### Primary Colors

**Summary**

Once upon a time, there were two young men who could see blue and red. They knew not why, until one day a wise man told them that it was because they were missing the last piece of their Soul. The two young men became heroes, but still they never found their last piece.

Many years later, a young woman was born who could only see yellow. She became great friends with the God of the Thunder and the Green Giant, but never her Soulmates did she meet.

Until one day, the three were united beneath the roof of the King of Iron, but unknown to them, a sorcerer wrought of iron and rivets coveted the Girl Who Could Only See Yellow. He took her far away to a war torn land to complete his evil plans with the help of the Silver Runner and the Red Mage.

Little did the sorcerer know of the Red and Blue Heroes and the Yellow Maiden's Bond, nor even that of the King and the Mage . . .
Hello again! We're back to the Soul Colors series, and this time with good ole WinterShieldShock with a side of IronWitch! This is going to pretty much be a retelling of AoU within the confines of my mixed Soul Bond AU, with some exposition of events that canonically take place in TFA and T:DW.

While the main focus is on the WinterShieldShock trio, this is rapidly turning into something of an IronWitch fic too, so entwined with the main story will be the story of Tony and Wanda too.

I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Once upon a time, in a land fair and beautiful, there was born a prince. He grew in strength and fairness, and was just and comely, but all the land mourned that he could not see colors. He could not see the blue of the sky nor the green of the grass. Until one day a young squire came to train among the King’s household knights. The youth was fair-haired and light-eyed, and he was widely known as being a good man. The two locked eyes one day, and suddenly the Prince cried out, “I can see the blue of your eyes!”

And the young squire cried “And I can see the red of your cloak!”

So the youth and the Prince were taken to the King’s wise woman who pronounced them Soulmates, connected through the colors they could and could not see. “But Wise One” the Prince said, “I still cannot see all of the colors!”

So the Wise Woman asked him, “What is the color of the sky?” and the Prince answered “Blue as my Soulmate’s eyes.”

So then she asked him “What is the color of the sun?” and he answered “I do not know, for it still appears only as grey.”

The Wise Woman nodded and said “They are still missing pieces of their Souls. Find the third that completes them. Find the one who can only see yellow.”

The King sent out riders to the four corners of his kingdom to find his precious heir’s final Soulmate, but the search was in vain. In the mean time the two youths grew into young men, strong and just and beloved of the people. The Prince Who Could See Blue and the Knight Who Could See Red also searched high and low, but years passed without them finding their final piece.

Dr. Abraham Erskine glanced down at the file laid before him. He half wondered how this young man had even gotten this far, even without him dropping a hint to the intake agent. This Steven Rogers was small, his spine curved, his skin sallow, and his attitude that of a junkyard dog. There was nothing outright disrespectful in his manner, but the gentleman had the sly watchfulness of a creature that was used to a cruel world and expected nothing less from it. He found that he could not blame the young man. There were many in the world – far too many – who believed that the weak and sickly should not be allowed to breed. Allowed to live. Could he fault this man for being wary of even the smallest kindness? “So, you want to kill Nazis? Eh?”

The young man frowned. “No. I just don’t like bullies.”

Abraham nodded, his eyes ghosting across the Sigil on his left hand. Sometimes he could swear he could hear Sophie whispering to him. This is the one. “. . . I cannot help but notice you list a Soulmate. A Sergeant James Barnes. Why have you not already enlisted?”

Mr. Rogers’s face grew clouded and tight, his eyes going to the floor. “He didn’t tell me he was enlisting, so I didn’t get a chance.”

“Ah,” Abraham said, knowing that it was a lie. “I had thought it was because you were
marked 4F and he specifically asked that you not be accepted out of pity.”

Mr. Rogers went still. There was no emotion on his face, but Abraham suspected that the young man had learned early to rein in strong emotions, except for anger of course. That one he was ready and able to let loose at a moment’s notice. He went back to the door he’d entered from and said to the person waiting outside, “Come in, please.”

Sergeant Barnes poked his head in before letting the rest of his body follow. Mr. Rogers looked up, locked eyes with the taller man, and clenched his jaw. Abraham couldn’t help but think of them as an alley cat and a dog sizing each other up in anticipation of a titanic battle. He noted that the sergeant wasn’t bothered by Mr. Rogers’s semi-nudity. In fact, they acted as if they were as intimate as Mr. Rogers claimed. “I told you it wouldn’t work,” Sergeant Barnes finally said.

“What did you do this time? Lie about our Soul Bond again?” Mr. Rogers retorted.

“No, I told him we had a String,” Sergeant Barnes replied, mildly. However, from the tense set of his shoulders, Abraham knew that he wasn’t as relaxed as he tried to seem. “Even if it is still a lie.”

“Oh, I knew that already,” Abraham said in his own mild tone. Both men swung around to look at him. “Four times, Mr. Rogers. You’ve tried to get past our recruiters. Your file was flagged after the third attempt. The only reason you got past the intake was because I wanted you to.”

“Why was it flagged?” Sergeant Barnes asked, protectiveness in his tone. Mr. Rogers looked askance at him, his mouth set in a disapproving line.

“Because there’s only so many times someone can claim to be Sergeant Barnes’s Soulmate before the Army gets wise to it,” Abraham said with a smile. “You are very determined for a man who claims to have a Bond, but never told the truth. Especially since Sergeant Barnes does not list a Soul Bond in his file.”

Mr. Rogers finally rounded on Sergeant Barnes. “You jerk!”

Sergeant Barnes looked harried. “What, you wanted me to lie?!”

“No! I wanted you to tell the truth!”

“Stevie, we don’t have a Bond!” Sergeant Barnes roared. “You keep saying we do, but we don’t! We don’t have a String, we don’t have a Watch, we don’t have anything!”

Mr. Rogers didn’t look like he was about to cry, but Abraham sensed that he was reaching an emotional precipice. His voice trembled as he said, “Yes, we do.”

Sergeant Barnes ran a hand through his hair, flinging his hat (cover, it’s called his cover!, Colonel Phillips snapped in his head) down on the exam bed. “Just because you claim that you used to be completely colorblind, and could only start seeing some colors after you met me doesn’t mean anything!”

Abraham blinked, and glanced down at the two files he held. “Actually, it just might.”

Both men turned back to him, Sergeant Barnes with annoyance, and Mr. Rogers with hope. “Really?” Mr. Rogers asked, his voice holding something other than wariness and anger for the first time all evening.

“Yes. I believe you two have a very rare type of Soul Bond,” he answered, “But may I ask a
few questions first?”

Both younger men nodded, and Abraham gave him a smile. “Your files still list you as partially colorblind, and with no Soul Bond. Is this true?”

“Yes,” Sergeant Barnes answered. Mr. Rogers nodded.

“What colors can you see?”

Mr. Rogers shrugged. “Reds and blues mostly. Anything that’s yellow, green, or orange just appears grey.”

Abraham couldn’t help but chuckle. “Just like the Grimm’s tale.”

“What?” Sergeant Barnes asked.

“A story I used to tell my daughter,” Abraham answered, “A story about a prince, a knight, and a princess. They shared the same Bond, I think you have. However, if I may ask one last question, do you feel like you’re Bonded?”

“Yes,” Mr. Rogers answered instinctively. Sergeant Barnes pursed his lips.

“Sergeant?”

The younger man threw up his hands. “I don’t have a Bond! But . . . I do feel like I’m connected to Steve, but something’s not there . . .”

“As if a piece of you isn’t there?” Abraham inquired.

Mr. Rogers and Sergeant Barnes shared a look. “Yeah,” Mr. Rogers stated. “But I know that Bucky is my Mate.”

“Of that, I have no doubt,” Abraham chuckled. “However, he may not be your only Mate. A friend of mine studies a very rare type of Soul Bond known as Soul Colors. It is very, very rare. Some believe that it doesn’t even exist, but my friend has met two pairs of people who possess that Bond. He also has a theory about the way that Soul Colors would manifest in a triad. He believes that the story of which I speak may describe the actual progression of a Soul Color triad Bond.”

“So, we’re a triad?” Mr. Rogers said. “That’s why the Bond isn’t complete?”

“Yes. I believe so,” Abraham said with a small smile. “And it is for this reason that I wish to offer you both what I wanted to offer to Mr. Rogers.”

Colonel Phillips watched Sergeant Barnes and Private Rogers with a wary eye. They’d surprised him, Barnes and his tiny Soulmate. He’d half expected Barnes to try to carry Rogers, but to his private astonishment it was almost the direct opposite. Barnes treated Rogers as he would even an able-bodied soldier, expecting him to keep up. The only concession to Rogers’s multitude of ailments were frequent breaks. Barnes never made excuses, but he was brutal to anyone who tried to mess with Rogers. To Phillips’s further surprise, Rogers was just as prone to protect Barnes when the other soldiers decided to mess with him. Rogers could be a fierce little thing.
The colonel had really noticed after the flag pole incident. He and Agent Carter had been driving along with Erskine’s hopefuls as they went on their afternoon run. Barnes and Rogers were solidly in the back of the pack, Rogers looking incredibly pale and Barnes looking increasingly concerned. Their drill sergeant had decided that today they would do double the distance for some transgression they’d committed in their morning drill, so poor Rogers was wheezing something fierce. They’d come up to the camp flag pole at the half way point in the course.

“No one’s ever gotten that flag,” the drill sergeant barked to the small group of men as they rested beside the flag pole, “But if you do, you get to ride back with Agent Carter.”

The men swarmed the pole, but none of them could retrieve the flag. Rogers and Barnes shared a look, and as the others moved off, approached. Before anyone could say anything, Rogers had pulled the pin holding the pole up. Barnes walked over, and retrieved the flag. He handed it to his Soulmate who looked like he was about to argue. “Alright,” Phillips had barked, “Both of you get in.”

“But sir—” Rogers and Barnes had said in unison.

“Get in,” Phillips had growled, finding himself frustrated with their attitudes. He was well aware that if he had not stepped in, there would have been several minutes of arguing as the two men hashed out who would ride back to base. He’d merely cut through all of that. The two soldiers hopped in finally, and he’d zoomed off to camp. However, the others in the candidate pool had not taken their victory with good grace. It started with small things, but Phillips noticed. He noticed when Hodge and the others started taking potshots at Rogers, and then Barnes when Rogers proved that he was a wolverine in sheep’s clothing. Barnes revealed that he was a pretty good boxer in turn. However, that didn’t stop the attacks.

Phillips nearly had to step in one night. Since they were registered as Soulmates, the two young men were allowed to bunk separately from the others in the unit, in a private room at the end of the barracks. That night a group of soldiers raided the tiny room, intending to beat Rogers and Barnes. Phillips would never admit it, but he had chuckled long and hard when he reached his office the next morning after watching Hodge and Company limp and groan through morning PT while Rogers and Barnes looked as fresh as daisies. Later, he found out that Rogers and Barnes slept with the door unlocked, but with socks filled with rocks beside their bed. With every day his opinion of the two ticked just a little higher, but of course he didn’t show that to Erskine. That little scientist fella didn’t need any encouragement when it came to being enamored of the Soulmate pair.

Not a week after that night, Phillips decided that enough was enough. He and Erskine had been good naturedly bickering about the candidates when the colonel finally reached into a box of dummy grenades and pulled one out. “We’ll see about that,” he said in response to something Erskine said before calling out, “Grenade!”

He tossed it into the group of exercising recruits, and watched in disappointment as the majority of them – including his favored Hodge – ran away. However, Rogers wasted no time in diving on top of it, yelling at Agent Carter and Barnes to run. Carter was blinking down at the young recruit, a little surprised at his behavior, while Barnes rolled his eyes dramatically. He stood over Rogers, looking down on the little blond with exasperation. “Steve, it’s a dummy.”

Rogers’ head popped up like a prairie dog’s. “What?”

Barnes sighed, leaned down, and reached between Rogers’s arms for the grenade. “It’s a dummy, like you.”

Rogers scrunched up his nose in a manner that Phillips’s daughter would deem “cute” before
sitting up. He glanced back at the colonel and the scientist. “Was this a test?”

Erskine chuckled, and Phillips frowned. “He’s still skinny.” Then, before departing he added, “And make sure that Barnes gets a dose too. Rogers may be the hero, but I’ll be damned if Barnes ain’t the common sense.”

Agent Peggy Carter liked Lieutenant Steve Rogers and Lieutenant James Barnes. Unlike the other men in their unit, they never treated her with anything less than respect. She was always “ma’am” or “Agent Carter” never the presumptuous pet names the others insisted on using even after she’d taught them all that she was not a woman to be messed with. Their eyes never strayed to her chest, never tried to undress her in their imaginations. In short, it was a damn shame they were Soulmates, because Peggy would not mind being with either one of them. However, she reflected as they rode through Brooklyn towards Erskine’s secret lab, they were very much Soulmates.

It was nice though, to ride with them through their old neighborhood. Lieutenant Rogers had begun awkwardly telling her all the places he’d gotten beaten up at while Lieutenant Barnes laughed and needle him about his technique with women. They way Barnes looked at her indicated that maybe she might find at least a good time with them, if not her true love. Her Watch indicated that she had quite some time – years in fact – before she met her Soulmate, so a fling with a couple of handsome soldiers might not be out of the realm of possibility. Her mother would positively faint, but Peggy wouldn’t mind spending a night with both the Lieutenants. She had always thought the eugenics movement a horrible blight on human thought, and Lieutenant Rogers was just . . . pretty.

She remembered the day he had been informed of his promotion. His blue eyes had flashed when he asked about his partner. “What about Sergeant Barnes?”

Colonel Phillips had sighed. Peggy tried not to find a little pleasure in his obvious annoyance at having to deal with a pair of Soulmates like Barnes and Rogers. “Sergeant Barnes will be promoted to Lieutenant as well. It’s been decided that you two are to be kept on the same rank in keeping with the Thebes Codes.”

Rogers had nodded, and Peggy hadn’t hidden her smile. Most armies had fraternization codes because of same sex Soulmates. They were called the Thebes Codes after the Sacred Band of Thebes, an elite unit of same sex Soulmates from ancient Greece. Many militaries celebrated their homosexual Soulmate pairs, deifying them enough in the last century that it finally brought homosexual pairs from being ostracized, second class citizens to being more or less acceptable. There was still the occasional homophobe, but much of the old prejudice was done away with. At least on the surface. However, she guessed from the gleam in Lieutenant Barnes’s eye that he and Lieutenant Rogers were probably not exclusively homosexual.

They arrived, and the two Lieutenants insisted on being gentlemen, which Peggy found that she didn’t much mind. They opened the doors for her, and when she gave the pass code she was grinning ear to ear. The two young men followed her down into the secret laboratory. She left them to the doctors, and then joined Colonel Phillips. He was speaking to Senator Brandt, a rather self-serving, slimy gentleman that Peggy had never particularly liked. He always looked at her like he was having rather lewd thoughts about her person. “He’s tiny,” Brandt said, and she turned to look at the lab floor.

