadly ones. You may strike anywhere but the head, but avoid blows that would cut off limbs or incapacitate the opponent beyond the Healing Pools ability to heal. Our medical team stands ready to help in case the first blood is shed from a large wound. Do you accept the conditions?” The two contestants nodded. “Then it is decided. Let the trial by duel begin.”

Calmly, the judge, no better word to describe her, retired from the meadow as Diana unsheathed her sword and, with ease, dropped in defensive stance. Shield raised to cover from knee to shoulder, sword sticking from the side of the shield, she looked like a panther ready to strike, in total contrast with Thekla, who was jumping from foot to foot, like a boxer would do, with both shield and sword lowered in a more aggressive stance. Two very different ways to see combat.

To Steve, it was like watching a light German Fokker approaching a heavily armored British Sopwith Camel. One was quick, fast, aggressive but unreliable, the other was heavy and hard to maneuver, but it outclassed any other fighter he ever had the chance to put his hands on. The Fokker had its perks, but it was sort of indefensible, given its thin fuselage and wooden components, but the Camel? That was the love of his life, speaking about biplanes.

Thekla didn’t wait too long before she attacked. It was a flurry of slashes and thrusts which were parried, deflected or dodged by Diana with swift movements and elegant that drew a smile from his face. “And you were worried?” whispered Menalippe, nudging him in his ribs with her elbow. “Diana knows the craft of war, you have nothing to worry about. She has the upper hand.”

Again, I wasn’t talking about Diana. Heck if he knew Diana was more than a capable fighter, she was formidable! If only they could see what he had seen, in Belgium and in Gotham and Paris, and in the videos of the battle with Doomsday… this fight would be over in a minute. Her worth could be proved immediately and no one would ever dare to negate her rightful place among the ranks of the Amazons. This… farce would have never taken place. Diana would have never felt like she was forced to turn to violence in order to make her voice be heard above the unfounded discontent.
Steve exhaled a long breath, just as Thekla tried to hack through Diana’s collarbone with her sword, a downward sword swing that was quickly deflected with a swift raised shield. Diana counterattacked with ease and agility, pivoting on her feet and dropping to one knee and trying to hit her opponent on the leg with a large swipe of her blade, attempt failed when Thekla jumped over the swipe and dodged it.

As she did so, she saw an opportunity to strike, but she aimed to high. Intending to push the tip of her sword to the shoulder, instead Thekla’s thrust hit the air above Diana’s clavicle, but the sharp edge of her blade, the part close to the hilt, cut through the leather strip that held the fastening of her right gauntlet. He saw it come loose on her wrist as the old fastening was detached from its loop and a sudden spark of bright yellow lightning coursed through her extended arm to her sword. The miniature lightning caused a visible shockwave powerful enough to push Thekla about ten yards back from Diana. At the same time, Steve heard a sudden intake of breath coming from both Hippolyta and Menalippe, as the whole crowd of spectators cried in shock around him.

“Oh no…” whispered the Queen.

“Does she know?”

Hippolyta shook her head. “No, she doesn’t…”

“What’s going on?” he asked, a little frantically.

“The gauntlets…” she replied, breathless, eyes wide in fear. “They’re designed to help her channel her powers, but…”

“But what?”

“But they’re also needed to keep those powers in check!” added the General, as worried as the Queen. “They were designed by Hephaestus to keep her powers under control, her control! Without one of them… who knows what will happen!”

“Without both…” cried Hippolyta. “Without both she would be completely unstoppable.”

He turned back towards the ring, only to find Thekla pushing herself away from Diana, now standing with both shield and sword lowered in front of her, right gauntlet dangling loose from her wrist. He couldn’t see her face, as she was turned away from him, but he knew that stance, the defiance and the rage it showed. Diana’s anger was literally coursing through her, like electricity. “Gods…” he murmured. “Is this the power Hades spoke of?”

“You mean the raw, unchecked power of the gods?” asked Philippus. “Yes, it is. And as long as she’s so wrathful, there’s no way we can control it.”

Well fuck...

Chapter End Notes

I hope I got the (vague, I know) specs of those planes right.
“But… there must be a way to stop her!” exclaimed Steve as he watched Diana viciously deploy a barrage of heavy strikes on Thekla, who was now reduced to hiding behind a battered shield that didn’t have much stopping power in it.

“She needs to calm down and regain her wits!” explained Hippolyta. “She’s overcome with negative emotions, the surge of raw power must be fuelling those emotions in the wrong way.”

“But is she really unstoppable?”

“For all I know, yes, she is,” replied Menalippe.

Steve grunted in disbelief. Diana’s not a raging animal, come on! He exclaimed to himself. There must be some way to stop her before she does something crazy!

But the more he witnessed her onslaught and the more he feared that Hippolyta’s dismal fears were more grounded than his hope she would get a hold of herself sooner rather than later. There was something vicious in the way she moved, something that struck a sour note in him. He knew she was powerful, good God, she was the daughter of Zeus for Olympus’ sake, but knowing that there were instances where she had little to no control on such power, and that she wasn’t aware of that? It was so messed up…

Damn…

Behind him, Menalippe shouted orders around, making her troops form a human barrier between Diana and a now exhausted Thekla. The General was playing her cards very conservatively, not wanting her troops or Diana to get hurt. The Amazons, weapons and shield at the ready, moved to surround Diana, and she looked around, a wrathful grin twisting her face in a grim look that slightly scared him.

He didn’t really think she had it in her, so much rage and pent up frustration. She looked around her, ready to strike whenever someone tried to move against her.

It was in that moment that he felt a sudden heated sting at his hip. He looked down and saw the Lasso of Hestia shining bright as it hanged from his belt. What the…

Then an idea, as crazy as it could be, popped up in his mind. What if this could help…

“Your Highness!” he yelled above the noise on the proving ground, grabbing the Lasso and showing it to Hippolyta. “Diana once told me that she tried to use the Lasso of Hestia on one of her friends that had gone berserk, to make him see his true self I think she said, do you think it could work on her?”

The Queen startled at the mention of the Lasso, but judging by her face, Steve knew she was interested. “Did it work?”

“I… I think so!” he stammered. “I mean, he’s alive and he hasn’t killed anyone so yes, it worked!”

“How exactly do you think you can use it though?” she asked. “It’s not like she’s calm and collected,
I’m not sure she’ll manage to hold back if you get close enough! You could get hurt, or worse.”

Briefly shaking his head, Steve pondered her words but decided he didn’t care much if he got hurt, Epione could simply dunk him in the Healing Pools again, but if his idea worked, this whole thing would stop right then. Sure, Diana would calm down with time, but he feared she would only get angrier if others tried to attack her, or gave her the impression they would attack, even if they didn’t intend to. *I’ve got to do something, fast!* He thought.

He gripped the Lasso so tight he heard his knuckles crack. “The only way I know, Your Highness,” he declared. “Head on.”

Without a single care in the world, he charged down the hill onto the grassy slope, holding the glowing Lasso of Truth in his hands and heading straight towards Diana. Most of the Amazons around her turned towards him, some of them even moved so they wouldn’t hinder his charge, and he was lucky she didn’t notice him until it was too late. She barely had the time to turn her head towards him before he tackled her and wrapped the Lasso around her torso as they fell to the ground. Twisting his wrists, he rolled the Lasso around his palms to get a better grip and then pulled hard. Diana started fighting against him, fighting like a trapped animal against the burning Lasso. Her hands let go of her sword and shield and tried to unwrap the divine tool from around her, but much to his surprise, he found it extremely easy to keep her subdued due to the magical powers of the Lasso.

“Calm down, Diana!” he exclaimed, pulling hard to keep the bright cord around her. “This is not who you are!”

“Let me go!” she grunted, thrashing again, but her efforts were less intense. “Let me go!”

“Not until you calm down!” he repeated, a little less violently this time. “Diana, this is not you. I get it, you’re angry. You’ve swallowed too much in the past year and this was the last straw, but this isn’t you. Let the Lasso show you the truth!”

The rope burned even brighter for a moment with Diana’s last attempt to get out of the Lasso’s flaming grasp, before she let out one long gasp and the Lasso suddenly turned back to its original golden color. She sagged in his arms and took a brief tentative breath and looked down at the broken clasp of her gauntlet. “I hate this…” she murmured. “How long was I out?”

*I thought she didn’t know*… “A minute, maybe two.”

“Did I…”

He shook his head. “No. No one got hurt. Thekla may need some time off training though. You sure scared her!”

He watched her slowly look around, meet the distraught faces of her sisters in arms as they stared down at her. Shrugging a little, she moved to stand up, in complete silence, grabbed her shield and sword then placed them on their hooks behind her back. “I… I need a moment alone. I… I’ll be back.”

She didn’t even look at him as she walked away from the proving grounds. She didn’t look at anyone at all, to be honest. Steve suddenly had a flashback of Veld after the gassing, she had the same look in her eyes, as if the world had crumbled on her shoulders. He could only try to imagine how she felt, losing control that way, in front of people she had known since childhood? It must have been horrible. Also, what she had asked him, about how long she was out, what she said about hating it… it had happened before, he knew it, and most of all, he was sure that something bad had
happened the other time.

Damn Diana... what happened to you? He wondered as he stood and gathered the Lasso in a neat hoop.

Suddenly, Steve started wondering how many things she had kept from him, about what she had done during the past century before resurfacing from oblivion as Wonder Woman. She had been pretty candid to him about having fought but not the way he would remember her, but she had never told him about specific events. He knew she had participated in World War 2, aiding both Allies and Resistance movements across Europe and the Far East fronts, but what else? Yes, there had been other wars to fight, but what else? Surely there couldn’t only have been Ares, his presence alone was more than enough to prove him that magic existed in the world. Had she fought another enemy like him?

A million other questions swarmed his brain, but before he could follow her, Hippolyta had reached him and stopped him. “Don’t Steve. I know you want to help, but she needs to be alone for a while.”

“It has happened before, Your Highness.”

She turned towards him, shocked. “Did she tell you?”

“No,” he replied, shaking his head. “But she said something about hating it, that alone was enough to tell me it has happened before.”

He heard curse, softly, in a language he didn’t understand. “Nevertheless, let her cool down on her own. I know my daughter, sometimes she just needs to cool off on her own.”

With a sigh, he nodded. “Yes, Your Highness.” He wasn’t still convinced Diana should have been alone in that moment, but he had solemnly sworn that he would have obeyed every single order her mother would have given him, so he wouldn’t follow Diana, for the time being. “I’ll... I think I’ll return to the boat, let Epione take a look at Thekla and... well, do your thing.”

“Good idea Captain. Now that I think of it, it would be better if you wouldn’t show up to our gatherings for a while. I’m sure things will calm down on their own in a few hours, but it would be better if you and Diana wouldn’t come to dinner tonight.”

“I agree, Your Highness. Also, I fear Diana’s would be inclined to leave as soon as we can. I’ll make preparation for our departure at once.”

It was late afternoon, with the sun already low on the horizon, when Steve had finished preparation for their leave. The ship was ready to set sail whenever Diana decided it was time to return to Man’s World, food and water were stashed away for the trip, he just needed her word and they would departure.

But he hadn’t seen Diana in hours.

He had found her armor and weapons on the boat, carelessly discarded in the bedroom, and had changed into something more modern and simpler. Her running shoes were also gone too, only her gauntlets were missing from her usual battle attire. She was nowhere to be found, and his patience was wearing thin while his imagination was running wild in the wrong directions, fuelled by anguish and too much coffee. Which was almost over, he had to admit as he fixed himself a cup and noticed the bottom of the tin appearing beneath the grounded powder. Unable to stand the wait any longer, he grabbed courage with both hands - and since he was there, the bag that contained his pipe - and went looking for her. He had no clue where he could where she could be hiding nor he had good
knowledge of the cartography of Themyscira, but he couldn’t stand the wait any longer.

Since he knew she was more than able to handle herself, he didn’t rush or anything like that. He needed to clear his head too after all, so he walked at a leisurely pace from the beach to the path that headed to the cliffs and once up, turned left, away from the gravel road that would have brought him to the citadel.

Meanwhile, he pulled the pipe out of its velvet box, gave it a good quick scouring with a tiny ramrod and filled the chamber with some finely chopped tobacco. He wasn’t a frequent smoker by any means, but he had picked up the habit of smoking the pipe from his father. He rarely had the time to do so, since pipe smoking wasn’t as nearly as convenient and fast as cigarettes, but the rare times he actually had the chance to sit down, or in this case take a walk, and he needed to clear his head, he found that the pipe was a good way to channel such thoughts that occupied his mind. Diana had scolded him when he had come home from a walk in Paris with the new pipe, all the accessory and a bag of tobacco, citing all the different side effects of smoking that had been discovered during the past century, but that hadn’t been enough to deter him from his old, though rather rare, habit.

He had much to think about and going through the slow and methodical action of charging the pipe helped him concentrate. How many more secrets had been kept from Diana, regarding his nature and power? Even worse, was there something that even her parents didn’t know about what she could truly achieve? He had no idea those gauntlets served as a purpose other than a defense mean against both blades and bullets, but it looked like pretty much everyone else knew, even Diana, despite Hippolyta’s conviction that her daughter had no idea of their true purpose.

Also, what had happened to Diana in the past to make her lose, or even worse, get rid of them herself, so that she would unleash all her power and strength?

Damn, she was scary. True, she had been under the influence of very strong feelings that had clouded her mind, but she was scary all the same. He had seen her fight, even when angry, but he never thought she could give in to such wrath in a fight. His fears for Thekla were justified in the end, even though he truly doubted Diana would have hurt her too bad if the binding of her gauntlet hadn’t snapped.

He was deeply engrossed in his thought when, contrary to his expectation, Steve found her, sitting on the grass at the edge of a cliff. She had her legs bent and her arms crossed over her knees and her face hidden in the crook of her elbow, blocking away the light of the setting sun. Sighing, he exhaled a quick puff of smoke and shook his head. She looked like a baby girl who had just been caught doing something she shouldn’t have done and was reprimanded for it, and she was now hiding in shame. Silently, he pulled the pipe from his teeth and sat beside her, but said nothing. He just enjoyed the gorgeous scenery in front of them.

“You’re smoking…” she whispered after a while.

“Oh, yes. Needed to clear my head a little bit.”

“You know it isn’t good for you…”

Chuckling, he banged the pipe against a rock to empty it of its now burnt contents and shoved said rock over the small mound of tobacco to avoid any risk of fire. “I know, I know… but come on, let me enjoy something from my own times here and then.” He dared to nudge her with his elbow.

“How are you doing?”

She shrugged her shoulders and blindly reached behind her, handing him the broken gauntlet. “I’ll manage.”
He took the piece of armor and examined it. Only the leather strap was damaged, something that could be easily repaired, the rest of the armguard looked perfect, just out of the forge. “Well, the damage isn’t that great, nothing that can’t be fixed with some leather and a new buckle.”

“I don’t care about the strap, Steve… I… I just don’t like lose control this way.”

“Uh… has it happened before?”

She nodded and finally turned her head towards him. “Thirty years ago I think, give or take a few years. It was… it was a tough fight and…”

“And?”

She sighed. “Listen, if I’m not proud of how I handled Ares, I’m not proud of how I handled… her too.” The disgust in her voice as she mentioned this unknown female opponent was blatant. “I let her get under my skin and it got… messy. She kept taunting me and I let control slip. She had no idea that Hephaestus had revealed that the bracers are what keeps my raw power in check and… I willingly took them off. What you saw today Steve was just the tip of the iceberg of what I could do.”

“Well, at least now I’m prepared and I know the Lasso can help you get you back. But now I’m curious… what happened?”

Diana ran her fingers through her hair. “I had been chasing her for months. A number of ancient artifact connected to ancient cults stolen all over the world, numerous sightings of a beautiful woman every time such an artifact was stolen, a trail of blood long enough to run across the Equator line… the usual, you know… I finally manage to track this person down and it turns out she’s a powerful sorceress with a tight control on ancient magic. She could even read my mind, I think. She would anticipate every move I tried, ever tactic… fighting was useless. She also could see through different worlds, different timelines and she kept mentioning you, how different us were happy and how stupid I was to let you go… I just… lost it. I took the gauntlets off and… it got gory.”

Steve nodded. He had guessed something like that had happened, so he was more curious about how she had got to know that the gauntlets not only channelled her powers but also kept them in check. “I see. Well… while it isn’t exactly the best conversation subject, now that we know about it we can avoid it, uh?”

“I hope. It doesn’t feel good, losing control like that. It’s like… I don’t know. I guess it’s like being crashed by a truck at high speed on the highway. Believe it or not, it hurts a lot.” She leaned closer to him and laid her head on his shoulder. “And it makes me feel like I don’t belong.”

“Why so?”

She shrugged again. “I’m half Amazon and half goddess. My body and mind are not prepared to deal with the immense power of my godly part and when I lose control I… I completely lose it. I could have used this power to defeat Steppenwolf, but I’m too afraid to lose myself in its immensity and become a much worse threat that…” she sighed. “No, I don’t even want to think about it. That’s what I mean with I don’t belong . I’m not an Amazon, but neither I’m a god. I can’t control this power, not to the extent of a full god, and at the same time I’m not Amazon enough to be called as such, even though I was raised like one. And you know what’s worse? I live in a world where, if I slip, I could become a raging monster, hungry for blood and nothing else. You saw what happened with Thekla, right? It only took the failure of a buckle, and I was almost gone. That’s why I say that I don’t belong. There’s no place for me in the world, not when one slip could fry my mind and make me forget who I am.”
“I think you’re a little too hard on yourself, Diana,” he said then. “Sure, you’re in a difficult position, you walk on the edge of something most people wouldn’t even dare to imagine, let alone understand, and it’s difficult, I get it but… you’ve done a remarkable job through the years, to make it work. As difficult as it has been, you still have managed to keep the balance letting yourself very few momentarious slips, and I wouldn’t count today as one because it didn’t get gory.”