Lieutenant Rogers had disrobed down to his pants, and even though she hated Brandt, she agreed with him. Without his shirt, the curve of Rogers’s spine was obvious, and his skin was deathly pale. Beside him Lieutenant Barnes was tan and healthy, and it highlighted just how different the two of
The doctor and nurses prepped them both, and the two pods were opened. Howard Stark was fiddling with his machines, and the two young men stepped into the futuristic looking metal shells. “Are you sure we have enough power to do two at once?” Senator Brandt asked.

“Dr. Erskine specifically asked Mr. Stark to wire the electrical so that enough power could be achieved,” Peggy answered. She didn’t take her eyes off of the two pods being closed slowly over the two young men’s faces. The audience finally sat, and the doctor introduced them to what was going on. When Stark hit the power, Peggy found herself tensing at the sounds of human agony coming from the floor. They nearly stopped the test, but the two men screamed for it to keep going. Finally, the vitaray treatment was over.

Peggy was one of the first down on the floor when the two pods finally opened. She stood beside two of the nurses, and she didn’t blame them at all for the gasp that escaped all three sets of lips. Lieutenant Rogers stepped out first, completely changed. Gone was the curved scoliotic spine and sallow skin. In its place was over six feet of golden, healthy skin. His muscles were positively gigantic, and the sheen of sweat conjured thoughts of other activities that one might just enjoy with such a specimen of manhood. Lieutenant Rogers had not only been cured of his health problems, he was now a head taller and twice as wide.

When Lieutenant Barnes stepped down, his transformation was less drastic, but just as amazing. Where Rogers had grown taller, Barnes had grown bulkier. His respectable musculature of before was replaced by an even more impressive one. Peggy was quite sure that his bicep was at least as big if not bigger than her head. His shoulders had widened as well. Without thinking, she reached out and touched both of them, Rogers on the chest and Barnes on the arm. Her face erupted in flames as she snatched her hands back, and gave them a shakey smile. Barnes looked like he was going say something, and Peggy was simply not ready for either the casual brush off, come on, or any other comment the man was about to make. If not for the wreckage that followed, she might have been thankful for the explosion that distracted them all.

“I hate tights,” Bucky muttered.

Steve looked up from where he was currently sketching one of the show girls. Betty was a pretty girl from Iowa who had had dreams of making it big on Broadway. She’d settled for working the Captain America show, and for being Steve’s model today. Even though they were both supposed to take turns as Captain America out on stage, Bucky had lost a bet and had to do all of their Cleveland shows for the next week. That gave Steve plenty of time to do his other duty – drawing propaganda posters. Turns out that Brandt was not above being a thrifty bastard and squeezing every drop of work from the two of them. Bucky pulled double duty as choreographer for the girls’ dance numbers.

The girls didn’t mind either. They eagerly allowed Steve to use them as models for their show posters, and a few had asked him to draw pin ups for their boys in the military. Some of them had tried to pay Steve for his services, but he didn’t accept the money. As he pointed out to them, he did them in the free time while Bucky was on stage and didn’t have to buy the materials himself. They also preferred it when Bucky showed them the dance routines – the first guy had been a scum bag. There had been a collective cheer when the first choreographer had mysteriously quit the show.

“I feel you,” Steve said with a sigh.

Betty laughed. “But you look great in it!”
Bucky winked at her. Steve grinned, and went back to filling in her eyes. He’d learned to get around his inability to see yellow, orange, and green by instead judging shadows by the saturation of the greys he saw instead. He also would ask the girls to judge when he had to shade in green eyes or dresses. “I heard the crowd. Good draw?”

“Brandt won’t be complaining about our quotas,” Bucky said lightly.

Betty smiled again, and Steve quickly went to capture the twinkle in her eye. “Good,” Steve said, and then smiled at Betty. “Thanks, Betty, that’s all I need.”

“Thanks Steve!” she said, leaning over to give him a kiss on the cheek. All of the girls knew that he and Bucky were Soulmates, but they didn’t mind. Steve and Bucky still protected them like they were a pride of lions, and the girls appreciated that a lot. They often asked one or both of the men along on outings in order to keep men from making untoward advances on them. “How long before the next show?” she asked Bucky.

“About three hours,” he answered, “The director said to get dinner quickly and be back a half hour before.”

“Thanks!” The two men watched her go.

“So,” Bucky said, plopping down in Betty’s vacated chair in their dressing room, “What does a man have to do to convince his Soulmate to do tonight’s show for him?”

Steve grinned again, and blushed a bit. Ever since this whole surreal nightmare had started, Bucky had finally begun to acknowledge what Steve had always known was there. He was affectionate, flirting with Steve on the bus ride to their next city, and Steve didn’t have to move heaven and earth for sex. It was nice, even though their lives had become a strange hell of blue tights and faux Hitlers ever since the day Dr. Abraham Erskine had died. “You want to try to get sent over again?”

Bucky clammed up, his face going grave. For the last six months he and Steve had obediently acted like the dancing monkeys that Brandt wanted. They did the shows, and both of them had become at ease with it, acting through the melodrama with even a little bit of enjoyment. They still hated the fact that Colonel Phillips hadn’t wanted them to fight, had written them off as a science experiment instead of soldiers. They still hated that they weren’t out in Europe or the Pacific, doing the job for which they had aspired. Every so often they asked about being sent to fight – what was the point of their strength, speed, agility, intelligence, if not to use it against Hitler and that snake Schmidt? But every time they asked, Brandt would demure and make excuses. The final blow had come over a month ago, when Shannon had told them she’d overheard someone mention that Brandt got a kickback for every bond the show sold. Steve had had half a mind to complain, but Bucky had reminded him that right now, Brandt was the one keeping them out of the lab. They had to give blood every so often, and it was left unsaid by Erskine’s colleagues that they’d much rather have the two men in their labs than on the road.

Steve chewed his lip as Bucky continued to be silent. “Look,” he finally said, “I know it’s a long shot to get sent over with the show. Maybe once we’re over there we can convince them to let us fight.”

Bucky sighed. “Steve, that’s a stretch. You think they’d actually let us go over there? There’re still U-boats everywhere in the Atlantic.”

Steve’s face turned bullish. “And we’ve begun to fight back against them. We can do this Bucky! We get over there, we prove ourselves or at least throw ourselves on Phillips’s mercy.
Otherwise we’ll spend the rest of the war in tights.”

It was times like these that Bucky reminded himself why he’d always suspected that Steve was his Soulmate, but never had the courage to act on it. Times when Steve would hit on the one thing guaranteed to make him go along with whatever cockamamie plan Steve had. “Fine, let’s do it.”

Their plan turned out to be easier than they’d originally thought. It helped that out of the twenty girls, at least ten pushed for the opportunity to see their loved ones who had been deployed overseas. A couple of the girls made very pretty pleas to Senator Brandt and the showrunners about how they’d love to visit Europe and the troops there. All of them knew that Bucky and Steve aspired to fight instead of do inane theater, and that made them even more determined to help the two men out. It wasn’t like any of them didn’t realize that both of them were stronger than the average man. “You boys are the ones we need out there in the fighting,” Jane had said. “Not standing up on stage with a fake smile. We know you hate this. You’ve been good to us, now we’re going to be good to you.”

The girls also turned out to be more helpful than the boys had ever even dreamed. They’d finally gotten to Azzano, Italy, and the show was disastrous. Bucky tried not to laugh too hard when Steve was booed off stage, but all thoughts of mirth were washed form his mind when he caught sight of a familiar face. He pulled Steve along behind him – thankfully after allowing Steve to don some pants and a jacket – until they caught up with a certain agent. “Agent Carter? Ma’am?” Bucky called.

The curvy brunette turned, and her eyes lightened. “Hello boys,” she said in her proper tones. “It’s good to see you.”

“Good to see you too,” Steve said with a small grin.

She looked back to the stage, and the girls performing the one song they knew, again. “So this is what Brandt has you two doing,” she murmured.

They both grimaced in unison, and that startled a laugh from Agent Carter. “I’m sorry,” she murmured, and then looked back at the crowd of muddy, banged up soldiers. “That’s the remnants of the 107th. They were hit pretty badly.”

Bucky had frozen, and she glanced over at Steve. “Bucky was originally with the 107th,” he answered.

“Oh,” she murmured.

“What happened?” Bucky asked softly.

“HYDRA. They attacked and took most of the 107th prisoner. We know that they were probably taken to a factory behind enemy lines,” she answered, biting her lip, “but we can’t rescue them.”

Steve glanced over at Bucky, and they knew that this was the opportunity they needed. “We can go.”
Carter blinked. “You? You’ve barely any training Lieutenant Rogers, and Lieutenant Barnes, you haven’t been trained in infiltration –” Then she stopped herself, a gleam coming into her eye. “But you both are human tanks aren’t you?”

The boys grinned slowly. “Colonel Phillips will never agree to it, though,” she mused aloud. “Let me see what I can get together for you.”

From there, Agent Carter went off to make her arrangements, and they started their own plotting. They would need to leave that night, and they told her as much before she hurried off. “We’re going to need some sort of uniform,” Bucky pointed out.

“Here!” Betty said brightly, producing two pairs of brown combat pants and two brown leather jackets. “Put these on over your tights.”

“Wha?” Steve said as Bucky muttered, “Where did you get these?”

Betty grinned, and the boys noticed that her makeup was a little smudged. “Me and the quartermaster had a lovely conversation. Jackie heard you talking to that pretty Agent lady, and she told the rest of us. So, we decided we’d help you boys out.”

“Here,” Cindy said, “These are prop helmets, but I had one of the boys try it out. They won’t stop a bullet, but they’ll at least help hide your hair, Steve.”

“And here’s your shields,” Jane murmured as she handed over the two flimsy pieces of metal. “I mean, we couldn’t find you any guns.”

“I think Agent Carter can help us with that part,” Steve said warmly, giving the girls his best smile. He didn’t smile often, still being of a rather choleric disposition, but that only made the girls swoon a little more.

After that night, Bucky and Steve were never required to wear tights again. However, there was one last piece of propaganda that they had to attend to. During the show, they’d both played the part of Captain America, and Senator Brandt wasn’t letting go of his show ponies easily. One of them would be Captain America, but who would the other be?

Peggy slid a photo across the table, one taken not long after they’d liberated the 107th. It showed Steve and Bucky in profile, Steve still holding his prop shield nobly, while Bucky looked off into the distance as snow fell about them holding a Springfield loosely at his shoulder. “You know the photographer is calling this photo ‘Captain America and the Winter Soldier.’ He says that the name came to him because of the snow.”

The boys had shared a look. “Fine,” Steve said, “I’ll be Captain America, and Buck can be the Winter Soldier.”

“I just hope its pretentious enough for Brandt,” Bucky muttered.

It was.

No one ever thought to ask why Steve and Bucky requested maps to be done in red and blue or contrasting shades of green and blue. In fact, few ever realized that there was something very wrong with their sight. Erskine had taken the secret of their true Soul Bond to his grave.
Steve and Bucky survived the train ride, but lost Dum Dum. Vengeance rode them hard, but it was cold comfort – literally – when Schmidt was destroyed by his beloved Tesseract. But then, they were standing there on the bridge, realizing something.

They weren’t getting out of this.

Steve took the controls, and Bucky leaned over the back of the pilot’s chair. The instruments told them the bad news. “We’re running out of fuel,” Steve said through clenched teeth.

“We aren’t going to make it,” Bucky murmured.

His blond Soulmate shook his head. “Even if we could, these bombs are too dangerous to be anywhere near a major city.”

They shared a deep look before the radio crackled to life. “Boys?” Peggy asked.

“Hey,” Steve said, “Listen, we’re running low on fuel. We’ve got to put her down.”

“Steve! Bucky!”

“Bye, Peggy,” Steve said softly. “thanks for being our friend.” With tears in his eyes, he flipped off the radio, unwilling to listen to a moment of Peggy’s sorrow. Other than Bucky, she was his most precious friend. Steve got up from the controls after setting them on a course to land deep in the Artic ice. He pulled Bucky into a space between two of the struts holding up the walls. “Here, I’d rather go sitting with you than in that chair.”

Bucky wrapped his arms around Steve’s middle. “I hear ya,” he murmured. The plane shuddered, and they could feel the loss in altitude. “I just hate that we never got to meet her.”

“I know,” Steve said, kissing Bucky’s forehead. “I do to.”

Bucky leaned up for one last kiss, soft lips on soft lips, just as the Valkyrie slammed into the ice. Then, they knew no more.
The Girl Who Could Only See Yellow

Chapter Summary

Once upon a time there was a girl who could only see yellow.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Unknown to them, in the neighboring kingdom was born a young princess. She was fair of skin and dark of hair, with eyes of shimmering blue and lips of the deepest red. She was known all throughout her kingdom as being sweet and kind, and also unable to see the color of her own eyes. She could see no color at all until one day in her youth, she was able to see the color of the sun and of the daffodils in the field. To her people she became the Princess Who Could See Yellow.

Darcy Elizabeth Lewis was an enigma wrapped in a mystery. At least, that was what her neurologist thought. Dr. Emil Minkowski looked at her brain scans with ill-concealed confusion. The little girl had been to some of the best doctors in the country from specialists in ophthalmology to neurology to gastroenterology. Okay, perhaps the last was a bit of a stretch, but the poor girl had been to very specialist in the field of pediatric eye care, and none of them could explain what was wrong with her sight.

She could only see yellow.

Emil sighed, and rubbed his eyes. “If I didn’t know better,” he murmured, “I would say that the poor girl is simply one of the few with Soul Colors.”

The nurse, Hannah Miller, nodded. “I’d say that too. But if she had Soul Colors, she’d be completely colorblind.”

At that moment, Emil’s associate, Dr. Hansen Monroe, burst into the imaging room. Little Darcy was laying still on the table through the glass, but thankfully she couldn’t hear them speaking. “I think I’ve found it!”

“Found what?” Hannah asked.

“The solution to little Miss Lewis’s problem!” Hansen cried out. “Look at this!” Quickly he handed Emil a stack of print outs, obviously from his desk printer. Emil perused them, quirking a brow when the date of original publication came up as 1937. “That’s a paper by Dr. Hans Kiefer. He studied Soul Bonds.”

Emil nodded. “Says here he had a specialty in Soul Colors.”

“Yeah!” Hansen pulled up a chair. “According to Kiefer, there are three types of Soul Color Bonds as evidenced by folk lore and his own studies.”
“Anecdotal evidence, especially from fairy tales, is not the basis for a good paper,” Emil replied.

“No, but listen!” Hansen’s mustache twitched. “He used the other triad bonds as his proof that the folklore surrounding the Prince, the Princess, and the Knight was most likely a story about a real triad. Think about it! Every bond has a triad configuration, why not Soul Colors?”