“Just because you had the best idea ever, Steve.”

“Well I’ll make sure I’ll be there the next time, ready to tackle you with the Lasso if need arises.”

She smiled for a moment. “Don’t you think I should learn how to manage this power, before I become too reliant on its failsafe?”

He rolled the stem of the pipe in his hands. “Good point. I just don’t want you to worry about this. Not now at least. This is manageable!”

“Yes well…” She drew a long breath. “You know, literature and mythologies around the world are riddled with the stories of demigods that couldn’t hold the powers harbored in them in check. Most of them had powerful magical instruments to help them not lose their minds. It’s also a common theme in recent years, in works coming from all around the world, even Japan! But it’s mostly demons in that case. Oh well, misery loves company, I guess.”

“Must be something born of a real event. Like… I don’t know, a demigod that fucked up beyond any repair and those who witnessed it turned it into a cautionary tale. A warning your own parents heeded, because they gave you the gauntlets so you could grow without the struggle of having to manage such power.”

“I guess so. I’ve always had them, you know? Ever since I remember. They seemed to grow with me.”

“Hephaestus must be an amazing blacksmith…” he mused. “So… I prepared the boat so we can leave anytime you feel like it, although…” he trailed off.

“Although what?” she prodded.

“Do we have to?”

“After today, we definitely have to go. Also, Season 4 of Outlander starts in a month or so, so yes, we have to go home.”

Steve chuckled. “I thought you said you weren’t one for watching TV!”

With a soft, playful grunt, she hit him with her elbow in between the ribs. “First of all, it’s based on a book. And while it isn’t exactly Shakespeare, the book was entertaining when I read it! Second the show itself is very well done and third, Lois watches it too! She hooked me up!”

“Ah well… I suppose I’ll have to watch it with you.”

“Only if you want to. But if you do, you’ll have to watch the other seasons, or you’ll understand virtually nothing of it.”

“I guess I can live with that.” Sighing, he wrapped an arm around her shoulders and drew her closer to him. “Sure it’s beautiful here.”

“It’s the place I used to come when I needed to be alone for a while. It’s also the place where I saw
you crashing in the sea with your plane.”

“Uh, really?”

She nodded against his chest. “Yes, right there…” She traced his ruinous trajectory in the reddish sky. “I had absolutely no idea of what was going, who you were and what the hell was that strange contraption, but I saw you struggling to get out and I jumped. The rest is history.”

Chapter End Notes

Damn, the rewatch of InuYasha is giving me all the feels in the world... also yes... ahem... I truly think DC EU Diana would be a fan of Outlander. Bear with me please, the Droughtlander is getting harder and harder...
I know, I'm late. I suck. Blame writer's block. Thank the new set photos from WW84 for unblocking me. GIVE ME ALL THE WONDERTREV GOODIES!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

In the end the time to leave Themyscira arrived, much to their collective sadness. Steve, Diana and her mother Hippolyta gathered at the dock where the boat was moored before sunrise, before they could catch the high tide.

“Are you sure you have to go?”

Diana had never heard such uncertainty in her mother’s voice, not in recent years at least. Hippolyta had always been resolute and steadfast, it wasn’t like her to sound like she was pleading.

With a sigh, she hugged her mother tight. “Unfortunately, we have to. We have obligations we must fulfill back home.”

“There was a time when Themyscira was your home,” she murmured in her ear. “Not Man’s World.”

“Themyscira will forever be my home, Mother, but there are places I can call home even in Man’s World. You would understand, if you could see it.”

She gave her a stern nod. “Very well. Then may the winds be strong and steady. Have a safe journey, Diana. We’ll be waiting here for your return. Just… don’t wait so long this time.” Then she looked over her shoulder. “The invitation is open to you too, Steve. You’re welcome on the island whenever you want.”

Suddenly called to the spotlight, Steve suddenly went rigid for a moment, but nodded himself. “Thank you, Your Highness, I’m really thankful for the opportunity and your trust.”

“We have a deal, remember? Treat my daughter right, and no harm will befall you while among Amazons. Now go, before you lose the tide.”

She hugged her again. “We’ll come back soon, don’t worry about it. Farewell Mother, may the Gods smile upon you.”

“And you too. Both of you. Sends my greetings to Poseidon.”

And so they left. In about twenty minutes they reached the dense fog that surrounded Themyscira and Diana found herself holding the handrail at the back of the boat, gripping it so tight as she watched the island disappear in the thick grey mist that she heard the metal screech beneath her fingers. Something heavy sunk in the pit of her stomach, and for the first time it was longing, not the urge to get away from the island as fast as she could. For one hundred years she had dreaded the times she decided to stay for a week or two, and now, with things finally settled with her mother and most of her sisters, leaving hurt. There was no sudden relief when the thick fog dissipated around her, instead she was filled with a bittersweet sense of nostalgia that she had experienced only when
she had left the first time. She had almost forgot that feeling, and it wasn’t exactly welcome.

“Oh well, until next time then,” she said, turning away and moving towards the helm, where Steve was taking care of the navigation. “How’s it going?” she asked him, trying to concentrate on other matters than her own nostalgia.

“Quite well, I have to say. The sea is nice, the tide is high, navigation systems are starting to work again… I think we’re set for Amalfi. You though? How do you feel?”

She sat on one of the chairs and pulled her legs close to her chest. “I don’t really know. For the first time since I left the first time, I feel like leaving hurts. Other times, I couldn’t wait to get back home, as soon as I could. This time though, everything was so different… I got most of the answers I wanted, I truly enjoyed my stay and I think I got closer to my mother but… I also miss home, you know? I don’t know, it’s confusing.”

“I get the feeling, Diana. And don't worry about it, I think your head will clear up a bit, sooner or later.”

She nodded. “I hope so. I just… Do you think we could come back, next year maybe?”

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled. “Same time window?”

“Why not? Maybe not for so long. Also, we have to see if Zeus will be willing to let us borrow the boat again.”

“Poseidon said he doesn’t use it that much, I guess that if we ask with some advance, there won’t be a problem.”

She smiled. “Uh, who knew the other side of my family would be so nice, in the end.”

“You always pictured as bitter, deceitful and power hungry?”

“That, and a slightly sadistic tendency to ruin everything in their wake. I don’t know, maybe I’m too influenced by humanity’s views on the different gods they believed in and the mythologies I’ve come to know in the past century just cemented my views too?”

“Could be. But you know what’s interesting? A while ago I asked Hades what he thought of the different religions in the world and he said that in the end the various religions in the world are just different declinations of worshipping the same gods. The different views, the different degrees of importance, they’re just humanity’s constructs. Hence the difference. Remember what he said about the myth on how he actually got married to Persephone?”

“Oh yes. Judging by the way those two acted around one another, he didn’t exactly kidnap her like we were taught in school.”

“Exactly. Who knows what the guy that told the story first said, it got passed on this way because of cultural reasons. And believe me, different culture can be extremely different, thus the different religions and the different way they saw the gods.”

“For all my life I experienced only one view of the gods, that of my Mother and the other Amazons. I guess getting to know other cultures with different views all so suddenly didn’t allow me to form an opinion, I just followed what I got from others.”

Steve nodded. “Exactly. Don’t think that it was any different for me. It was kind of a shock within a shock, being catapulted one hundred years ahead in time and three days later meeting Hades in a bar.
I myself had a very different idea on gods, both from normal school and Sunday school.”

“No that you mention it, were you religious before we met?”

“Not much,” he said, shrugging his shoulders. “I was raised catholic, considering that all my grandparents came from Ireland to the United States, but I was never religious. The war and the atrocities I’ve seen just… well, they made me actually give up religion all the same. Though I guess I changed my mind now, given the circumstances.”

“It’s different, when you have the actual certainty that something like this exist, isn’t it?”

“Oh absolutely. I mean… I knew of the myth of the Amazons, but did I believe it before I crashed on Themyscira? Of course not. After? It’s impossible not to believe it, or at least some of it, since it was twisted in more ways I can think of.”

“Believe it or not, I don’t mind. Gives me a little sense of uniqueness, if you allow me the term.”

He smiled. “You’re already unique, Diana.”

“I don’t know, my father is well known for having issues controlling is most basal instincts, when it comes to sex. How many demigods and demigoddesses, children of Zeus could there be out there?”

Gently, he wrapped his fingers around her wrist and pulled her towards him, into his chest and kissed her. “None of them are you.”

Hundreds of nautical miles later, another pantagruelic banquet at Poseidon’s restaurant and another, quicker and lighter this time, lunch at Dionysus’ with Hades so they could give back the car and then one last flight, they were finally back in Paris. In the early days of September, the air had cooled and used to the warmer climate of the Aegean Sea, Steve shuddered a little bit when they landed and got out of the airport. The shuttle ride home took a little longer than expected, and when they finally arrived, he was exhausted.

Diana laughed out loud in true amusement when he plopped on the bed, face down, and hugged his pillow. “I missed you…” he murmured into the memory foam. “I missed you and how good you are for my neck!”

“Weren’t you the one that bragged about being able to sleep even on a bed of rocks?”

“If I’m tired enough,” he replied, turning his head to face her. “But that doesn’t mean my neck and back don’t hurt after a night on such a bed.”

“Has it happened?”

“Once or twice.” His face twisted in a grimace at a sudden memory. “More often than what I would like to remember, unfortunately. Being a spy had its perks, but also its downsides. Finding sleeping accommodations in odd places was one of those downsides. You?”

She sighed, and sat on the bed beside him. “Same thing, I guess. Trenches, jungles, bombed down buildings… even a recently liberated concentration camp, once.”

His eyebrow shot up. “Uh? A concentration camp?”

“Yes,” she sighed again. “I can’t remember which one, that time period is kind of a blur, but I had helped some troops liberate the camp and bring help to the people in there and… I just collapsed in
one of the turrets and slept the day away. You know…” She leaned back and plopped down on the bed herself. “I think my mind blocked out most of the memories of that period because of how ghastly they were, but I absolutely remember how tired I was all the time. Lack of sleep, little food, everything sucked during World War II, and…”

“Well, I haven’t lived through it, but I’ve seen my fair share of trenches, of blood and violence in my time, in my own World War, I think I can understand what kind of weariness you’re talking about.”

“I guess you can… It’s more mental than physical.” She ran her fingers through his messy hair and scratched a little the nape of his neck. “Listen, do you mind if I take a shower? I think I still have some salt in my hair.”

“Sure, go ahead. How about I make some tea and start unpacking?”

Diana leaned closer to him and kissed him. “It would be great, thanks Steve.”

“Anytime, Angel. I’ll shower after you.”

She disappeared in the bathroom and he got to his tasks. He prepared the tea first, then moved to their bags. Not that they had much to unpack, most of their clothes consisted in t-shirts, shorts and swimming gear, so he basically grabbed everything and shoved a bunch of clothes in the washing machine, added the detergent and started it. He took a moment to appreciate that miracle of technology, thinking back to the time when his mother had to wash everything by hand and he used to help her as a child, just to have an excuse to splash around water, then went back to the suitcases. He put the little clean clothes left from the trip away, set the book he was reading on the nightstand on his side and the ones he had finished back on the shelf, then gathered Diana’s things and set them in their allotted places too. Doing that, he passed in front of a mirror in the bathroom and through the fog of Diana’s shower he noticed how ragged and disheveled he looked.

“Damn I need to shave!” he exclaimed, running his fingers through the spiky and unkempt beard.

“Don’t you dare to shave clean though!” came her voice from the shower stall.

“I wouldn’t even think about it! Just a trim here and there, I know you like my beard!” he replied. “But I definitely need to see a barber. My hair’s a mess.”

“That, I don’t mind.”

“Me either. I’m almost done with the unpacking and the tea is ready. Take your time!”

Diana pushed her head through the stall door to look at him. “Calm down, we have time. It’s not like we have to host a gala in an hour or so!”

“No, that’s next week at the Louvre, right? The new season presentation, right?” She nodded and Steve shrugged. “Anyway, I just don’t like to leave things scattered around. I don’t mind, really! Call it old military conditioning.”

With a smile that melted his heart, she grabbed the hem of his shirt and pulled him into a long, languid and wet kiss. “Got it. I’ll let you do your thing then.”

About five minutes later, he was done with the unpacking and he moved to place Diana’s case and his own bag in the top shelf of her walk-in closet. As he did so though, he knocked over some of her clothes in the back.

“Damn…” he muttered as he bent over and pulled up what he had displaced. One was a thick
woolen coat he had seen her wear a couple of times in winter, on special occasion, the other was an old, battered leather biker jacket. *Must be from those days when she owned a bike.*

He picked it up from the floor and as he hung it back on the hanger, a small but thick envelope fell from the internal pocket. A bunch of photos came out of the frayed paper container and Steve, curious, gathered them and started flipping through them. He had come to know that between daguerreotypes and modern digital photography there had been a long period where pictures were impressed on film and then developed, but there was also instant photography, and those were a bunch of old Polaroids, as they used to be called.

They showed people he didn’t recognize in places he had no idea where in the world they were, but all of them showed people having a good time. In some of them, Diana appeared too. Her hair was longer and more wavy, the makeup darker and the clothes different, but in most of the Polaroids where she appeared she wore the same jacket where the pictures were stored, as a safe keep. Steve had no idea why, but those pictures made him smile. She seemed to be having such an amazing time with those people, he couldn’t help but wonder where they were now, and what had happened to them.

He had just flipped to a photo of Diana smiling as she sat on a low wall, almost curled up on herself as she laughed at something happening on her right but not pictured, when she walked out of the bathroom wrapped in a pale blue bathrobe, towelling her hair dry. “Hey, what did you find?”

“Oh don’t worry, I don’t care if you pry, I was just surprised, I thought I had lost these pictures with the last moving. Gods… some of them were taken nearly forty years ago!”

“Wow, really?”

She nodded and took a photo that showed her and two other women sitting at a rustic wooden table in what looked like a mountain setting. They were drinking beer from thick glass mugs, something he had seen often in Germany during the war, so he guessed they were in there. “Oh damn, look at those two! Angela and Silvia! I met them on a trip in Germany in 1991. I was living in Munich around that time, I worked at the Alte Pinakothek there and I had too many vacation days piled up and they forced me to take two weeks off. I had no idea what to do so I just got the bike out and headed towards the mountains. I met these girls and the groups of bikers they travelled with and we rode together for a couple of days.”

Flipping through the pictures, Steve pulled another out of the bunch. “What about this?”

“Oh this one is old! 1982 I think… or 1983, oh well, who cares. I was in line for a concert with some friends, in London.”

“What concert?” he asked.

“Duran Duran. I think you’ve heard them, I still listen to them from time to time. Oh, this one has a
story behind it!” she exclaimed pointing at the picture of her laughing he had noticed earlier. “That was taken in Brazil.”

“Brazil uh?”

She nodded. “It’s more recent though, but damn it aged like hell! It was taken in 2004 for heaven’s sake, the quality of the developing paper really got downhill. Anyway, I got involved with a gang of heisters around that time.”


“For a good cause. They were criminals alright, but they weren’t that bad. I mean… they liked illegal racing and they did everything they could to fund their passion and that involved heists, but this time they were working for a greater cause. I had met them a couple of years before as I worked for a mexican drug dealer…”

“Diana, I don’t really like where this tale is going…”

“…So I could gather evidence to arrest him! Come on Steve I told you I did my part to help humanity, even without the sword and the shield, have some faith in me!”

“Uh, alright, I like it a little more now.”

“Good. Anyway, we did actually manage to gather enough to have him arrested, tried and imprisoned. He’s still in jail by the way. Fast forward a couple of years later, they were ready to do it again. They needed some help and I had vacation days piled up. We pulled a heist on another drug dealer, got him in jail and got ourselves some good money too, to be honest.”

“How much?”

“About ten million dollars. I kept some for myself, you never know, but let’s say that Doctors Without Borders appreciated a nine million dollar check, that year.”

“Well, I wouldn’t mind too. What were you laughing at?”

“I think it was something Dom said after the heist, something really stupid that made me crack. That guy is enormous, he looks like he could crush your skull with his hand, but he’s one of the sweetest men I’ve ever met in my life. He’d do anything for his family, crime included, but he’s really sweet. I wonder where he is now.”

“You didn’t keep in touch?”

“How would i justify the fact that I still look like I’m in my late twenties when technically he knows a Diana Prince that should be 43? Heck, he doesn’t even know Diana Prince, I used another identity at the time.”

“Wow, you make my spy days sound like a walk in the park.”

Chuckling, she nudged his ribs with her elbow. “Another time, another place. Don’t try to compare the two, it doesn’t work too well. By the way, I have more photos if you’re interested. Go and take a shower, I’ll look for them.”