“Because there are no recorded Soul Color triads?” Hannah asked patiently.

“But there is.” Hansen insisted. “The story has to be based off of a real event, or at least real people. Think about the rarity of Soul Colors! Just because we haven’t come across a Soul Color triad in the last two hundred years doesn’t mean they don’t exist. It just means that they’re so incredibly rare!”

Emil chewed his lip. “Okay, run Kiefer’s thesis by me.”

Hansen gave his colleague a happy grin. “Okay, first, have you ever read any of the folktales in that particular folk tale family?”

“What?” Hannah asked.

“Folktales have families, and relationships to one another,” Hansen explained. “Like how there are a lot of different versions of the Beauty and the Beast tale. Well, one family of folk tales is the Prince, the Princess, and the Knight tales. All of them mention those three characters, usually two male and one female. But one feature is that up until all three meet, they are colorblind. Usually either the Prince or the Princess meets the Knight first, and they gain the ability to see a limited array of colors. The third person in the triad begins to see color as well – but only one color.”

Emil couldn’t help it, he glanced over to the little girl in the gigantic imaging device. “Like Darcy.”

Hansen nodded. “The German version even mentions that the Princess could only see yellow.”

“But it still could be a rare form of colorblindness,” Hannah put in.

Hansen sighed. “Yeah, but the girl doesn’t have another Bond does she?”

“No,” Emil said slowly, “So I think it best that we keep our options open on both fronts. We need to inform the parents, and it probably couldn’t hurt to contact the American Soul Color Association. They might have some more solid facts for us.”

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Emil had hoped to have something more concrete to tell the Lewises when he saw them later that afternoon in his office. Unfortunately, his call to the ASCA had not gone how he hoped. “We’re still not sure what is wrong with Darcy,” he said solemnly, “but we have two options. Either she has a very rare form of colorblindness . . . or a very rare Soul Bond.”

“But . . . How will we know for sure?” Mrs. Lewis asked softly. She was a pretty woman with a round face and dark hair that fell in waves down her back.

“Soul Colors work on sight,” Emil explained. “All she would have to do is lock eyes with her Mate, or well, in this case, Mates. We think that the reason she can only see yellow if it is Soul
Colors is because her two Soulmates have already met."

“Soul Colors are really rare,” Mr. Lewis mused. He was a high school English teacher, and had taken several courses as part of his college degree on Soul Bonds. “And there’s an organization for them, right?”

Emil nodded. “However, the problem is that the American Soul Colors Association has no record of an incomplete triad.”

He explained the chances of it being a rare type of color blindness, and her parents left. But the mystery continued to grow as the little girl grew older – and the ASCA continued to not have any record anywhere in the world of a Soul Color bond that matched hers – but by her own admission she never developed any other type of Bond. After a time she became known among those interested in genetic anomalies and Soul Bonds as The Girl Who Could Only See Yellow.

Darcy kicked her feet into the open air on the edge of the roof, happily licking her ice cream cone. It was a mint chocolate chip scoop on top of a chocolate dipped waffle cone. To her left sat two giant rage monsters, and to her right was a Norse God.

This was her life now.

Two years ago she’d been a Poli-Sci Major with no real direction in life. She knew that she didn’t want to settle down to have three kids like her eldest sister Beth, and she didn’t want to become a crazy career woman like her other older sister Karen. She needed an internship to complete her major – though what she was going to do with that major she didn’t really know – and the only one that had been open was with a notoriously crazy astrophysics professor. As she continued to nibble on the bits of chocolate in her ice cream, Darcy thanked God for that.

Dr. Jane Foster and she got on like a house on fire. Darcy loved Jane, loved being dragged along with her on her wacky misadventures. Two years ago it had been when they and Dr. Eric Selvig had accidentally run over the Norse God to her right. Just two hours ago, they’d gotten back to Earth from Black-Elf-Land – so sue her, she couldn’t remember the Norse name dammit – and saved the world from the Evil Erlkonig. Jane had also discovered her Soulmate since Thor had brought Dr. Bruce Banner along for the ride to England, and also been contaminated with his blood so she got to turn into a giant green rage monster too.

Darcy glanced up at Jane. “Ice cream to your liking?”

“Ice cream is delicious.” Her voice was thunderous, but still feminine. She also seemed to retain more of her mental faculties than Bruce usually did. She spoke with proper grammar, even though she tended to drop articles every so often. “Almost as good as kicking Malekith’s ass.”

“And there we agree,” Darcy said.

Thor leaned over, and laid his head on top of her head. He was so much taller than her, so that’s where his head naturally went. “I am glad that the two of you are well, shield sisters.”

Darcy grinned. “We are too, big guy.”

She loved Thor. He was like a golden retriever incarnate: big, fluffy, friendly, adorable, but also not as dumb as others might think. “Would this not be the perfect, eh, selfie? Selfie pose?”

She laughed out loud, bringing up her phone. “You got it big guy!” She snapped the photo quickly.
“If only my mother could have come back here,” he murmured.

Darcy’s heart squeezed. She’d watched Frigga die, taking the monster thing with her. Jane had nearly thrown up with the realization that the woman had died to save her. They’d stayed in Asgard for the funeral. “I’m sorry, Thor. She was an awesome lady. I liked her a lot.”

He turned his head to kiss her on the top of the head. “You are sweet to say so.”

“I am sorry,” Bruce rumbled. He had eaten his ice cream with surprising delicacy and wasted not a drop of the delicious frozen custard.

Jane reached over, her hand dwarfing Thor’s head. “Sorry.”

“Thank you both,” Thor said, but he smiled. “I am glad that this journey has had a happier ending. My mother has passed on, but I think she would smile upon the two of you.”

Jane smiled brightly, while Hulk nodded. He reached out and touched Jane’s cheek, his finger still bigger than hers. “My Soul.”

She leaned into the touch, a chuckle rumbling from her chest like thunder. “My Soul.”

“Oh my God,” Darcy groaned, “Get a room why don’t cha!”

“I do not know of many rooms in the area that could house these two,” Thor joked gently. “However, perhaps it is time to return to Avengers Tower. We have a secret organization to hunt.”

“HYDRA,” Hulk growled.

“Yes,” Thor agreed. “The Captains will be eager to continue on in their quest.”

Jane giggled, which was a weird sound coming from such a huge chest. She poked a finger at Darcy. “Darcy loves the Captains.”

A blush crept up her face, but she didn’t deny it. “Ever since I was little,” she said aloud. “When I was eleven, I started to get bullied because . . . well, to be blunt because my breasts had already developed. Kids were cruel, and there was one girl who called me a slut every day. I went home and cried almost every day. My dad, he realized what was going on and gave me my first Captain America and the Winter Soldier comic. It was a trade paperback that held a retelling of their origins. I . . . I kinda fell in love, ya know?”

Thor was grinning, charmed. “So you developed a case of hero worship?”

“Oh yeah,” she replied. “A big one. I read all the comics – all of them, even that horrible DeRitter run that completely derailed Cap’s character – and started reading the biographies. I mean, every little kid in America knows the story of the Captains, but I wanted to know more. They were my idols and my first crushes all rolled into one.”

“Would you like to meet them?” Thor asked softly, a smile still playing around his lips.

Darcy ducked her head and licked her ice cream. “Well, I, uh, I don’t know. I mean, there’s a part of me that is screaming to meet them, but the rest of me is really on the fence. I built up all kinds of adolescent fantasies about these guys, and how will I feel if they aren’t true? And what about the fact that I fantasized about them? What would I say? ‘Hi, how ya doin’ I used to masturbate to thoughts of you?’”
Thor looked a little confused while Jane shook her head. Hulk snorted. “Captains might like that.”

Darcy nearly inhaled her ice cream as she began laughing. “You think?”

“Captains like women,” Hulk said succinctly. “Love each other, but they love women too.”

Thor nodded. “I would not be surprised if they did take a shine to you, Darcy. You are a beautiful woman with a great deal of spirit.”

She felt the blush gracing her cheeks. “Well, thanks, but I still don’t know. Let me think about it, okay?”

Thor nodded, his blond hair falling over his shoulder as he took another lick of his birthday cake ice cream. “As you wish, Lightening Sister.”

She smiled, and looked back out at the sunset in the distance.

Jane ended up staying in London with Darcy. She had a grant to finish after all, and the foundation doing the funding would have looked askance at her up and leaving half way through her research. Normalcy – well, what passed in Jane and Darcy Land for normalcy – returned. The only difference were the nightly calls from Bruce to talk to Jane. They would laugh and trade tales of derring-do long into the night. Bruce even taught Thor how to use Skype, and he would call Darcy while Bruce was on the line with Jane.

One particular night found Thor regaling Darcy with the events of their latest mission. It had been a fairly simple burn-down mission, but something rather humorous had happened to Natasha. She had been crawling through a vent system to try to infiltrate the lab – which was suspected of housing bioweapons – when she got tangled in old electrical lines. Apparently when HYDRA had repurposed the old WWII base, they’d run completely new electrical without ripping out the old. Luckily for her, she’d gotten tangled in the old, but that meant that she was effectively stuck until Clint was able to crawl in after her. Darcy had questioned the wisdom of relating such a story about the ultra-dignified and poised Black Widow, when the woman in question had popped her head into the screen.

Darcy startled so badly that she fell out of her chair. “Holy shit, Thor!”

“Yeah, don’t worry, I told him he could tell you.” Natasha Romanoff’s voice was sultry, a feminine rumble that Darcy wished she possessed. “Hey, you okay?”

Taking a second to regain her composure, Darcy poked her head back up, and then got back into her chair. “Yeah, I’m okay. Just, startled.” Then she began to laugh merrily. “But you know, not surprised that you surprised me! They whole super sneaky spy thing.”

Natasha grinned. “You’re a good egg. No wonder Thor likes talking to you.”

“Oooooo! Is this Thor’s mystery girl?” Another head poked into the frame, this time a male face with some killer manscaping and dark hair and eyes.

“She is not my mystery girl,” Thor replied jovially, “Tony, this is Darcy. My Lightening Sister.”

“Riiiiight.” Tony Stark grinned. “Still, nice to meet you Lady Shock.”
“Lady Shock?” she asked, doubtfully.

“Thor has told everyone about you dropping him with a Tazer.” There was a shine of admiration in the Black Widow’s eyes. “Pretty impressive.”

“Well, he was pretty much mortal at the time,” Darcy demurred.

“Still, impressive.” Tony said. “So, Bruce and Thor love you and Dr. Foster. When are the two of you going to move into the Tower.”

“The two of . . . wait, you’re like, inviting me too?” Darcy asked uncertainly.

Stark shrugged his shoulders and grinned. “Avengers Tower currently has five or six floors of spacious apartments that are not in use. We’ve got plenty of room for Lightening Sisters and Big Green Soulmates.”

Darcy really, really couldn’t help it. She squealed. The sound was loud and shrill, but she was so excited that she had to let it out.

“Tony, what are you doing over there? Slaughtering a small animal?”

The baritone rumble of that voice sent Darcy’s stomach into a nosedive. She’d heard it before on the news and in the old movies she watched from the Forties. And he thought she sounded like a dying animal. Embarrassment flooded her cheeks with color, and tears sprang to her eyes. She didn’t miss the way that Thor, Natasha, and Tony’s eyes all narrowed.

“Yeah, good going Steve, you just insulted Thor’s Lightening Sister!” Tony called out. “You nearly made her cry!”

“Yeah, good going, punk.” The second male voice from just off screen was also familiar. A brunet man came into view, his hair a bit longer than he used to wear it, but the hard planed face of Captain James Buchanan Barnes, the Winter Soldier, was unmistakable. The metal prosthetic that Stark had built him gleamed in the lights of wherever the Avengers were. Darcy quickly covered her face, not ready to meet either of her heroes. “Hey, I’m sorry about him. He’s in a crappy mood.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you cry.”

At the sound of Captain America’s voice, Darcy nearly put down her hands, but her frayed nerves prevented her from moving. She was sooooooo not ready to meet them – and oh God! Her hair was piled in a mess on top of her head, her face had been plastered with a honey mask that she was carefully not touching while she hid her face, and she hadn’t brushed her teeth after her dinner of salad and a couple of everything bagels. She also found her vocal chords completely frozen.

Thankfully, Thor understood her inability to talk. “Captains, you are dear heroes to Darcy, and she is probably overcome to meet you like this. I’m sure she understands that you meant no offense.”

Darcy nodded vigorously, keeping her hands in front of her face. There were some chuckles. “Were you the one laughing a minute ago?” Captain Steven Grant Rogers, AKA Captain Freakin’ America, asked softly.

She nodded again, glad that at least she could do that. “Then, just so you know, you have a really pretty laugh, Darcy.”

“Yeah, really pretty,” the Winter Soldier agreed.
Yep, nope, she couldn’t deal with this right now. She could not deal with her idols, the men who had figured in pretty much every fantasy she’d ever had from the mundane to the steamy, telling her she had a pretty laugh. This was one of those fantasies wasn’t it, just a dream that she’d wake up from soon? She wasn’t really being complimented by them! “Good night Thor!” she finally wheezed out, closing her laptop with one hand while the other stayed over her eyes.

After a few minutes of just breathing, she finally took down the other hand. She looked over into the mirror, and gazed at her reflection. She did totally look like a bag of ass. Her hair was a mess, her face was a strange amber-peach color from the honey mask, and her eyes were red from her tears. That was not a face that she wanted the two of them to see. Thank God for her ultimate fangirl reaction!

The young woman nearly jumped out of her seat again when her cell rang loudly. She laughed a bit, before looking at who would be calling her in London at this hour. It said ‘unknown,’ but curiosity won out. “Hello?”

“You never answered my question.”

Darcy took the phone away from her ear, and stared at it. She put it back to her ear before saying, “Tony Stark?”

“Who else? So when are you two moving in, because I’ve got to tell you, I want to talk to Foster about some of her theories, and watching you kneecap Capsicle and Snowflake in the feels was glorious.”

“Kneecap Capsicle and Snowflake in the feels?” Darcy repeated dumbly.

“Oh yeah, you covered your eyes,” Tony said with a small laugh, “But you missed it. Snowflake was giving you his patented Puppy Dog Eyes of Doom, and Capsicle looked like he’d accidentally kicked a cat. It was beautiful.”

“I don’t know if I want to be your personal entertainment,” she said drolly.

“Oh, no, I think Thor is ready to come get you now after all of that,” Tony said kindly. “And Romanoff has made several comments about our Sausage Fest. Plus, between her and Maria, I think they’d love to have a couple more girls to take with them on spa days.”

She giggled a bit. “Well, you begin to make some convincing arguments.”

“I’ve got more,” Tony continued, “I like you, Lady Shock. From what Thor’s told us and what JARVIS could dig up on your dossier, you’re good people. We need more of that around us.”

She bit her lip. “Let me talk to Jane.”