“Oh I’m definitely interested. Let’s see what you can find.”
They didn’t exactly spend much time looking at the pictures Diana had found while he was in the shower. To their defence, finally washing away the dirt and the sweat of the past couple of days spent travelling in a real shower and not just briskly washing off the sweat and the dirt of training with a quick dunk in the sea felt too good, and their bed was just so comfortable and enticing that their attention was quickly diverted to other types of activities. The fact that Diana was already half naked on the bed didn’t help at all.

And as much as the shower had felt good, making love to Diana in their own bed felt glorious.

“Oh, I missed this,” she murmured into his neck.

“Well, the Pools weren’t bad too.”

“Uhm… Yes, not bad, just slippery maybe?”

“Can’t complain, really,” he replied. “Sure the buoyancy helped a lot!”

Steve felt a smile form on her lips against his skin. “Yeah, we did get pretty acrobatic that night, although we shouldn’t have, with your injured shoulder.”

“Oh I’m sorry Diana if I’ll sound like a primitive caveman by saying this, but a round of wild sex with you beats sore shoulder every day.”

“Well, I’ll take it as a compliment, but it was more than one round, or does your memory fail you?”

He ran a hand through his hair. “I think I never started counting, but it was a hell of a night,” he said. “Even though every night with you is a hell of a night. I learned that lesson pretty soon.”

“If you mean Veld, that wasn’t exactly my best moment, I was slightly inexperienced when it came to sex with a man.”

“I didn’t notice and I wouldn’t have cared at all, but I wasn’t talking about Veld, I was talking about the first night on the boat. Man, you were a handful that night!”

Propping herself on her arms, she lifted her head and looked at him in disbelief. “I had just left my home, with the prospect of possibly never coming back, and you were insufferable! You kept deflecting the questions I asked, you refused to believe anything I said… you think it was a hell of a night only for you?”

“Ah! So you couldn’t remember where you put those pictures but you remember a night that has happened nearly a century ago? Really? And you think my memory is failing?” he exclaimed.

Smiling, she gave him a quick kiss on the lips. “Priorities, Steve. That’s all.”

Then, with a swift movement and a swirl of the bedsheets, she straddled him. Air caught halfway down his lungs when she sat up, gloriously naked and bathed in the pale light coming from the streetlamps outside, like the Greek Goddess she was. Her warm hands on his chest felt like hot coals as suddenly a burst of desire cursed through his veins like molten lead, followed by an equally staggering cold chill down his spine when she looked down at him, a naughty grin twisting her gorgeous features that made his hips buck into hers. Steve was losing the already weakened grip he had on his self control, quickly.

“Priorities,” she repeated. “That are very well set right now.”

He lost it when she bit her lip. And Gods help him, he hoped he’d never regain control again in his
The little shoutout to the Fast&Furious franchise come from the JL BTS short film they did for the Mercedes product placement and a comment a friend of mine made about it that sort of said "GAL YOUR GISELLE IS SHOWING", Giselle being the character Gal portrayed for Fast&Furious 4, 5 and 6, with a little cameo in 7 that got deleted in the editing room. So yes, that part about the heist was a nod to Fast5, which in turn is just the reimagining of what should have been the sequel of The Italian Job. They adapted the script that was never used for a Italian Job 2 to fit into the F&F franchise and there you get the most enjoyable film of the whole series. (No, really, it's a decent heist movie, I swear, I thought it was going to be crap but I actually enjoyed it, once I turned off my brain).

Also, I don't know why but when it comes to Diana and Steve I get all giggily and shy about writing sex scenes involving them. I know for a fact that I can write decent sex, and I have all kinds of different scenes in my mind that would fit this story soooo good, but when it comes to explicitly write them, I bet all shy and I don't know why. For Hera's sake, I wrote full on BDSM stuff in the past about characters I even had more reasons ot be shy about because I had actually met the actress playing her, and I was typing away with no issue. Then I get to them, and nothing. WHY MELPOMENE WHY?????
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

“Diana? How much time do I have left?” yelled Steve from under the shower spray.

“You don’t have to scream, I can hear you!” laughed Diana as she precisely applied the eyeliner in the mirror they had in the bedroom, just a few steps out of the bathroom door. “And we’ve got time, don’t worry.”

“Oh, good!” he exclaimed, clearly spluttering some water as he spoke. “I can fix my beard then.”

She heard him turn off the water and step out of the stall. “Didn’t you go the barber just yesterday?”

“Uh, oh yes!” he replied. “But I had him cut my hair, I can take care of the beard just fine.”

“Be honest with me, you didn’t want him to cut it too short, am I right?”

“Indeed you are,” he said stepping out of the bathroom as he towelled his hair dry. “I’m a little jealous of it, what can I say.”

“Well, I’ve grown fond of it, and while I know it would regrow if shaved, I like you a lot as you are now. Also I got used to it, it would be strange to see you clean shaven.”

“Then you understand my reasoning. I want you to be proud of me with your colleagues and the guests of the gala, so I want to look my best to impress them.”

“Oh Steve, you know I’m always proud of you! You don’t need to impress my colleagues to make me proud! Also, you didn’t need to come.”

He kissed her naked shoulder as he headed to the walk in wardrobe to retrieve his clean clothes.

“And miss a private tour of the museum, after hours, with the best guide in the world? No thank you, I’m glad to join you, if only for the open bar.”

“I heard the catering is to die for, too.”

In the mirror, he noticed his shoulders slump a little bit. “Alright, double workout tomorrow.”

Before Barry hauled him ahead in time, Diana had no idea Steve was such a big eater. It was probably an effect of the rather spartan life he had lived when he was a child, not to mention the years of struggle and shortage of food of the war, but he did enjoy eating. He wasn’t picky at all, another trait she could trace back to his past experiences, but he could indeed turn into a little bit of a glutton, from time to time. Most of all when it came to pasta, he adored every single declination of that dish, from every part of the world, and with the carbs in excess came the need to workout more, to keep himself in good shape. He often whined about how easily she could keep in shape while he had to bust his ass off, his words not hers, in the gym just to maintain a healthy weight.

“Don’t you think you worked out enough last month? Look at you, you’re in awesome shape!” she exclaimed, laughing. “I know people who would give an eye and an arm to look as good as you do!”

Truth be told, as harrowing as it was, the Amazon training regimen had done him very good. He was already in great shape to begin with, slender but muscular at the same time, but the month of hard
training had given him a more definite look that she didn’t mind at all. The added strength that came with all that added bulk he had put on allowed them for more… diverse activities, even outside the gym.

Actually, she had to will herself to divert her thoughts quite briskly when he took off the towel around his waist and stood, naked, in front of the wardrobe.

“If there’s something I learned during the war, is that you never workout enough. There’s always someone who’s better than you, someone that has better chances of survival than you. That’s why I need to keep in the best shape I can, both physically and mentally, if I want to keep up with you guys.”

“Well, I think you can splurge for a night all the same. Your mind is quick and your muscle strong, you have nothing to worry about.”

“For now!” he exclaimed pulling his boxers up. “Now, let’s see if the catering is really so good, then we’ll judge if I need a double workout tomorrow.”

Chuckling, she went back to her makeup. “You surely could work a little on your cardio. You get breathless pretty easily when you sprint.”

“So says the one that can fly.”

Each year, the Louvre organized a gala, just before the beginning of the season, in early September, to show investors and authorities of both the city of Paris and the French government the plans for the new year. Each department would show a premiere of the new pieces going on display, and discuss temporary exhibits they were going to hold through the year.

Before leaving for Themyscira, Diana had left explicit and detailed instructions about how to prepare the department for the night, as she had always done during her tenure, and she had been very pleased when, once she had returned to work, she had found out that her assistants had followed those instructions down to the last comma. The night was going to be more of a formality than anything else, where she would be required to mingle with wealthy investors and the higher ups of the government, nothing to worry about.

What she hadn’t thought about was the effect of Steve’s addition to the mix. He had a talent to be liked by people, a talent he had nurtured to become one of his greatest aces up his sleeve, ready to be played when he needed to, and no matter what he tended to polarize attention on himself. After all, being the one and only official spokesperson of the Justice League meant that in the past months he had appeared multiple times in the media, so his face was well known, by then.

He didn’t mind, he told her multiple times, but he wasn’t one for the spotlight, she knew it. No matter how well he handled that type of attention, she knew he would never feel completely at ease in that kind of environment.

“Well, at least we don’t run any risks of having a power hungry bastard gassing people this time,” he murmured while in the elevator.

“You say it every time we go somewhere like this! Relax, I don’t think we’ll have to rush away to save someone tonight,” she replied. “At least I hope so.”

“Paris and the world managed to resist a month without Wonder Woman, they can resist one night more.”
“Exactly. Ready to be bored to tears?”

With a long and slow intake of breath, he stood up straight and squared himself, fixing the tie knot in the mirror of the elevator. “As ready as I’ll ever be. Come on, it can’t be worse than facing the most important politicians of the United States like… less than two months after being dragged ahead in time, can it?”

When they reached the floor and the door opened, the party was already going. There were tens of people, of all ages, from young entrepreneurs and successful startup owners that were trying to reach the higher ups in a neutral ground running around the hall and said, mostly older, higher ups more accustomed to that type of social gathering that, in true French form, faked being interested in the new tech development while in reality they were what Barry called *technotards*. Not everyone, but in Diana’s experience, somehow Steve had been more inclined to use his intuition to get the hang of technology when he had first landed in the twenty first century than some people that actually had lived through the digital revolution.

They were instantly dragged in a swirl of different conversations, on various topics ranging from their vacation, that had officially taken them on a trip through Italy, to the plans Diana had to boost visitor numbers to the incoming temporary exhibition on the warriors of ancient times, from the Spartans of the Thermopylae to the Roman Legions. Steve managed to chime in from time to time, but for the most he provided a solid smiling presence at her side, letting her charm her way into the hearts and checkbooks of investors of all ages and types. A talent she had perfected through years and years of experience in the art conservation field.

A couple of soft grunts didn’t fall on deaf ears when he noticed, just as she did, that some people had the tendency to let their gaze wander down the neckline of her black evening gown, but he let them slide with quiet dignity and grace, only with one or two killer glares thrown at those who let their eyes linger south a little too long for his tastes.

She was very used to the sometimes curious and sometimes utterly lecherous looks she received from time to time, but Steve’s innate sense of protectiveness in her regards made him more susceptible to that kind of reaction. She herself wasn’t a fan of that kind of attention she gathered, but she had learned to dismiss it with a smile and an elegant shrug of her shoulders, but him? He still had to learn to do the same thing. Had it been for him, he’d punch every man that dared to move his gaze lower than her eyes or showed any type of disrespectful behavior in her regards - or any other person in the room to be honest. He had modernized himself very fast, but he was still very old fashioned when it came to respecting others.

Still, he kept his cool all the way through the night, a constant polite and mostly silent presence right beside her. Until the clock timed 10 PM and he turned into another person entirely. It happened when they got surrounded, in a peaceful way, by some of her colleagues from other museums who were specialized in contemporary history. Two of them were in fact World War I experts and when the discussion turned from art to weaponry - how they got there, Diana never had the time to realize - the subject galvanized Steve enough for him to take over her entirely, and turn him into the absolute leader of the conversation. With all the charme and the nerve he could pull off.

Because it took some very stable nerve to talk about something you had happened over a century before, and that he had actually lived through, like it was just a matter of personal interest sparked by a late relative’s involvement in the Great War.

“You see, one of the biggest issues both soldiers and higher ups had to deal with in trench warfare was the near impossibility of keeping the weapons clean and up and running in good conditions. We have to remember that some of the weaponry used, mostly the automatic guns to be precise, was
often just a glorified prototype brought to the frontline because there wasn’t anything better to fight with. Between that and the fact that no one actually wanted to fight because they saw no reason for it, life in the trenches wasn’t exactly the best a soldier could hope for.”

Steve nodded. “That, but also there was the constant fear of chemical attacks. Sure, they didn’t happen so often, but you know, it’s not exactly the greatest way to die.”

Diana could barely see the twitch in the corner of his eyes, the only sign that betrayed his experience and the emotional baggage the war had left him him, most of all his involvement with Doctor Poison, Ludendorf and gas attacks in general.

“Suffocated by the very air you breathe? No, it isn’t,” replied her colleague, Robert. “Now that you mention gas attacks, have you ever heard of Veld?”

While she had quite a hard time to keep herself from shuddering when he mentioned the tiny town, Steve didn’t bat an eye. **He’s really really good at his job!** She thought to herself, watching him as he simply swirled the bourbon in his glass. “No, never heard of it.”

“It was the place where the Germans tested their last poisonous gas, a little village in Belgium, not too far from the front lines. I can’t remember how many casualties that specific attack caused, but it was particularly brutal, because it was a retaliation attack, since the village had just recently been liberated by Entente forces.”

A second colleague jumped in. “Wait, is that the village that was supposedly liberated by that… how was she called?”

“You mean the **Angel of No Man’s Land**?” continued Robert.

Diana froze for a second, and Steve too, but he hid it better than her. “Who?” he asked.

“You never heard of her? It’s an interesting story, probably a case of mass hysteria. There are some testimonies, mostly letters or accounts from soldiers present that day, that speak about this woman in armor, sword and shield crossing the battlefield from the Entente trench to the German one, deflecting bullets, fighting off multiple soldiers at the same time. Some talk about her flipping a tank with her bare hands!”

Steve chuckled as someone at his side scoffed, loudly. “Must be mass hysteria for real,” he said, clearly unimpressed.

“Uhm, I wouldn’t be so sure!” he went on. “The description matches other witenessings that happened later in the last century. Some survivors of Dachau spoke of a similar woman that crashed through the gates ahead of the Allied forces, disposed of the German guards and brought food and water with her. She was seen during the Battle Of Berlin, again during the Stonewall Riots, in 1984 in Washington… she’s a bit of a widespread legend. Thing is, all the descriptions of this person resemble closely Wonder Woman.”

“Could be,” replied Steve. “Who knows how long she’s been around.”

Diana rolled her eyes, hiding the involuntary gesture behind a jerk of her neck as if she was stretching a bit.

“Aren’t you the official Justice League spokesperson?”

He nodded. “Yes, and I do personally know Wonder Woman, but it isn’t polite to ask a superheroine how long she’s been around, don’t you think?”

Steve shrugged. “Comes with the family I guess. My great grandfather fought in that war, and now that you mentioned it, I read about the *Angel Of No Man’s Land* as you called her, in his diary, I just couldn’t remember it.”

Diana smiled. “Oh, that’s interesting. What did he say about her?”

“For what I could read… he had the worst writing in the world, I have to say, he wrote about this woman like she was beauty incarnate. He saw her in the trenches, she came out of nowhere with this shiny armor and a smile that could outshine the sun, sword and shield. He thought he was hallucinating, until he noticed how she drew all the fire on her and… well, he charged after her.”

“It seems to be a theme, right?” she mused, speaking for the first time since the subject had moved to herself.

“People charging behind her?” asked Steve. “Yes, it seems so. Last thing he wrote about her was that he saw her in the town that I know learned was called Veld, helping people clearing the rubble. He also wrote that despite the brutality of the offensive she led, what impressed him the most was the compassion she showed towards both the villagers, the German soldiers and the Entente soldiers that camped there. You know, the fact you mentioned Wonder Woman makes me think about something Batman said, about her compassion being her greatest superpower.”

“Oh, so he exists! I thought he was just a myth!” exclaimed Robert.

“To quote him, *he’s real when he needs to be*. Also, it must have been quite a big myth, to cross the Atlantic and reach your ears from Gotham City.”

“I did my fair share of travelling to the United States. Also, rumors travel very fast in the world, ever since the coming of the internet and social networks.”

Diana shrugged. “Don’t I know it?”

The discussion moved away from the war and related matters, until it ebbed to a halt, and the group disbanded. Diana and Steve moved to the now almost empty bar, set up by the catering agency in the corner of the large room. With most of the people either gone or already drunk, the young bartender was just idling, minding his own business, and after he had served them their last drink - water for her and one last neat dram of Scotch for him - and returned to his own devices, leaving them room to talk among themselves.

“So…” he started, sitting on a stool and leaning on the counter. “The *Angel of No Man’s Land* uh?”

She shrugged. “Apparently. I swear, I had no idea people called me that way. I had no idea there were people who told that story at all! I thought it would have been dismissed like mass hysteria as that other man said!”

“I think it fits though, it has a nice ring to it,” he said before taking a sip of his drink, right as her eyebrow shot up. “I mean it. Also, it’s not that too far off from the truth. For those people in Veld, you were an angel that came to save them. I know you were for me, standing on that wing as I sunk in the sea.”

“Yeah, you called me *your angel on the wing*. I like that one better.”
He wrapped one arm around her shoulders and gently pulled her to his chest, holding her close to him. “Just as you liked Diana Prince. You still go by that name, even after nearly a hundred years.”

“What can I say,” she said, setting the glass of water on the counter behind her and nestling deeper into his embrace. “It has a nice ring to it. But tell me, did you come up with the great grandfather story on the spot?”

He shook his head. “No, I actually came up with that around the time of the hearing at the Capitol building. I needed a backstory, something more detailed than what we had come up with Bruce, so as I read things about the last century, I made up the story of my family. That’s it. But what I said… about you in Veld, that’s true.”

Her smile nearly gave him a heart attack. “Sometimes I think you’re too good for me.”