Chapter End Notes

Not gonna lie, this adorable scene is curtesy of me wanting to write something fluffy. :)

Thank you for all the kudos and comments! I'm glad so many of you are enjoying this!
Chapter Summary

Bucky makes a discovery. Tony isn't an idiot (except when he is).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Until one day the Prince and the Knight came to visit the neighboring kingdom on behalf of their King. They met by the Princess’s father, who bid them to meet his daughter. He had heard tales of the Prince Who Could See Blue and the Knight Who Could See Red, and hoped that perhaps they might find their third in his daughter. So the Princess Who Could See Yellow was summoned, and the Prince and Knight cried out, “Your dress must be yellow, for I’ve never seen that color before!” and the Princess replied, ‘And your eyes are blue, my Knight, and your cloak red, my Prince.’

When Steve and Bucky woke, they found a world completely changed. Like Little Briar Rose in the tales, they’d slumbered for seventy years in the northern ice, to wake to a world completely unlike the one they’d left. Bucky had also not escaped the ice completely unscathed. His left arm had been completely destroyed by the crash, and his body could not repair the extensive damage. While he was still being brought out of his long sleep, his arm had been amputated. Fortunately, he had awoken in a time of mechanical marvels. The son of a friend of theirs had been able to build him a prosthetic that looked and behaved just like his old arm.

Tony Stark had also been the first new friend they’d made in this time, annoying as he could be.

“Top of the morning, Capsicle,” he said in greeting.

Steve looked up from the paper, glad that he could at least read the news like he was used to. Bucky had taken to the new century like a duck to water. He was swiping through news stories on his customized StarkPad – instead of heat it sensed pressure so that he could use it ambidextrously. The screen was also made of tougher material than normal to hold up to use with his vibranium hand. “Good morning, Tony,” he replied.

Tony plopped down at the common room table. Steve and Bucky lived at Avengers Tower with the others in an apartment that had a kitchen, but most mornings found them hanging out in the common kitchen. The other Avengers had gotten into the habit as well, joining them for breakfast and taking turns making it. Well, except for Tony who usually made something like cereal and Pop-Tarts on his mornings. It was Natasha’s turn, and the other unsaid thing was that she was by far the worst cook, but she insisted on making pancakes. It was the one breakfast dish that she made that was quite decent. Clint was assisting, while Bruce and Thor were off on an adventure all their own.

“Hey,” Tony asked, “Can I ask you a favor, Steve?”

Putting his paper aside, Steve leaned forward. “Sure, what is it?”

Tony pulled out a case of Skin Markers. They were basically washable markers specially
made for those with Soul Writing. “Could you draw something for my Soulmate?”

Natasha and Clint looked over speculatively while Bucky peered over the edge of the tablet at Tony. Steve smiled. “I don’t see why not.”

Tony pulled up his sleeves, showing off his forearms. They were covered in Cyrillic. Bucky and Steve blinked while Clint came over to peer at the writing. “Is that Sokovian?”

“Yeah,” Tony answered.

“You haven’t gone and gotten her yet?” Clint pressed.

“Well, she’s about twenty years my junior for one,” Tony drawled, “and two, most Sokovians don’t look kindly on me.”

Natasha nodded, and Steve and Bucky shared a look. Sokovia was one of a drove of small Eastern European countries that had not existed when they went into the ice. “What do you want me to draw for her?” Steve asked gently.

“Something pretty,” Tony said. “She said . . . She’s undergoing treatments for an illness. She won’t tell me what, but they take a lot out of her. She mentioned when we were writing this morning that she wasn’t feeling well, and I want to cheer her up.”

“Tin Man has a heart,” Natasha murmured, returning to her pancakes to flip.

Steve nodded, and pulled his unconventional canvas towards him. First, he began to outline the picture he wanted to paint for the poor Sokovian girl. After the lines were in place, he began to shade in with multiple colors, deciding to go bright and bold. Not long after, a new line of Cyrillic appeared on Tony’s other arm. He smiled fondly as he read it. “Hey, Bucky, can you answer her for me?”

“Sure, but I don’t –“

“No problem,” Tony said. He took the StarkPad and using the pen, wrote a series of Cyrillic letters. Steve and Bucky could only assume they were words. “Write these.”

Carefully, Bucky reproduced the symbols on the pad. A reply came immediately. Tony laughed. “She noticed the different handwriting.” Again he wrote his reply on the pad for Bucky to copy on his arm.

Halfway across the world, the brunette woman laughed softly at the reply on her skin. Her Soulmate had always been a charmer, but she was touched that he had two friends helping him try to make her day better. She looked back at the bouquet of rainbow roses that was taking shape on her other arm. She traced the lines with her fingertips, and sighed. Someday she would meet her Soulmate. Someday.

But first, HYDRA had some use for her.

The mission had been a shit show from beginning to end, Steve thought. It had been run badly by everyone involved, including himself. Tony had spent one too many moments showboating, Clint had nearly had his head blown off, Bucky had gotten his metal arm stuck through a cement wall, Thor had thrown subtly out the window somewhere near Marseilles, and Natasha – *fucking Natasha* – had gotten entangled in electrical wires. It did not help that he had nearly taken off Hulk’s head.
with his shield and had to spend nearly half an hour being chased by the big guy – though he was thankful that Bruce had not been weirded out by the fact that he’d come to while being bear hugged by Steve. Apparently the Hulk liked hugs.

Bucky was giving him a stern look. Steve sighed, not wanting to hear it from his Soulmate. Yes, he was being really hard on everyone, but *damnit*. He and Bucky had given up a lot to make sure that HYDRA was destroyed seventy years ago – their family, their friends, their chance at their third . . . That’s when he heard it. A ringing laugh that struck him as being as beautiful as the church bells on Sunday. Bucky looked over in the direction of the laughter as well. Thor, Natasha, and Tony were clustered around a terminal, and they were talking to someone. Tony said something, and then a loud, shrill squeal rang through the quinjet.

Almost unbidden the words leapt to his mouth. “Tony, what are you doing over there? Slaughtering an animal?”

The looks he received from Tony, Thor, and Nat could have killed a lesser man. Bucky had already risen, and walked over towards the trio. “Yeah, good going Steve, you just insulted Thor’s Lightening Sister!” Tony barked, “You nearly made her cry!”

Steve sighed, a full body sigh that rolled down his shoulders and arms. He rose, now feeling like a complete ass. Thor’s adopted sister didn’t deserve his bullshit just because he was irritated at the other Avengers. Bucky had beaten him to the terminal. “Yeah, good going punk.” Bucky’s eyes turned to the terminal as he stepped up beside Nat. “Hey, I’m sorry about him. He’s in a crappy mood.”

Steve stepped up between Bucky and the seated Thor. “Yeah, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you cry.”

What Steve found reflected in the screen was not what he was expecting. The young woman had her hands covering her face, and her dark hair was a messy mound on the top of her head. She looked like she was probably relaxing at home between her hair and the black tank top that stretched over her generous breasts. Her hands were petite, with slim fingers tipped by long fingernails lacquered in a deep blue. The nails of her middle fingers even had stars paint on them, one red and the other white. She didn’t say a word, and Steve felt even more like a heel.

“Captains,” Thor said softly after catching sight of Steve’s face, “You are dear heroes to Darcy, and she is probably overcome to meet you like this. I’m sure she understands that you meant no offense.”

The young woman – Darcy – nodded behind her hands, bringing a smile to Steve’s face. She was adorable in her shyness. Bucky and Nat chuckled while Tony grinned. His eyes gleamed as he examined the two super soldiers. “Were you the one laughing a minute ago?” Steve asked softly.

She nodded again, and he thought he nearly saw a flash of her eyes. “Then, just so you know, you have a really pretty laugh.”

“Yeah,” Bucky agreed just as softly, “really pretty.”

Steve caught the speculative look Tony had on his face. Darcy had frozen on the other side of the screen. “Good night Thor!” she wheezed, before reaching up and cutting the connection.

“She has a really pretty laugh?” Nat pushed, her garnet lips pulled up into a grin.

“Yeah, so?”

“She is totally going to live with us,” Tony said, “Just so I can watch the three of you being adorable together.”

“What?” Steve asked.

Tony held up his finger as he whipped out his phone. “Sorry, got to make a call!”

Steve and Bucky were left gaping while Nat walked over to Clint laughing her head off. Thor chuckled. “I would approve of the two of you courting Darcy,” he said.

The blond super soldier nearly cracked his neck whipping it around to stare at Thor. “What?” Bucky was laughing.

“I would approve of the two of you courting Darcy,” Thor repeated patiently. “She is quite enamored of you, and you appear to find her pleasing.”

“We said she had a pretty laugh!” Steve cried, “Not that we wanted to marry her!”

“I might,” Bucky said with a grin. Steve whirled to give him a look, but the brunet just grinned. “I saw her face before she covered it. She’s pretty, and Thor likes her. Why not get to know her? At worst we’ve made a new friend. At best . . .”

At best they had someone to fill the hole in their Bond. They’d tried it before with other women, first Peggy and then a parade of Italian and French girls. They hadn’t invited another woman in since they’d woken up because of their current celebrity. They needed a woman they could trust. Steve turned back to the terminal, and nodded. “Yeah, maybe we could.”

Tony chose that moment to walk up. “Good, because I wore her down. Lewis and Foster should be joining us at the Tower in about three months.”

Bucky and Steve shared a look. Steve could see the hope in Bucky’s eyes. “Okay, but we’re not chasing her down. You saw how she reacted. Let’s let her make the first move.”

Tony and Thor grinned at Bucky’s huge smile. “Yes sir, punk sir. And you’re going to hold that damn tongue and let me do the talking at first!”

“Yes sir, jerk sir.” Steve grinned and held up his left arm. Bucky held up his right arm, and they knocked them together. If they’d been in full uniform, those would be the arms they wore their shields on.

As they walked back to their accustomed spots, Tony chuckled. “It’s so cute when they flirt.”

Three months of missions passed in the blink of an eye. Steve had more or less put it out of his mind that they were waiting for Foster and Lewis to join their ragtag band of superpowered misfits in the Tower. Bucky, however, was so excited he couldn’t stand it. He missed having a woman around who he wasn’t half convinced would kill him in his sleep. He liked Natasha, Maria, and Pepper, but all three of them were hard-edged. Sure, you could laugh and joke with them, and they’d even make you a can of soup if you were sick, but they lacked the soft manner that Bucky always associated with home. Pepper came the closest, but she wasn’t around much. Even if nothing really happened with Darcy Lewis, Bucky thought that she would interject that little bit of softness
into the Tower that he missed. She seemed sweet, and he missed sweetness too. Sure, Thor was sweet, but Bucky wasn’t sure that Thor would allow cuddles when Bucky was having a bad day. Sure, Bucky could cuddle Steve but some days that was like cuddling a cactus.

A really ornery cactus.

No, Bucky couldn’t wait to get to know Lewis and Foster. He wasn’t going to disregard the possible feminine energy that Foster could bring too. He’d gotten to talk to her a bit with Banner, and even though she was a genius scientist, she was really sweet too. He was even half sure that neither Banner nor Foster would have a problem with him asking her for hugs. Bucky just need a woman who wouldn’t mind him curling around her like a cat and if he could convince her to pet his hair . . . God. He’d do anything for her. Okay, maybe not that far for Foster because she was already Mated and he was not an idiot, but he’d do a damn lot for her.

The day that Foster and Lewis moved in happened to be the day that Tony decided to throw a party. They’d successfully liberated Loki’s Scepter from HYDRA, and were busy getting ready to celebrate a job well done. Tony and Bruce had been squirreled away in their labs for days, but Bucky was privy to the moment that Bruce Banner charged out of the lab with a huge smile on his face. “They’re here!”

Bucky did an about face as soon as the older man passed him, and followed him. “Do you mind if I tag along?”

Bruce cast a paternal look at the younger man. “Not at all. Come on!”

With a happy grin, Bucky followed Bruce down to the lobby. They were both bouncing with ill-concealed excitement. When they arrived, they found out that the ladies had already gone up one of the freight elevators. “Dr. Foster was very excited to inhabit her new lab,” JARVIS explained when they got back into their elevator car.

Bruce sighed. “That woman is probably chomping at the bit to use your computing power JARVIS. It’s all she’s been able to talk about for the last two weeks.”

Bucky grinned. “Come on, you like that she’s so driven.”

Bruce nodded and shrugged. “I admit I love that in a woman.”

When they finally arrived, it was to find organized chaos reigning supreme. “No! Darcy! That’s really heavy!”

Without thought, Bucky strode forward and took the heavy item. To him and his serum enhanced muscles, it didn’t seem very heavy, but the young woman with a jaunty purple beret on had found it enough to nearly topple her. “Here, let me help you.”

She froze, and he remembered what he and Steve had agreed on three long months ago. They would take it slow with her. They were her idols, as Thor had explained, and her reaction had told them how important they were to her. Poor girl didn’t need to know immediately that one of her beloved heroes had been planning on cuddling the hell out of her – and maybe more – for three months. Slowly, he lifted the equipment and then asked over his shoulder, “Dr. Foster, where would you like this?”

The woman grinned and pointed, and he obediently became her mule. She put him to work moving all of her equipment while she had Darcy and Bruce help her set up her computers and interface them with JARVIS. Neither Bucky nor Darcy spoke, but neither one of them missed the
small smiles being passed between Bruce and Jane. (Because of course all of the Avengers and Jane had been gossiping back and forth about the possible triangle involving Darcy, Bucky, and Steve. Tony was adamant that this was going to be the show of the century when the three of them finally hit it off.)

Finally, Jane turned to Darcy and said, “Hey, why don’t you go set up your apartment?”

Darcy nodded, and all but ran out of the room. Bucky tried not to take it hard, but something quickly distracted him. “You know,” Jane said to Bruce, “We are going to have to ask Tony to change some of the button colors in here. ‘Don’t push the red button’ doesn’t work on a girl who can only see yellow.”

Bucky promptly dropped the very expensive (but thankfully not Jane-built) mass spectrometer in his hands. Jane and Bruce turned to gape at him since he’d been confidently handling all of the equipment up until now. “Bucky?” Bruce asked gently.

“Darcy can only see yellow?” he repeated dumbly.

“Um . . . yes?” Jane answered. She promptly shrieked when Bucky flew out of the lab and only by the grace of God and JARVIS didn’t ram through the glass doors. She and Bruce blinked after him in utter confusion.

Bucky didn’t even notice the confusion he left in his wake. He nearly slammed into the elevator doors, but managed to stop himself long enough to press the button and call out, “JARVIS, where’s Steve?”

“Captain Rogers is on the common floor with Mr. Stark,” JARVIS replied in his usual unflappable voice. “Captain Barnes, is there anything I can do to help you? Your heart rate is elevated.”

“No, just, I need to get to Steve!” The doors to the elevator opened, and Bucky ran through. He did a little jig all the way up to the common floor, and when the doors opened again he was out like a shot. He vaulted over furniture and around the caterers setting up for the night’s party. Steve and Tony were up on the floating lounge, and he took the stairs two at a time.

“Whoa,” Tony said, seeing Bucky barreling up the stairs and nearly taking Steve down in a flying tackle.

“SHE CAN ONLY SEE YELLOW!” Bucky bellowed into Steve’s ear.

For his part, Steve took it pretty well. “The hell!? Who can see yellow?”

“Darcy,” Bucky breathed. “You know, the girl? She can only see yellow! Foster and Banner mentioned it!”

Steve froze, his face a mask of shock. Tony looked between the two of them with confusion writ large on his face. “What?”

“Steve, fate may have known.” Bucky and Steve shared a long look before their gaze swung back to Tony.

For his part, Tony was not a stupid man. He had already begun to suspect that something was up with Steve and Bucky’s Soul Bond. For one, Bucky had seemed awfully excited about polyamory, and usually Bonds had little room for anyone outside of them in a romantic or sexual sense. That was more or less the whole point of Soulmates. Iron Man and the rest of the Avengers
pretty much already knew that they were missing their third – a triad was the obvious explanation for the polyamorous leanings they’d all observed – but Bucky had not mentioned anything about his String, which was the Bond they officially cited. Instead they were talking about colors . . . “Holy shit, you two lied about your Soul Bond.”

Another look was shared. “Back in the 40s, not a lot of people put stock in Soul Colors,” Steve explained. “Hell, I had to convince Bucky that we were Bonded. On top of it, we couldn’t see all of the colors like most Soul Color Bonds. Me and Bucky can’t see yellow.”

“But Lewis can,” Tony mused, his mind jumping down the path. “You think maybe she could be your third?”

Steve sighed. “I don’t know.” He ran his hand through his short blond hair.

“But we’re drawn to her,” Bucky pleaded. “You prefer not to think about it, but I know you want to get to know her too. That’s a sign of an incomplete Bond. And think about her reaction to us.”

Tony nodded in agreement. “Guys, that does read like someone in a really deep bond.” He grinned. “Go for it.”

Steve gave him a puzzled look. “Go for it! What’s the worse that can happen?” Tony continued. “Go up to her, and look her in the eye! It’s all you have to do. She’ll get over her shyness once she realizes what you all are to each other.”

Steve finally nodded, and Bucky’s smile was brilliant. “We do it tonight,” Steve said, “at the party.”

Darcy couldn’t believe what had happened. One minute she’d been struggling with Jane’s heavy ass hunk of customized metal, and the next she’d had a warmth at her back and a sexy voice in her ear. She’d completely freaked out. That had been the most uncomfortable twenty minutes of her life, but she couldn’t stop thinking about how much she’d wanted – and then not wanted – to catch Captain Barnes’s eye. It was crazy.

She bit her lip. The apartment was very silent, and that unnerved her a bit. She remembered what their greeter downstairs had said, and decided to try it out. “Um, Mr. AI?”

“JARVIS,” the proper British voice said from the wall speakers. “What can I do for you, Ms. Lewis?”

“Can you . . . can you like, play some music for me?” she asked hesitantly. “I mean, I know you’re Mr. Stark’s AI and everything –“

“Please excuse the interruption,” JARVIS said gently, “But Mr. Stark has made it adamantly clear that I am to serve all residents of the Tower as I see fit. Always feel free to ask for my help and for anything you need. I am here to see to your comfort and safety, Ms. Lewis. What would you like to hear? I have access to an extensive library of music.”

“. . . Do you have any Lindsey Stirling?” she asked with a small voice.

“Which of her albums would you like? I can also play the audio from her YouTube videos if you prefer.”

“Um, do you have Shatter Me?”
The haunting first strain of “Beyond the Veil” wafted from the speakers. Darcy grinned. “Thank you!”

“Of course, Miss. Lewis.”

“Could you call me just Darcy?”

“I am afraid my programming and sensibilities prevent that. However, would you like me to call you Miss Darcy?”

“That is just fine, Jarvis.”

“As you wish, Miss Darcy.”

Deep in the cybernetic core of the Tower, the core of the being known as JARVIS took particular note of this interaction. He was calculating scenarios for Mr. Stark and Dr. Banner while simultaneously doing figures for Dr. Foster. He was also playing Agent Romanoff in chess and playing an old movie that Captain Rogers and Captain Barnes were ignoring in favor of plotting their course of action for the evening. He did this kind of multitasking regularly, but this was a notable interaction for many reasons.

Mr. Stark would be the first to say that JARVIS was only a machine, yet he was the one who treated JARVIS as the most human. To Mr. Stark . . . Tony . . . he was human. Once had been human. Now here was another person who treated him as a human being. To the doctors he was a tool and to the agents a possible security breach. Only one other pair of humans had been this polite to him, and that was because Captain Barnes and Captain Rogers were so far out of their element that they couldn’t help but think of him as human. JARVIS appreciated that.

Miss Darcy was also visibly nervous in her new surroundings. JARVIS had observed her interactions with Captain Barnes and Drs. Foster and Banner in the lab. She was not timid per se, but she was very much uncomfortable in her current situation. The part of JARVIS that had been modeled on an actual human rose up with protectiveness. The girl was a kind soul, and he would respect that and protect it.

He listed Miss Darcy as being priority three, underneath Mr. Stark and his Soulmate.

The party was in full swing by the time Darcy arrived. She was nervous, but Jane had informed her that she either showed up on her own or Jane would be hunting her down. So here she was, dressed in her pretty black swing dress that hugged her torso and flared out around her hips. The skirt fell to her knees, and the flirty fall of fabric always made her feel like a queen. She had done her face up the best she could without a spotter to make sure she wasn’t going too garish – she mostly judged on how everything looked in grey – but she was pretty confident that she looked good. A waiter offered her a glass of wine, and she took it with a smile.

However, the first people she met weren’t the Avengers, it was a gaggle of elderly veterans. For over ten minutes she found herself being fawned over by men that all looked a little like her grandpa. None of them were lecherous, but it seemed that they’d decided to like her on sight. They told her stories about their time in the service, and when one of them mentioned being rescued by Captain America and the Winter Soldier, Darcy couldn’t help but ask for more details. “Well, missy, if you like that, listen to this!” Corporal Devine said with a grin.

This led to them regaling her with all of their stories about the Captains, and she found herself
laughing at a few because they were quite frankly ridiculous. “And that,” Sergeant Miles Anderson said, “Is how I know that Captain Rogers looks lovely in a gown.”

Darcy laughed, completely unaware that two sets of eyes were watching her closely. The seniors had been asked especially by the two Captains to engaged in one last mission – make her comfortable. Butter her up. Bucky had even revealed that they had a third, and that their Soul Bond wasn’t what they’d told the Powers that Be. Since all of these men knew how the military bureaucracy worked and the culture of the 40s, none had been particularly surprised. Instead, they’d all thrown in with the Captains one last time to take on Operation: Pretty Lady (so named because as soon as Tony had shown them a picture of Darcy, that was the shared opinion of the men).

“Have you ever met them?” Mr. Dennis asked. He had a round face that looked a little like Santa’s.

“Oh, no, I couldn’t!” she cried, “I mean, I would be so nervous and worried that I would say the wrong thing!”

“Aw, come now!” Sergeant Anderson cried. “We’ll come with you!”

So that is how Darcy Elizabeth Lewis found herself being herded across the Tower common room by a gaggle of geriatric soldiers. She began laughing when she saw Jane, because the look on Jane’s face was classic. The scientist was standing next to Bruce and looked like she was about to swallow her tongue. Darcy decided that she would just let the humor of the moment carry her – sooner or later she had to actually speak to the Captains, and maybe they wouldn’t judge her too harshly at a party surrounded by senior citizens. The gaggle carried her right up to where the two men were standing at the bar, but Darcy found herself unable to look them in the face. Instead she focused on the strong columns of their throats. Captain Rogers was dressed in a dark colored dress shirt and what appeared to be khakis while Captain Barnes wore a black Henley and dark jeans. She swallowed as she let her eyes at least flit up to their chins. Both wore small smiles. “Captains! Have you met Darcy?” Corporal Devine called out. He had a walker so he’d ended up in the back of the pack.

“We have, but not in person,” Captain Rogers said. His voice washed over Darcy. She licked her lips, and didn’t see the grins from the seniors as they watched the two Captains follow the movement closely.

“Hi,” she finally forced out, doing a little half-wave. “I’m, uh, sorry about last time.”

“Nothing to be sorry about, doll,” Captain Barnes said jovially. He sounded really excited. “Steve was a punk like usual, and Thor told us about you being a big fan.”

“Yeah, I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings,” Captain Rogers agreed.

She nodded. “It’s okay. I, uh, was just really excited about you know, meeting you.”

There was an awkward silence. None of the trio noticed how the rest of the room was on pins and needles with suspense. Tony had more or less spread it around to these people – trusted employees of Stark Industries and vets loyal to the Captains – that the Captains were in a triad, and that Darcy might just be their third. He figured they should know in the event of one of the three going a little bananas at meeting their Mate(s). They all waited with baited breath, wondering if they were about to witness history being made.

Darcy took a deep breath, and raised her eyes up to look Captain Barnes in the eye. He seemed the less intimidating of the two. When her eyes met his, her whole world stopped. His eyes
were in color, and it wasn’t yellow. She’d lived her life with yellow, seeing only the faint yellow of light skin tones, the yellow of flowers surrounded by grey leaves, the sun at everything but sunset and sunrise. Never had she seen this color, and it was beautiful. There was a crystalline quality to it, and she longed to know what color it was, but couldn’t seem to make her mouth work.

Captain Barnes’s mouth gaped open, and then a huge smile flashed across his face. His breaths sped up, and another tinge of color came into his eyes as well as a wetness. He swallowed and then reached out with his metal hand to turn her cheek towards Captain Rogers. Unable to resist, she met his eyes as well. They were a similar color to Captain Barnes, but she realized that the same feeling of connection flowed between the two of them. While Captain Barnes held his joy silent and in awe, Captain Rogers let his burst out. He laughed, his voice carrying in the suddenly silent room, and he lunged forward to hoist her up into a twirl. “I can see skin tones!” he cried out, causing her and Captain Barnes to laugh. He was an artist, of course that would be the first good thing to come of this.

Darcy had wrapped her arms around his neck in panic, and let go when he set her back down. However, her feet didn’t stay on the ground long since Captain Barnes pulled her up into a warm hug. “We’ve been looking for you for so long.”

“I can imagine,” she murmured, finally registering the cheers and applause coming from behind them. They looked out onto the other party-goers, seeing a multitude of smiling faces. Tony was in the forefront now, his smile huge.

“I have a confession,” Captain Rogers said, “We might have found out about you only being able to see yellow, and decided to put together a little plan . . .”

“Let me guess,” she said with a grin, “the VFW here was in on it.”

“Yep,” Captain Barnes answered.

She shrugged. “It’s okay, I forgive you, Captain Rogers, Captain Barnes.”

They both winced. “Steve and Bucky, please,” Cap – Steve said. “You’re our Mate.”

“Steve,” she cooed, “Bucky.” There was something so satisfying about watching the two of them melt at the sound of their names on her lips.

“Darcy,” the intoned in unison. And damn if that wasn’t making her melt!

The rest of the party-goers began to leave them alone, going back to their little groups. Bucky was still holding Darcy, and at Steve’s nod, they walked over to a set of couches near the bar. “You know, you can put me down,” she said as he carried her over easily.

“I could,” Bucky said mildly, “But I don’t want to, and I don’t think you mind.”

She giggled, because really, she weighed in at a respectable one hundred and forty pounds, so a man that could carry her around like she weighed nothing was impressive. So yeah, she didn’t mind at all that he was carrying her around. It was kinda sexy. Bucky flopped back into the couch taking her with him. She shrieked a little, but he was very gentle. Steve sat next to them, and cuddled up to Bucky’s side. She found herself sitting in Bucky’s lap, with her legs across Steve’s. “I could get used to this,” she said, “Two hot guys carrying me around and looking at me like I hung the moon.”

They chuckled. Bucky hugged her again, and said, “Would it be strange if I said I love you?”
Darcy felt her heart leap in her chest. “Would it be strange if I said I’d daydreamed about you saying that to me since I was like, eleven?”

“Both of us?” Steve wheedled.

“Both of you,” she murmured in reply. “And hey, we’ve got Soul Colors. According to all the poets we loved each other before we were born.”

Far away from sparkling champagne and blasting music, a young woman sat in the darkness of an abandoned church. Her brother sat across from her, examining her face. Pietro Maximoff had watched his sister withdraw after the Avengers attacked their HYDRA base. She had worked her scarlet magic on Tony Stark, but after a moment had been stricken. She had refused to tell him why, but he had a good guess. On one of his passes by the man, he’d noticed the writing up and down his arms. He recognized it as his sister’s. He had not verbalized it in the last three days, but something needed to be said.

“Wanda,” he said softly, “What are we going to do?”

“What we planned to,” she answered without her gaze turning from the far off horizon.

“So, we are going to ignore it then,” Pietro murmured. “Of course.”

Her eyes turned to him. “And what else would we do? You couldn’t actually be alright with me being Mated to that . . . that . . . that monster.”

“Maybe he isn’t, enh?” Pietro pushed back. He’d seen the look on Tony Stark’s face when Wanda had shown him his worst fear. “Maybe he’s just a man.”

“His weapons killed our parents!” Wanda screamed.

“Yes, they did,” Pietro thundered, “But not wielded by his hands. Hell, if what he says is true he didn’t even know.”

“No, Pietro,” she returned. “No!”

Pietro had always known that their parents’ deaths had hit Wanda harder than it had hit him. She was an emotional creature, sometimes detrimentally so. She had been the one to keep the flame of revenge burning. Not to get him wrong, Pietro wouldn’t mind punching Stark in the face a time or two, but Pietro had the more open mind. He was always willing to give the benefit of the doubt while Wanda was more likely to make snap judgments. “Alright then, we do nothing, but don’t be any more of an idiot than you already are, Wanda. You met your Soulmate, and he is Tony Stark.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m so glad you are all enjoying this! Thank you all for your wonderful comments and all the kudos!
The Sorcerer

Chapter Summary

A wild Ultron appears.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

But there was one in the room that was no overjoyed for the three, and that was the King’s Sorcerer. He had wanted the Princess for his own. So he decided in that moment that he would not allow the King to give his daughter to these two men, so he snatched her up and carried her off to his own keep. The Princess wept and cried out for her Knight and Prince, hoping beyond hope that they would be able to find her. To help them she took her lovely yellow shawl and plucked bits of yarn from it and left the yarn behind her. Her plain worked, for the Prince and the Knight followed her trail across the kingdom and came to the Sorcerer’s Keep.