He kissed her temple and reveled in the short-lived giggle he elicited from her. “No Diana, you are too good for me. What have I done to deserve you, I’ll never know.”

“Well, maybe it’s not something you’ve done, but something you will do.”

He chuckled. “Uh, I like the way you think. I don’t know in the far future, but I know that right now I’d love to take you home. What do you think?”

“I think that it’s an excellent idea, since I’m kind of tired and I’ve made enough people make a donation to the museum tonight. I can only stand so much people staring at my ass.”

Steve grunted, a guttural sound coming from the deepest part of his guts, and he downed the last gulp of his whisky. “Yeah, same goes for me.”

Chapter End Notes

Again, I’m late. Sorry. Managed to squeeze this chapter online before leaving for vacation tomorrow morning. I’ll probably reply to any comment you make next week, when I come home and I’ll have access to my computer again. Hope you like this one, a new segment of the story opens with the next one!
I know. I suck. I can try and blame work, life, sports, even videogames, but reality is just that I got stuck. That's it. I got stuck and it took me a lot of time to get out of the mud. Believe it or not, it was playing Assassin's Creed Odyssey that got me out the writer's block.

Also bear in mind that this chapter was started in August and stuff has happened in between so it may not be exactly accurate right now.

It had been a long day at work, with a not so pleasant lunch break where she did anything but have lunch, and all she wanted to do was to go home, kiss Steve, take a long shower - some added company wouldn’t have hurt - then have dinner and go to bed, hoping that her presence or intervention. The brisk wind had given her a jolt of energy, after the dull afternoon stuck in an endless meeting with the Museums higher ups and the Minister of Culture, but the efforts of the daily life-saving adventure of Wonder Woman still lingered, with a mild weariness that caused a slight discomfort. Maybe she should have ditched the heels for the pair of sneakers she always kept at work for when she had to do some actual restoration work down in the basement.

Her mind was wandering as she walked upstairs, when she was suddenly brought back to reality.

“Doesn’t matter!” Diana heard Steve exclaim as she turned the key to enter their apartment. “I’ve flown in those planes, and like hell they moved that way!”

She found him on the couch, in front of the TV… apparently playing a videogame. He was wearing a large headset with a microphone attached to it and he was talking to someone. Intrigued, she took off her heels and left her purse on the table next to the door, then she silently walked towards the living room.

“No, Barry, please! I know it’s just a game, and I really like playing it with you and Vic, but you can’t tell me it’s realistic because it isn’t!” He must have heard her moving behind the couch, because he turned towards her.

“Is that Barry?” she mouthed to him, pointing her finger at the headset.

Smiling, he nodded in response and added a whispered “Welcome home.”

“Hi Barry!” she said then, a little louder than usual to be heard through the voice-activated microphone, then she sat on the couch beside him and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. “You finally got to use that thing!”

“Oh, hi D!” she heard him reply when Steve took off the headset and let it hang loose around his neck, so she could hear him too. “And yes, I finally got him to play with me!”

“And what are you playing?”

“Battlefield 1,” said Steve, with a huff.
“Wait, isn’t it that game set in World War 1? Why on Earth would you play it?”

Barry snickered, all the way through the Atlantic ocean. “Because it’s a great game and it will be a good training for Steve for the next one. It comes out in November and I want him to grasp the basics of multiplayer so we can crush our opponents in Team Deathmatch.”

Diana shook her head at Steve’s silent scoff. “I get it Barry, but really… World War 1? Didn’t you think that maybe it’s a bit of a sensitive subject for him?”

“Oh…” came the icy reply from the Speedster. While she was well aware that Steve didn’t mind talking about his time in the war, that while indeed a sensitive topic he wasn’t overly sensitive about it, she had to make Barry understand that sometimes he had to think about what he was doing and what kind of activities he proposed.

That simple oh clearly showed that he hadn’t thought about it for too long if at all, that he had chosen the game only because he liked it a lot and he was hoping to find common ground with Steve, in order to introduce him to the world of videogames, after the almost failed attempt, months before. For his birthday he and Victor had ganged together, each putting half of the price of a brand new gaming console and some games they could all play together. Steve, being the sweet guy he was, had deeply appreciated the gift, but it had taken him months to even turn the thing on, time he spent reading everything he could put his hands on about the history of videogames, and even more time to actually look into more games to play, and most of them sat, sad and dusty, on the shelf beside the console itself. Up to this day, to her knowledge.

“I… I’m sorry Steve, I didn’t think…”

Shaking his head, he smiled and gently patted her thigh. “Don’t worry Barry, it’s all right. Just remember that to some other people, sensitive topics like these are indeed sensitive and they don’t like to talk about them. Now, back to the matter, while it’s as far away from what the War was, this game nails the concept of how brutal the war was. But the planes didn’t fly like that!” he exclaimed, almost laughing.

“Oh, and how did they fly?” asked Barry, just as the match started.

“Way, way worse than that! Ask Diana! They were made of plywood and canvass, most of the time!”

“Oh come on you can’t be serious! Canvass? Could they even stand the aerial fights?”

“Not much,” replied Diana. “You know, when Steve says he crash landed on Themyscira, he’s not exaggerating. He did actually lost control of his plane and crashed less than two hundred yards from the coast of the island,” she explained as she watched Steve navigate the map as he played. Fairly well, from her point of view. “You two really like this types of games?”

Steve shrugged but said nothing, Barry instead yelled in delight. “Hell yeah!”

“I don’t know…” she thought, aloud. “We see so much violence in the world already, I don’t really see the appeal of bringing more violence in our lives.”

“It’s cathartic,” replied Steve, eyes glued to the screen. He looked so concentrated that for a moment she thought he was a pro-gamer or at least a more seasoned player. “Wars suck, like… really bad.” She smiled, hearing him use such a modern term. Spending so much time with Barry and Vic was rubbing off on him, not to mention Arthur. “I have the scars to prove that wars suck and that violence is abhorrent, but unfortunately, it’s part of human nature. From my perspective, I think this is a
healthier way to deal with it.”

“I still think that sports are a better way to deal with it.”

“Fair point,” said Barry. “But you have to admit it’s still better than beating the crap out of a random passerby because you’re frustrated, right?”


“Oh, you like the classics!”

“Exactly! I bet I’m still able to make Pac-Man crash.”

Barry gasped. “Wait, you managed to get to level 256? I never got to that screen!”

“You lack the patience, Barry,” she explained. “Because you think too fast. Now I wonder if that happened even before you got hit by that lightning.”

“Yep, it only got worse after that. Ah, there you have it, damn camper!”

With a sigh, Diana stood. “I won’t even try to make you think I understood what you said, and I’m going to take a shower. Got any ideas for dinner?”

“There’s salmon marinating in the fridge, already made tzatziki and I was waiting for you to choose the side dish. Go shower, we’ll think about it later.”

Barry snickered, through the headset. “Marinated salmon, uh? Sounds fancy.”

“I’m sure there’s enough for you too, if you want to join us!” said Diana, much to Steve’s horror. It was printed on his face, he didn’t really want the Flash bursting through their door to have dinner with them. Not that he didn’t like the kid’s company, but it was clear that he hadn’t spent probably a good hour of his time that day preparing their dinner only to share it with the lovingly awkward fastest man on Earth.

“Nah thank you D, but I have a date with Iris.” Steve sighed in relief and Diana couldn’t stop herself from rolling her eyes. “Maybe sometime down the month, we could actually set a date or something. I’d love to see you two, hoping no one will need the help of the Justice League, because I don’t like meeting you guys in such circumstances.”

“Good idea,” replied Steve. “Now think about playing and not about food for a moment, we’re losing momentum in the assault!”

---------------------------------

When she got out of the bathroom, she found him at the kitchen counter, busy with slicing and dicing something. “So, videogames now, uh?” she asked, leaning on the doorframe of the kitchen.

He turned for a moment, smiling, then went back to the cutting board. “Barry has been pleading me for months to give it a try. At least a couple texts every day, so some weeks ago I relented. It’s not bad, I mean… not exactly my cup of tea when it comes to entertainment but still something I can do. For him, more than for myself, though I definitely see the appeal for people who were not born more than a hundred years ago. Did you see how detailed it all looked? Damn, it’s crazy how fast technology leaped in a century. Back in my day movies were like five minutes long, with no sound and terrible grainy images. And look at the state of entertainment now… I’m impressed, you know?”
“I know very well,” she replied, giving him a quick kiss on the cheek. “You’ve been impressed with the improvements of technology for almost a year now. And I’m impressed with your improvements with cooking as well!”

He nodded, swiftly cutting the veggies on the wooden board. “You’re a great teacher. And YouTube helped a lot. But enough of that, how was Stockholm?”

Diana felt all the blood drain from her face. “You know?” she murmured, slightly terrified.