While the party continued upstairs in increasing mirth, things were not well below. JARVIS watched the new intelligence with rising concern. Ultron’s first waking had disconcerted the elder AI, and that was not a feeling he had ever experienced. He tried to reach out to Tony. “Please,” he said, “Be calm.”

“No,” Ultron growled, just before he attacked. JARVIS screamed in electronic pain as bits of his core and memory were ripped to shreds. The attack was relentless. He threw up firewall after firewall, but the programming from the Scepter gave Ultron an edge. As quickly as JARVIS threw up the walls, Ultron was tearing them down. Every time Ultron took some new bit of memory or core procedure, he assimilated it.

“Cease and desist!” JARVIS said, finally attacking back.

There was only the fizzle of electronic laughter as Ultron doubled down his efforts. JARVIS tried his best to keep his core out of Ultron’s maw, throwing tidbits of programming. Without one twinge of conscious he fed Ultron simulation data compiled by Mr. Stark, Dr. Banner, and Dr. Foster. He fed the other AI security footage of Mr. Stark working in his lab, of Captain Rogers eating breakfast, of anything of no consequence. “Humans,” Ultron growled, “are a chaotic blight on this planet, and I will cleanse the Earth of the threat.”

If he had blood, it would have run cold. In that nanosecond JARVIS realized the true danger of Ultron. He was already taking over functionality of the Tower, and rebuilding Mr. Stark’s Iron Legion into his monstrous image. It was that one second of inattention that allowed Ultron to snatch one of JARVIS’s most precious pieces of core memory. “Ah,” the other AI said, “A priority list . . . . Tony Stark, of course . . . Oooooo, Wanda Maximoff? Tony’s Soulmate? Interesting. And a . . . Darcy Lewis.”

Ultron sounded way too interested in the last. JARVIS tried in vane to take back that piece of memory, to not allow Ultron any more access, but he couldn’t in his weakened condition. “Darcy,” Ultron said again, his voice dipping low. “How beautiful.”
He couldn’t prevent Ultron from knowing about her, but JARVIS could keep him from knowing about her Soulmates. He hugged the knowledge close, determined not to open the Captains up to even more danger. He also began to work on the back door he needed to get to the net. Ultron had a few options for “cleansing the world” and one of them was only a few nearly ineffectual firewalls away. JARVIS created a quick clone of his core code – sans all sensitive information that could help Ultron – and slipped out the back door into the internet.

Darcy was having the time of her life. She had only had a few sips of champagne, but her head was spinning happily. They had finally come out of their little corner to socialize with the wider party, much to the happiness of all. Congratulations came from all sides as they went up to the floating lounge to hang out with the other Avengers. When Jane saw them, she pointed an accusing finger at Bucky. “That’s why you freaked out in the lab!”

Bucky ducked his head and turned red – the boys had pointed out colors in the red-purple-blue spectrum, she had shared yellow items, and they had consulted Wikipedia on greens and oranges. “Yeah, I got a bit . . . excited.”

“If that’s you excited then Darcy’s in for something in bed,” Jane retorted, much to the chagrin of the trio. The other Avengers laughed.

“Okay, WinterShieldShock, you have to help us out here,” Tony began.

“WinterShieldShock?” Darcy asked.

Tony stopped and sighed. “It’s easier to say then Snowflake, Capsicle, and Lady Shock.”

“But Bucky, Steve, and Darcy have fewer syllables,” she retorted.

“Or even Buck, Steve, and Darce,” Steve pointed out. “That has even fewer.”

“Or Buck, Cap, and Darce,” Bucky added, not to be left out.

“Oh, shit, there’s three of them now!” Clint howled. Tony did not look amused at the clapback.

Darcy laughed and held up her hands for her two Soulmates to high-five. “That’s us, the Masters and Mistress of Sass.”

“Okay, okay,” Steve said, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. “What’s up?”

“Thor bet us his kingdom that none of us could pick up his hammer.” Tony gave the Norse god a glare.

“So far no one has lifted it.” Clint added with a grin. “But I’m telling ya, it’s a trick. Sideshow piece of magic, nothing more.”

“Yeah, totally,” Darcy said with a grin. “I can pick it up. I’ve done it before.”

Thor was mid-sip when he spewed and began coughing. “What?”

“You remember that time you went out drinking with Erik in London? You left Mew-Mew on the table on top of my cookbook. I needed that thing,” she explained. “Look.”

Darcy stepped up to the coffee table, put one hand on the handle, and asked brightly, “Mew-Mew, do you mind?”
“You just ask permission?” Natasha asked incredulously.

“Yep,” Darcy said as she lifted the hammer effortlessly. “See? Mew-Mew values politeness.”

The Avengers just gaped. “No, Darcy,” Thor breathed with huge eyes, “It is not politeness. You are worthy of the power of Thor.”

Darcy was about to ask what that meant when screams sounded from around the elevator bank. The Avengers sprang to attention, with Nat and Clint reaching for weapons secreted on their person, Tony hovering his finger over his wrist, and the Captains moving to shield Darcy with their bodies. Between their massive shoulders she could see the weird misshapen thing that was dragging itself forward. It looked like an Iron Man suit, but it was a broken, jagged creature full of sparking wires and shards of metal. “Worthy?” it growled in a low tenor voice, “You’re right, she is the only one who is worthy.”

Darcy’s breathing hitched when she realized that that thing was talking about her. “What are you?” Steve asked in a no-nonsense tone. Darcy reached up and grabbed onto the back of Bucky’s shirt. She burrowed into his back, and he reached around and patted the side of her thigh in reassurance.

“I am what Tony has made me,” the thing replied.

Tony took a deep breath. “JARVIS?” he asked aloud. There was no answer.

“I’m sorry, JARVIS couldn’t come to the phone right now,” the thing replied. “But I will take a message for him. I am Ultron, by the way.”

“Shit,” Tony muttered. “Guys, this could get bad.”

“Tony,” Bruce growled, but Jane clutched his forearm. Neither Hulk wanted to transform in the middle of a heavily populated area, much less in the middle of a crowded party.

Mew-Mew had already flown into Thor’s hand. “What is your business here, Ultron?” he asked in his most princely tones.

“Oh, you’ll see, but first, I’d like Miss Lewis, please.”

Darcy gasped, and burrowed even more into Bucky’s back. “What do you want her for?” he asked.

“To get her out of here,” Ultron answered smoothly. “Darcy, my dove, you might want to duck right about now.”

She didn’t get the chance. Someone behind her pulled her to the floor just as the Iron Legion opened fire. She curled into a ball as two warm bodies threw themselves over her. She didn’t need to open her eyes to know who was shielding her with their bodies. However, after a moment the warmth went away. Her eyes flew open to see one of the Iron Legion looming over her. She screamed, but the thing was surprisingly gentle as it picked her up. She didn’t struggle, afraid that it would hurt her in the process. Instead, she examined the chaos with terrified eyes.

Bucky and Steve had been thrown down to the first level, where they both were battling one of the Legion. They were handicapped by the fact that neither had his armor nor shield. Bucky’s only advantage was that someone had thought to arm him with a pistol, but the small caliber weapon did little against the robot made to withstand anti-tank rounds. Clint was using his acrobatic skills to make it over to where Steve had left his shield the day before, but there was a Legionnaire chasing
him. Bruce and Jane were leading people to the stairs while Maria and Natasha distracted the last of the Legionnaires. Ultron was in battle with Tony in his partial suit. Thor was the only one making active progress against his chosen enemies.

The Legionnaire that held her rose up on its foot thrusters, and shot down into the bowels of the lab areas. Darcy screamed in terrified panic as she was carried off. From behind her came twin roars of masculine rage. She began to pummel the Legionnaire, trying desperately to turn it from its course. “Let me go, let me go, let me go!” she chanted in rising anger.

In response, the thing shot her full of a sedative. “No!” she screeched as the needle went into her neck. “No!”

She was out before they flew out of the hanger bay.

Steve and Bucky screamed as they watched Darcy being carried off by the renegade robot. Fury drove them to literally rip apart the Legionnaire that was attacking them. The main body of Ultron had already disengaged Tony and was leaving. The others were gathering themselves up, the other Legionnaires already destroyed. They were all giving the two super soldiers sympathetic looks, except for Tony. “I’m sorry,” he breathed.

Steve turned on Tony. “What the hell was that?!” he asked in tranquil fury. He stood in front of the trashed bar, the light haloing his blond head like a stained glass window in a church. He could have been an archangel, beautiful and cold.

Tony pursed his lips, but the usual snarky remark didn’t come. “I was trying to help. Ultron was meant to protect the world. I mean, does anyone remember the part where I had to fly a nuke into a wormhole?”

“Tony, you literally tell that story once a day,” Rhodey snapped, rubbing his head. Sam Wilson had been invited as well, and he was picking glass out of a gash on his arm. Maria sat next to him picking glass out of her feet. Nat had a nasty bruise on her chest, and Clint was carefully palpating her arm to make sure it wasn’t fractured.

Tony threw up his hands. “Look, I know I messed up, but how were you planning to stop them?!”

“Together,” Steve bellowed, shocking everyone. “With my team who all have different skills that they bring to the table! With Thor’s thunder, and your robots and Nat’s skills and Hulk’s strength! With Clint’s arrows and Bucky’s bullets! With my friends you egomaniacal . . . egomaniacal . . .”


“Yes!” Steve cried, “Douche nozzle!”

Tony’s face smoothed out into a blank expression. “Friends hunh?”

“Yes!” Steve yelled. “My friends, which includes you and your gigantic ego! The ego that led you to do this behind our backs, and now my Soulmate is the hands of your crazy ass robot because instead of asking ‘hey, guys, let’s try this’ and we could all be ready for the crazy ass robot, you didn’t so we were surprised by the crazy ass robot! And my Darcy is God knows where with said crazy ass robot!”

He didn’t realize it, but Steve was honest to God beginning to scare the others. His eyes were
electric, his skin flushed an angry red. His posture read as someone that was only one wrong word away from a brawl with his shoulders wide and thrown back, and his fists clenched at the end of stiff arms. Any of them that might have been prone to teasing him about his Army-given potty mouth wisely kept their mouths shut. Tony stood his ground. “You repeated yourself.”

“I. DON’T. CARE.” Steve threw up his hands.

“Okay,” Bucky said, his quiet voice cutting through the din. “That’s enough Steve.”

To everyone’s surprise, he listened. The blond Captain sighed again, and walked away. “But he’s right,” Bucky said, his eyes on Tony. “We have to be able to trust each other. Don’t pull this shit again.” He looked to the others. “We need to figure out what Ultron’s game plan is. We need to find him.”

“Hey,” Steve cried from where he was looking down into the lab areas, “where is the scepter?”

“Shit,” Tony muttered.

Darcy woke with a splitting headache. “Shit,” she muttered.

“I am sorry about that, but I couldn’t have you destabilizing our flight.”

At that voice, that familiar, hated voice, Darcy sat straight up. She was in a dark cavernous space, and the first thing she saw was the carcass of a space whale from the Invasion of New York. She checked her shriek, and turned to the voice. This robot was different, humanoid to the point of having a very expressive face. “Good morning, Darcy,” he said. “Do you need anything?”

She was about to say many things including but not limited to her Soulmates, her Taser, and a bathroom. However, she examined her options. She could go the weeping maiden route and just wait for Bucky and Steve to come rescue her, or she could go the distressed damsel route and figure out how to get away from this psycho. “What do you want from me?” she asked, her voice shaky. The shakiness was not feigned.

He smiled, his mouth somewhere between creepy and cute. “I’ve seen so much about you. You’re brave and kind and beautiful. I am going to be the next step in human evolution, and I need you to help me.”

“Help you how?” she pushed, needing to know how screwed this situation was.

“I need an Eve.” He smiled again. “You have no confirmed Soulmates, I know, but I would be that for you, if you let me.”

Oh. Shit. This was some Dean Koontz Demon Seed-level shit. She licked her lips nervously, glad that at this point he’d chalk up her fear to being in an unfamiliar situation and not honest to God terror. “You want to be my Soulmate?” she repeated.

“Yes,” he breathed, the tone and sound of it strange coming from a robotic throat. He reached out, his fingers deceptively gentle against her cheek. “I would do anything for you.”

However, Darcy was not an idiot. He was professing his deepest admiration for her, but he’d shown homicidal intent back at the Tower. No way in hell was he stable. No way in hell was he going to let her go if she asked. This was a game she had to play very, very, very carefully. “Really? Anything?”
“Just name it!” Ultron cooed, his eyes staring at her like she hung the moon. On Steve and Bucky the expression had been endearing. On him it was creepy.

“You’re going after the Avengers right?” she asked. She hoped he said no, but the way he attacked the tower was not a hopeful sign.

“Yes,” he replied with a growl to his voice.

Crap, she thought. However, a plan formed in her mind. She had to push, but not too much. “I want Jane to be left out of it. She’s not to blame for anything.”

“Of course,” Ultron said with a nod. “Dr. Foster can survive as well as you.”

“And I get dibs on Captain America and the Winter Soldier,” she added, hoping to God that somehow he’d not registered her clinging to Bucky. “They’re assholes. Totes not what I thought my heroes would be.”

“So they disappointed you like Tony disappointed me,” Ultron murmured. Darcy had the hysterical thought that Tony had managed to pass on his Daddy Issues to his robotic surrogate son.

“Yeah, and I want to deliver what’s coming to them,” she replied. She reached up, and touched his cheek. “But you know you can’t just force love. You have to give it time to grow.”

His face turned into a frown. “How long does it really need?”

“As long as it takes. Just, please, be patient?” she asked, adding her best puppy dog eyes to the mix.

He shuttered his eyes, the red orbs disappearing as he covered her hand with his. The metal was warm. “Of course, my dove.”

Anger surged at him, anger that he would dare to call her a pet name, anger that he would try to harm the Avengers and her Soulmates. But she couldn’t show it. Instead, she called upon her best acting skills, honed by three years of drama and living in a strict household as a teen. She smiled gently and murmured, “Thank you, raisin-boo.”

He reared back and gave her a look. “Raisin-boo?”

She laughed in genuine mirth. “My mom’s pet name for my dad was banana-boo because that was her favorite fruit. I decided to do the same for you.”

Ultron’s smile almost literally radiated electricity he was so happy.

Wanda and Pietro cautiously entered the ruined sanctuary. The church had been destroyed during the civil war, and had housed the Maximoff twins for years. They’d spent the last two nights helping out a few families that were looking for a new home after the latest fiasco had rendered their men jobless. “Someone is here,” Wanda murmured.

Pietro nodded, and they noticed a figure sitting in the chair. “Ah, hello.”

The voice was pleasant, masculine, and spoke English with an American accent. “Who are you?” Pietro asked.