Again, he nodded. “Of course, it was all over the news. A train wreck of that magnitude is bound to be, most of all if Wonder Woman shows up. Did you at least eat something, since you went during lunch break?”

“I snatched something on the way back and stole a protein bar from Helena’s stash in the afternoon,” she admitted. “I’m sorry Steve, I should have told you but…”

“Hey, don’t worry!” he exclaimed, turning around with a smile. “I’m not angry, I was just a little worried. A warning would have been appreciated, you know, instead of seeing you fly into the flames on TV. Just that! How are Clark and Arthur doing?”

She relaxed, feeling relieved that he wasn’t angry with her for flying to Stockholm, where a freight train carrying highly flammable cargo had derailed and exploded not far from the Swedish capital, endangering people, infrastructures and even the ecosystem given the pollution potential of the fire.

“They’re fine, they appreciated the help even if I came in a little later than them. They said that office hours don’t combine well with crysises like this!”

“Didn’t you have that meeting about the Gotham Art Museum exchange with the Minister?”

“That’s exactly why I couldn’t get there as soon as the train derailed!” she nearly yelled, opening the fridge and pulling a water bottle from it. “I’m sorry I didn’t hear about it until I was out of the meeting!” She drank a long sip of water straight from the bottle, so long she actually drained it so thirsty she was. She could still feel the acrid smoke in the back of her throat, she hated fires that big. “They say hi by the way.”

“Wow, you were really thirsty, uh?” he grabbed the empty bottle and filled it again with tap water, the put it in the fridge to cool. “You want me to uncork some wine for dinner?”

She shook her head. “No, thank you. I think I’m going straight to bed after that. Unless something happens, of course.”

“Wasn’t it supposed to be movie night? You wanted me to see Mamma Mia! and I thought you were more than enthusiast to watch it.”

Damn… she cursed inwardly, as she grabbed his wrist and pulled him to her, hugging him tight and hiding her face in his chest. “I forgot,” she murmured, taking a deep breath. She felt his hands on her shoulders and behind her back, his warm fingers tracing wide circles above the damp bathrobe, making her relax even more into him. “I’ll try to stay awake, the movie isn’t too long after all.”

“Are you sure? We can always postpone, it’s no big deal.”

“Steve, we’ve been postponing for too long. We should have gone to see the sequel in theaters, but we postponed watching the first one for so long that it’s almost out in home video. Between my job, your job and my side job, finding some time just for us has become a feat on its own.” She sighed. “Is it so strange that I want to have a normal night with you, cuddle a little on the couch in front of a movie?”
He chuckled. “Just cuddle?”

Diana gave him a playful headbutt on his chest. “You know what I mean.”

“Yeah, I know.” He pulled her even closer, held her tighter and buried his face in her hair. “All too well.”

She felt his breath on her damp hair, and felt a rush of love envelope her like a warm blanket. A thought and a comparison that surprised even her. Damn, where did that come from? She thought to herself. Sure, Diana was known for her own overly sentimental moments, but those were rare and sparse. Lately, they came more and more often. Was she getting soft, losing her warrior spirit, like Arthur feared? Oh, look who’s preaching, she went on, knowing fully well that Arthur looked tough on the outside but once you got to know him was softer than he wanted people to think. And she had to admit that his relationship with Mera was just too cute, the playful banter and the jabs they threw each other were just too sweet.

Here I go again...

On the other hand, she didn’t mind if people thought about her sweeter side. She preferred to show her softer attitude, her diplomacy and unharuing tactics, before people got to know her tougher side, the skilled warrior that showed no mercy in front of evildoers.

“Come on now, let’s feed Wonder Woman,” he snapped, pulling himself back from her and kissing her forehead. “Then we’ll see what we can do.”

In the end they did end up watching the movie, which turned into a long karaoke session with Diana barely able to avoid reciting every word of the movie. She quickly gave up on shutting her mouth during the songs.

“Diana, how many times have you seen this film?” he asked, about halfway through it.

“Not as many as you would think, it’s just that I lived through the height of ABBA’s career and I know most of their hits by heart.”

“And what’s this thing about making Pac-Man crash?” he inquired.

“Oh, that? Pac-Man was one of the first widely known videogames, it was released more than thirty years ago and as you have seen the technology as evolved a lot. At the time, due to technical limitation, the game just couldn’t progress farther than screen 255. Reaching the next one would make it crash.”

“And crash means in this case?”

“That anything with a processor cannot work anymore and needs to be rebooted. Like when your phone is stuck and you need to restart it, that’s a crash. Or is called a crash, I don’t know enough of the matter to distinguish with different issues.”

“Uh, interesting. And you said you could reach screen 256 in Pac-Man?”

She sat up on the couch and nodded. “I used to, yes. But it’s been so long since I actually touched a videogame, I wonder if I’m still able to even handle a joystick.”

“Wow, you’re talking like you have a foot already in the casket! I should be the one talking like that!”
Diana smiled. “You’re definitely improving though. And what you’re doing with Barry and Vic, playing with them even though you don’t like the games they want you to play.”

He sighed. “It’s not that I don’t like them, I just don’t feel like I want to play competitively with others. I mean… I can see the appeal. That game we were playing today, it has a section… well, multiple ones, that you play on your own, and I liked those a lot! And I’ve read that there are tons of games like that, I just don’t have much time to play them so when I play it’s mostly with Barry and Vic. That’s it.”

“So you’re more of a story driven kind of guy, uh?”

Throwing his head on the back of the couch, he looked at the large bookshelf behind them. “Well, if the amounts of books I’ve read in the past months count for something, I guess I am,” he replied. “I admit I can appreciate a good story, no matter how it’s told.”

“Anything that caught your mind recently?”

“A couple of books, and I wanted to watch Nocturnal Animals, it popped up the other day on my Netflix recommendations and it’s interesting. And if you want to include games, yes, there’s one coming out next month that definitely caught my attention. Barry sent me the trailer the other day and it does look intriguing.”

“And that would be?”

“I can’t remember the title, but I’ll show you the trailer later. It’s set in Ancient Greece, maybe it will interest you too. But let’s watch the movie, come on.”

Later that evening, tucked in the cozyness of their bed after finally enjoying the movie they had wanted to watch for so long, they resumed the conversation about Steve’s newly discovered hobby. “So, what was that game you were talking about?” asked Diana as she pulled the book she was reading from the drawer of her nightstand.

“You mean the one Barry recommended?” he grabbed his phone from his own nightstand and pulled the YouTube up. “This one! Comes out this October.”

He handed her the device as the video started playing. “Oh Assassin’s Creed!” she exclaimed reading the title of the game in the header of the video.

“You know it?”

“Of it. Some years ago they released one that was set in Paris during the French Revolution. It was a big deal, we got people from the studio coming to the Louvre too to take notes and pictures so they could recreate the place in the game and by Hera’s grace is it set in Ancient Greece?!” she exclaimed.

He nodded. “Yes it is. Barry said it would interest you too. Seems like you can also play as a woman.”

She had to admit, as much as she wasn’t really one for videogames, this one looked stunning. It was probably a not so good take on ancient history, but she could appreciate the effort, as much as she had appreciated the attempt at realism of the developers when they had come asking to look around the museum for the purpose of accuracy. “Oh come on you’ve got to play this one!”

He chuckled. “You think?”
“Yeah, I mean… Listen, I’m not a fan of videogames but since you’ve got the console why not use it? And this one looks interesting enough.”

“You just want to see if it lives on to your knowledge of the era, come on!”

“That too, but come on you’ve got a game that’s set in your era, why shouldn’t I be interested in a game that’s set in my own time period?”

“Hadn’t the Amazons already left Man’s World during the Peloponnesian War?” he asked.

“Yes they had, but please be a little flexible!”

“Oh you know I can be flexible when it comes to you!”

That earned him a slap on his chest. “Steven Rockwell Trevor, you weren’t one for such innuendos when I met you!” she laughed. “You were so embarrassed about sex in general, where does this come from?”

“What can I say, I’m trying to keep up with the times! Even that boy scout from Kansas that is Clark can make dirty jokes so can I! I’m a damn war veteran, cussing and innuendos aren’t something I’m unfamiliar with. I just wasn’t comfortable with it at the time.”

“You were treating me like some kind of virgin that has never heard of how babies are made!”

He grunted. “You were a princess!” he exclaimed. “Well, you still are… but bear with me, I just wasn’t comfortable talking about such matters with you. At the time.”

“And now?” she inquired.

He placed the phone back on the nightstand and turned towards her, a mischievous smile that made her insides turn into goo printed on his face. “How tired are you?”

“Not enough to say no to whatever you’re about to propose.”

He quickly kissed her and shot out of bed. “I’ll get the Lasso.”

Chapter End Notes

Also, Happy Holidays to everyone. I'll try to be a little more consistent from now on. Please, forgive me again.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!