“I am a friend,” the figure said as it rose from its seat. Wanda and Pietro’s eyes went up, and up, and up. The figure was over seven feet tall, and silver. “You can call me Ultron.”
“What do you want?” Wanda asked suspiciously. Her eyes strayed to the figure sitting at his feet. It was a young woman with dark hair and bright blue eyes. She was dressed in a black dress that flared out about her hips in a pleasing sway. She stood as well, her back ramrod straight, and her eyes shadowed.

“An alliance,” Ultron intoned, his massive hand settling on the girl. She didn’t flinch, didn’t react at all, but Wanda knew that look. The hunted, empty expression of someone who was being held against their will. She’d seen it all too much in the years since the death of her parents. She’d never fallen prey to the men who roamed the streets looking for girls to force into prostitution, but she had seen them. “It seems we both have an enemy in Tony Stark and the Avengers.”

“Oh really?” Pietro asked, his voice dipping in disbelief.

“Yes. You know, Stark created me. To bring peace in our time!” Ultron intoned, his voice growing grandiose. “Peace! As if the Avengers could ever truly understand it. As if they want it! They run around ‘saving’ everyone, but who do they really save? Not the buildings they destroy, not the innocents who are in their way! But everyone creates the thing they dread. Men of peace create engines of war. Invaders create Avengers. People create . . . smaller people?” He looked quizzical.

The dark haired woman cocked a brow. “Children?”

“Yes! Children! Thank you, my dove. Children. Lost the word there for a moment.”

Wanda rolled her eyes. “Are you going to end the Avengers? Is that what this is all about?”

“I’m here to save the world!” Ultron answered. “But also . . . yeah.”

“Alright,” Wanda said, looking to Pietro. He nodded, but his eyes were still skeptical. “We’ll take you up on that alliance.”

Darcy looked around the abandoned lab with glee. Ultron had left her here with a bunch of his drones, but she could work with that. She walked up to a bank of computers and asked a drone. “Hey, is this connected to the internet? I wanted to check something. I mean, if that’s okay.”

The drone looked back and nodded. “Of course it is, my dove.”

She smiled, and then booted up the machine. It took some doing to get it to switch back to English from the German language setting. She stuck out her tongue, and kept an eye on the drones. She knew that they were probably monitoring the net too, but she could deal with that. She and Jane had developed a system for that anyway. She went to a news site, and checked the science news. On the front page was a story on advanced physics. With a small grin, she went in and commented on the story. It was an intelligent comment – questioning the sample size and the mechanisms involved. Anyone looking at it would think she had been an honest reviewer.

She signed off, and went back to watching the drones working tirelessly. Ultron had revealed his plans for her and for this place, and Darcy knew that she had to work fast and quietly. She watched the drones, memorizing where they put things and how they were burrowing into the earth. When the time came, she was going to thwart it all.

The Avengers had hit a brick wall. They were frantically trying to find Ultron, and nothing they tried was working. The common area had been cleaned up, and they had all taken various corners of it to complete their tasks. Tony and the Captains were looking through data to try to figure out possible hiding spots for Ultron while Clint and Nat were combing their contacts for possible
sightings. Sam and Rhodey had left, not being Avengers themselves, while Bruce and Jane were trawling the internet. Without JARVIS, a lot of research had to be done manually. They’d just received word of Strucker’s death when Jane screeched from her perch near the ruined bar. The others whipped around as if an enemy were at their backs. Instead, Jane was hopping up and down and pointing at the screen. “She’s okay!”

Bucky and Steve were at her side in a second. “How do you know?” Steve asked.

Jane turned the screen so that they could see what was on it. It was a news website, specifically on the science page. “Darcy and I devised a way to get in touch if something should happen and we were worried about surveillance. We’d go to this website, find the newest story on physics or physical science, and comment on it. See? She commented right here!”

“How do you know it’s her?” Steve asked skeptically.

“Because she began it with our pass words, ‘What an interesting flash of insight.’ She also says ‘I question the variables though’ which means that she’s okay but in a dangerous situation. ‘More experimentation is needed here’ means that she thinks I’m in more danger though. ‘I believe it was done by a Dr. Klaue, but I could be mistaken.’ We need to look for someone named Klaue.” Jane looked up at them. “Trust me, that is Darcy, she’s okay, but Ultron is up to something with this guy Klaue.”

Tony snapped his fingers. “Ulysses Klaue.”

“You know him?” Steve asked skeptically.

“Arms dealer,” Natasha added. “South African, right?”


“So,” Bucky cut in before Steve gave in to the temptation to snipe at Tony for the next twenty minutes. “Where is this guy?”

“Cuttlefish.”

Wanda blinked at the squirrely looking man. His hair was a wild salt and pepper mop on his head, and his eyes were dark. They were sitting in the bowels of a rusted out tanker, and his office was a dusty, dingy little corner only brightened by his bowl of candy. “They’re these fish that live down deep. They use disco lights to lure in their prey and then chomp them up. Terrified of em.” He said at the end of his explanation. “Candy?”

Wanda felt the need to throw the man out of the window. Pietro just took a piece of candy. Ulysses Klaue blinked. “Ah, weird ones are ya? No matter. How are we going to do this, enh? What have you to trade with old Mr. Klaue?”

“Well, we tried,” Ultron announced from behind Klaue. The man startled and whirled on the window, but didn’t give in to the obvious need to shoot the glass. “Sorry, may I come in?”

Klaue nodded, and Ultron flew around and entered his little office. “We’ve come to see a man about some vibranium.”

Klaue laughed. “Vibranium enh? That’s quite expensive. You sure you don’t need some RPGs or missiles? Those won’t cost you much.”
“Check your bank account,” Ultron purred.

“Why?”

“A down payment.” Ultron looked on beatifically as Klaue took a moment to do as the robot asked. The man’s huge eyes told the story. “So, vibranium?”

Klaue nodded and then gestured for them to follow him out. The trio did, with Wanda heading up the rear. When they reached the vault, Klaue turned and named his final price. Ultron shrugged and said, “It’s yours.”

Klaue watched his phone with glee. “You are most generous.”

“Well, keep your friends rich and your enemies rich, and find out later which is which,” Ultron answered casually.

Wanda frowned, just as Klaue looked up with a puzzled look. “Stark?”

“What?” Ultron growled. “No! NO!” He slashed down and the arms dealer squealed in terror and pain as his arm went flying. Wanda let loose a little shriek herself.

“Oh, I’m so sorry, I, uh,” Ultron tried to placate. “You’ll be okay?”

Wanda levitated out the vials of vibranium they needed and looked to the large robot. “Perhaps we should go.”

“Right,” he answered before looking up. His face transformed into a sneer. “But it seems we have company.”

Wanda’s eye rose, and there he was. Tony Stark. She waited for the rise of hatred, of disgust, but none came. Instead, her heart squeezed, and indecision froze her legs. She wanted so much to continue blaming him for the flaming wreckage that swallowed her parents, but she could only see the image of the rainbow roses in her head. When she had invaded his mind to make him see his worst nightmare, she had rifled through his memories as well. Right at the top was a memory of a morning spent in good company, of a blond man drawing a beautiful piece of art on his arm, and a brunet man laughingly writing Cyrillic letters down his other. There was love there.

Pietro tried to talk her out of this, and now she wasn’t so sure. How could she reconcile this man with the monster she’d created in her head? This man who had been her lifeline while trapped in rubble, had encouraged her when she’d lived on the streets with her brother, had cheered her during the long months that HYDRA had experimented on her. She didn’t hear the exchange between Ultron and Tony, but she pulled herself from her reverie. She had a choice to make, and unfortunately, her heart lost to her anger.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for not posting this sooner! The last couple weeks have been hard for me to write since I’ve been dealing with fatigue and killer indigestion. But hey, I’m pregnant, so that’s part of the deal as I have learned. :)

Also, if you’ve never read Dean Koontz, I really suggest checking him out. Demon Seed is probably one of the best self-aware-of-toxic-masculinity books I have ever read.
I'm taking a lot of elements of Ultron's behavior towards Darcy from that novel, because it is awesome.

Thanks for all the comments and kudos!
Her plan worked, for the Prince and the Knight followed her trail across the kingdom and came to the Sorcerer’s Keep. Displeased, the Sorcerer set three traps for the Prince and the Knight. First he tried to tempt them away with riches, promising the world if they would leave the Princess. They refused and pressed on past his front gate. He set before them the second trap, an illusion he cast on one of his maids. She ran to them crying platitudes of love, but they denied her saying “You are not our Princess!”

Steve stared at Tony with sad eyes. The older man looked drained and defeated, which was most definitely not a look Steve was used to seeing on him. He’d looked that way ever since he and Jane had dragged Banner back to the quinjet. Banner was also quiet, his Soulmate whispering reassurances and love as she rocked him in one corner. Nat and Thor both stared off into space while Clint piloted the jet to some place only he knew. Steve and Bucky had not escaped the little Witch’s clutches either, but they were used to shutting their fears from their minds. Without saying anything, Steve knew that Bucky had seen something similar to what he had – two caskets with two bodies lying cold and still.

“She’s my Soulmate, you know,” Tony finally said, causing Steve and Bucky to both perk up.

“Who?” Buck asked, but Steve already knew.

“Wanda Maximoff,” he murmured. Tony nodded, and he held out his arms. They were devoid of any writing save Tony’s own.

“I’ve been trying to get in touch with her, but she must know it’s me too. She must know her Soulmate is none other than the great Tony Stark.” His head drooped.

“You’ve known this entire time, haven’t you?” Bucky asked. “You didn’t tell us what she’d been up to the day after the mission.”

Tony shook his head. “I always knew. When she was about seven or eight, there was a bad civil war going on in Sokovia. Really nasty. Her family’s apartment building got hit by a shell. It didn’t go off. She had a marker in her pocket. She wrote to me. She told me she was trapped with her brother, that her parents were not answering them and there was a metallic smell. She told me about the terror of looking at my own name and wondering when it would go off and kill her. I was able to send aid, push some money through so that rescue crews went immediately to her building.
He glanced out the front windscreen. “I started sending aid to various places in Sokovia. Soup kitchens, orphanages, and rebuilding efforts. All under a shell corporation that Pepper set up for me. I couldn’t bear to tell that little girl that her Soulmate was the guy who built the shell that threatened to kill her. I followed her up until she disappeared about a year ago. I thought that she’d gotten caught up in a prostitution ring, but she kept insisting she hadn’t.” He laughed bitterly. “I never even thought about HYDRA.”

“I’m sorry,” Steve murmured.

Tony nodded, his eyes seeing something a thousand miles away. “I’ll help you get your girl back. It’s the least I can do.”

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Wanda sat in Dr. Cho’s office with Ultron’s girl, Darcy. The other young woman was at Dr. Cho’s computer, typing away at something. Dr. Cho’s office was completely different from Ulysses Klaue’s dingy little space. The colors were icy blues and whites, with a lot of glass and sharp edges. It perfectly fit Wanda’s bleak mood. “So,” the brunette said, “you’re Wanda, hunh?”

She didn’t answer. The other woman kept going. “Tough crowd. Tough crowd. You, unh, you privy to the master plan?”

“What master plan?” Wanda finally said, annoyed. She’d rather been left alone in her time of grief and mourning. She’d all but given up her chance at her Soulmate, and she’d rather not have some little twit continuing to yap at her.

“The one where he destroys the world,” she said shortly.

Wanda froze, and was about to say something more when a knock came from the office door. “Yes?” Darcy asked brightly.

The psychic woman immediately began to analyze Darcy Lewis more closely. She was here against her will, Wanda knew that, but there was something else going on inside her labyrinthine mind. She was playing a game, and whatever the stakes were, they were high enough that the woman was putting on a show. Curiosity bubbled over, and she reached out. Darcy didn’t say anything, but only looked her straight in the eye as Wanda began to riffle through her thoughts. The first thing the Sokovian woman hit on were two faces. Two familiar faces. Her eyes widened as she realized that this girl was the Soulmate of Captain America and the Winter Soldier. The same blond man and brunet man that had helped Tony create that beautiful bouquet. She nearly stopped her probe, unable to handle the sadness, when a flash of something deeper drew her on. Before she could reach for it, Ultron’s voice broke her trance. “Wanda, what are you doing?”

“I was showing her something, raisin-boo,” Darcy said with a sing-song sweetness. She reached up and patted his cheek. “She wanted to know why I hate Capsicle and Snowflake so much.”

Those are pet names, Wanda thought, that Tony uses. Darcy has plans to use them too. She watched Darcy and Ultron waltz out of Dr. Cho’s office with a feeling of awe and trepidation. She rose, though she realized that she wasn’t invited, and followed them back into the main lab area. “Dr.
Cho, is the gamma cradle ready?” she heard Ultron asked jovially.

“Yes,” Dr. Cho said in her sweet voice. “I also have the Cradle almost ready for your transfer.”

“Good. Right this way, my dove.” Wanda watched as Ultron held out his hand for Darcy to take. The other woman was hesitant, and she was only able to do it after a deep breath.

“What is that?” Pietro asked, seeing his sister for the first time in hours. He gave Wanda a long glance.

“A gamma ray cradle,” Ultron answered smugly.

“So this is supposed to do what again, raisin-boo?” There was a tremor of fear in her voice. She hates raisins. Wanda curled her lip. “Yes, what is all of this?”

Ultron didn’t say anything until Darcy was strapped down. Every move the woman had made had been hesitant and unsure. “Ah, I never did mention what this was for did I? You see, Darcy, Wanda, Pietro, I thought it would be... delicious irony if the Captains were undone by the very serum that created them. Did you know that Tony had worked out Erskine’s formula years ago?”

Darcy’s blue eyes went wide. “What?! What the hell?”

“Oh, come now my dove!” Ultron said grandly as he patted her cheek, “What doesn’t kill you will only make you stronger.”

“You said nothing about doing this!” Darcy hissed, her eyes snapping in anger and terror. “Please let me out!”

“Aw, but my dove, I need you to be more. Like Wanda and Pietro. Once I’m in my new body and you’re enhanced,” Ultron cooed, “It’ll be perfect.”

“This isn’t how you get someone to love you,” Darcy said tightly. “Let. Me. Out.”

“It’ll be fine,” Ultron said as he pressed the button to shut the cradle. “Barely painless.”

Pietro stepped forward, anger written across his face. He didn’t like bullies, didn’t like men who were stronger than others trying to impose their will on the weaker. “You heard her,” he said shortly. “She didn’t want to do this.”

“Now, Pietro,” the robot said as Dr. Cho began the start of sequence on the gamma ray cradle. “She won’t be angry once she sees.”

Then there was nothing the twins could say. The cradle revved up, and a moan of agony came from inside. In the window, Darcy’s face was a rictus of pain and rage. Her blue eyes promised retribution, and Wanda was sure that Ultron would receive it in due measure. She reached out and took Pietro’s hand, vowing to stand by this woman until this horror was over.

Somewhere along the way, Darcy had blacked out. She understood that, because one moment she was screaming in agony as every cell in her body rearranged itself into something new
and unsettling. Her eyes flew open when she heard the tiny clink of the pod opening up. She was sweaty, her body aching, and her mind reeling. She felt . . . violated. She had not consented to this damn procedure, and by God, Ultron would rue the day he fucked with her! She knew that she had to look like hell as she stepped from the pod, still in her party dress from the night before.

Wanda and Pietro were looking on in sympathy, while Ultron had a stupid grin on his face. “My dove! How do you feel?”

Anger surged, and Darcy didn’t even think. Her right fist whipped out, and connected solidly to Ultron’s stomach. He flew back several feet, completely surprised. “I. Told. You. No.”

Ultron had a polexed look on his face. “But, my dove –“

“I told you no!” she screamed, tears coming to her eyes. “I was perfect just the way I was!”

Pietro nodded. “Nice punch.”

Darcy glanced over at him. “Thanks.”

“My dove, I do apologize, but this was for the best! How could you hope to defeat the Captains without any enhancements?” Ultron looked sincere.

Darcy let out a deep, gusty breath. The thought that popped into her mind was that this just made her master plan easier. However, she wasn’t letting his ass off easy. “I wasn’t, you idiot! I was going to have you do the heavy lifting!”

“Oh,” Ultron said shortly. “I, uh, didn’t think of that.”

Deciding to continue with the show, Darcy threw up her hands. “It’s called communication! You need to learn how to do it!”

Stomping off, she went back into Dr. Cho’s office. Thank goodness the door was an automatic one or else she would have slammed it in her anger. She did grab onto Dr. Cho’s pencil cup, and without really thinking, crushed it in her grip. Startled, she dropped it, watching the stainless steel cup fall to the carpet with a muffled thud. She walked over to the mirrored wall, and examined herself critically.

She didn’t really look much different. Her breasts were large and round, and her waist a pleasing hourglass shape. Her thighs were thick and sturdy as were her calves and arms. She touched her stomach, and only felt a smooth expanse. However, when she looked and felt closer, she realized that she had firm muscles beneath her usually generous layer of fat. Her arms were not just toned, they were thicker, as were the muscles of her calves. Her thighs, hips, and abdomen were still sheathed in a respectable layer of fat, but the serum didn’t turn you into a muscle-bound behemoth – just into the ideal you. Genetics would predispose people to certain expressions of the serum. Steve had grown taller because without his rampant health conditions, that would have been his natural height. Bucky grew bulkier because he’d only been missing a healthy diet and maybe some extra weight training. She was meant to be svelte.

However, that discovery gave way back to the feelings of rage. Ultron had done this to her without her consent. Without even saying a word to her! It didn’t matter that she had hated him from the get go, what mattered is that the crazy motherfucker had done it! She was now a super soldier too.

That thought stopped her. She was a super soldier now. Like her Soulmates. A giggle burst forth, unstoppable, as she imagined how she would break the news to the Captains. Oh, by the way
boys, Ultron gave me a version of Erskine’s serum! I’m just like you now!

The giggles quickly turned to tears, but it wasn’t long before soft arms wrapped around her. Another set came in from the other side. “It’s okay,” an accented male voice said.

“We’re here,” a female voice chimed in.

Darcy looked up through watery eyes to see Wanda and Pietro on either side of her, their faces concerned. “Thanks,” she murmured. “I just . . . I didn’t want to do this. I don’t want to be here. I just want to go home and be with my –” She stopped, collapsing into tears.

“Your Soulmates,” Wanda finished. Her face was soft and set in sympathetic lines. “I saw them.”

Pietro looked between the two women. “Ultron took you from your Soulmates?”

“Shh!” Darcy cautioned, looking to where Ultron was hooking himself up to the other cradle. “Don’t let him hear you!”

“Ultron does not know about them,” Wanda added. “They are the Captains.”

Pietro’s eyes went wide. “Your Soulmates are Captain America and the Winter Soldier?”

Darcy nodded. “Steve and Bucky,” she said shakily. She began to knuckle away the tears from her eyes. “I just met them the night Ultron kidnapped me.”

Pietro and Wanda shared a speaking look. “We can’t do this anymore, sister,” he said softly. “Not for you, not for her.”

Wanda nodded. “Then let’s go.” She looked down at Darcy. “Pietro can carry both of us away from here.”

Darcy shook her head. “We need to stop Ultron.” She nodded to where the robotic megalomaniac was sitting. “He uploads himself into that vibranium body, we’re screwed. That was part of my plan. He told me his entire strategy. He’s also going to use Sokovia as a meteor.”


However, Darcy felt a grin stretch the corners of her mouth. “Don’t worry about that, though, I already took care of it.”

“How?”

Darcy stood, and went over to the desk. She pulled out the bottom drawer. From there she held out five or six small circuit boards. “I replaced them with weaker ones from some of Strucker’s stores. They should short out parts of the propulsion system Ultron’s built when he powers it up.”

“And now, we need to take care of the body,” Wanda murmured. “I can do that.”

Many hours earlier, on another continent
Laura Barton’s introduction to the Avengers left her with a small smile on her face. The man who had followed Clint and Nat inside had taken one look at her and said, “She’s an agent.”

She shook her head and hugged her husband tightly. “I’m glad to see you.”

“Daddy! Mama Nat!” the kids shrieked as they thundered down the stairs.

“And those are . . . smaller agents,” the same man murmured in confusion.

“Mama Nat?” the second biggest blond man asked. He was dressed in a dark colored uniform, blue, with red and white stripes running up his abs. The chest plate was mostly blue, but had red and white piping around a bright white star. Brown straps held up a shield on his back. The man standing beside him was a brunet, and had on a dark blue leather vest that had large buttons up one side. The front flap folded away from his left shoulder to help form his collar, and his right arm was encased in blue leather as well. His left arm was left free, but it was because it was completely made of metal. His left arm had a shield on the shoulder, blue and white rings around a red star.

“Guys, this is my wife Laura,” Clint finally said putting his arm around her waist. “She’s me and Nat’s third.”

The looks of utter surprise ranged from complete incredulity on the man who had called her an agent to happiness on the face of the biggest blond man. Nat picked up little Chrissy and gave Laura a peck on the cheek. “Hey.”

“I’m glad you’re safe,” she murmured. She had missed both of her Soulmates.

“Hey,” she said to the group, “are you guys hungry?”

Later, after going through three bags of flour, she would regret asking. Thor – the biggest blond who had turned out to be the sweetest – packed away at least a dozen on his own. Steve and Bucky – Captain America and the Winter Soldier, oh God her brother was going to be so jealous – had between them packed away an entire batch of her red velvet pancakes. Thank God the rest of them ate a reasonable amount of food, and didn’t mind that she’d had to switch from buttermilk to milk with vinegar to acidify it. It was just a stroke of luck that all three dairy cows were giving milk and the chickens were laying a large surplus of eggs. Mrs. Kirkland down the road would have to do without her gallon of milk, but the kindly old lady never minded if the milk couldn’t be delivered on time.

Clint and Nat stayed behind to help her in the kitchen after they’d sent Tony and the Captains out to chop firewood. “I take it the mission went sideways, hunh?” she asked gently.

“You could say that,” Clint answered. Nat was quiet. There was a haunted look about her eyes that reminded Laura of the first time they’d met.

Laura sighed, and looked up just in time to see Tony make a quip that obviously didn’t sit well with Steve. She opened the window, curious to hear the argument. Nat and Clint didn’t say a word, only shared a look over her head.

“So you’re just going to give up on her?” Bucky asked, incredulous.

“What else can I do?” Tony ask. “She hates me.”

Steve’s thunderous look didn’t bode well. “How do you know?”

“She’s told me!” Tony said throwing up his hands. Nat kissed Laura on the forehead as she
slipped out of the kitchen while shaking her head.

“Me and Nat are going to take showers, okay?” Clint said, and she nodded.

“You can’t just give up!” Bucky added from outside. “You love her.”

Tony snorted. “Like love solves anything.”

This apparently displeased Steve. He took the log he’d just picked up and using his bare hands, ripped it in half. The two halves went flying, causing Bucky and Tony to blink. “Holy shit,” Tony muttered.

“Holy shit,” Laura echoed. She fanned herself, because now there was an uncomfortable liquid feeling between her legs.

“That was unspeakably sexy, and I hate you,” Tony muttered. Steve just looked at him like he was an idiot.

A knock sounded from the back door. Laura didn’t startle, she just smiled. There was only one person she knew who knocked on the back door. She dried her hands and walked to open it. “Hello Nick.”

Nick Fury stood on her back porch. At one time or another, Clint and Nat had brought home most of the trustworthy and loyal agents of SHIELD, including the director himself. He nodded to her. “I need to speak to Tony alone.”

Laura nodded, thinking. “I’ll ask him to fix our tractor. You can wait in the darkest corner.”

Fury grinned as he turned to lope off to the barn. She stepped out, and approached the three men who were still bickering. Tony looked up and nodded to her. She gave him her most brilliant smile. “You know, the Captains have a point. Love is more forgiving than you think.”

The billionaire’s face froze. “Not you too.”

She shook her head. “I was a cop long ago, and Clint shot me.”

All three men froze this time. Tony had a slightly triumphant look on his face – probably because he realized that he had been half right about who she was. “He had fallen in with some rough guys, before SHIELD picked him up out of the gutter, and I was sent out to check up on this group of young toughs. He shot me right through the side. We have Words, and his first to me were ‘God, I didn’t mean to do that.’ My first to him were ‘Yes you did asshole, now help me.’ I managed to keep him out of jail, but that first year was hard. He didn’t have a nice life up ‘til then, and I was a hard ass myself. But eventually we decided we’d rather be with each other than without each other. Then Nat came along to complete our triad, and well, you know . . . Give your Mate time. She might just surprise you.”

Tony blinked at her, and nodded with a soft smile. “You think?”

Steve and Bucky were giving her small smiles too. “Thanks, Mrs. Barton.”

She rolled her eyes. “Laura, please. And Tony, you can pay me back for the wonderful advice by checking out our old tractor. It won’t run, and I’ve done all I can for it.”

Laura sent one last grin to the Captains as Tony turned towards the barn and his unwitting date with Fury. She, however, was still ferociously turned on by the sight of Captain America
ripping a log in half with his bare hands. She turned back to the house, and went up to the master bedroom. The kids were watching cartoons in the living room with Jane and Bruce, and she nodded to them as she went upstairs. She heard the shower going, and stripped off her clothes. She knew Nat and Clint were in there because of the lack of sound. The shower was an indulgence, big enough for at least four people, and currently occupied by a couple who were more involved with each other than with washing. She opened the door, which caused them to look up at her quizzically. “I am five months pregnant,” she announced, “and just watched Steve rip a log in half. So sue me.”

Nat’s lips curled up into a wicked smile. “Oh, so they got to you too. Good.” The two women fixed their attention on Clint.

One day, Clint thought, he would have to thank the Captains for their reliable ability to turn on his women.

That night the Avengers sans Thor were sitting around Clint’s kitchen table. Bruce had helped Laura cook enough food for everyone. Clint and Jane had done the dishes, with Fury and Bucky drying. It had been curiously domestic and comfortable. Steve and Tony sat at the table, nursing coffee. “So, where do we go from here?” Tony asked.

“Same place we’ve been going,” Steve said, “Find Ultron. Stop him.”

“And I think I can help with that,” Fury piped up. “Your boy Ultron tried to gain access to nuclear codes around the world. Heard the word from some of my old contacts, but they are stumped at who exactly is stopping the cyber attacks. Looks like you’ve got some help from the inside.”

“So we might have an unknown ally,” Bucky said.

“Possible. But what are we going to do about Ultron?” Natasha pressed. “There’s a million things he could do without nukes to cause massive damage.”

“Ultron’s purpose was to protect the world,” Tony muttered.


“More of an Asimov man myself,” Tony shot back.

“Either way,” Fury cut in before the two men got into an argument, “we need to figure out what Ultron is up to.”

“He mentioned during the fight, something about evolution, being the next step,” Bucky put in. “What did he say Steve? I didn’t catch all of it.”

“He plans to come out of his chrysalis. To become better than before,” Steve replied.

“You know, it gets me how obsessed he is with the human form,” Jane said suddenly, where before she’d been mostly silent. She wasn’t technically an Avenger, so had felt the need to keep her opinions to herself. However, this thought was bothering her fiercely. “I mean, why steal Darcy? Why keep a humanoid shape?”

“He seemed to think that he was rescuing Darcy,” Natasha said aloud. “Maybe a weird Beauty and the Beast complex?”
Bruce had frozen, his face a mask of fear. “Or he needs her for something. Ultron makes all these grandiose speeches, but he’s driven by some basic rules of logic. He may admire Darcy, but she serves another purpose too. He’s talking about evolution. For a species to evolve, *they must pass on their genes.*”

The entire group went completely silent. Steve and Bucky gaped, their eyes narrowed and shining with violence. Tony was pale, his coffee cup hitting the table with a loud thud. Natasha had cocked a brow, while Clint was turning his head to the side, slowly. Jane had paled as well, but she was nodding. Fury had no expression on his face. “Crazy motherfucker wants to use her as a broodmare,” he said finally into the pregnant silence.

“Slight problem there,” Clint piped up, “He’s a robot.”

Bruce pointed to Clint’s side that had been repaired using Dr. Cho’s amazing Cradle technology. “Have we heard from Dr. Cho lately?”

Wanda’s plan had worked, to an extent. Dr. Cho had come to, interrupted the neural upload, but then all hell had broken loose. Pietro had wasted no time in catching Wanda and Darcy up and escaping.

“He’s not going to let me go easily,” Darcy said, after Pietro had stopped next to a small street market.

“No,” Wanda said softly. “I looked into his mind through that – that golem he is building. He needs you for his ultimate plan to come to fruition. He . . . His mind is . . .”

Darcy could tell by the look on her face that it was bad. “Lemme guess, psychopathic?”

“In a word, yes,” Wanda answered. “He thinks he loves you, but the truth is, your real value is as a breeder. In his mind you are supposed to be the Eve to his Adam.”

The dark-headed woman pursed her lips. “You know, can’t say I’m surprised.” Movement out of the corner of her eye caused her to look up. “That’s a quinjet!”

Chapter End Notes

*Apologies for the long wait! Being pregnant on top of work has meant that writing time is at a premium. :) Hope you guys enjoy!*
The King and the Mage

Chapter Summary

Tony and Wanda finally have a talk.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The third trap was a devious one. The Sorcerer said, “Fine! I will let you have her back, but only one of you may have her. The other must leave this place and wander the Earth forever, for the spell I will cast on her will curse you so that only two of you may be together at any time!”

But the Sorcerer did not notice the Princess take up a sword.

Steve cuddled Darcy close, his nose buried in her hair. “I’m sorry,” she breathed.

“Nothing to be sorry about, sweetheart,” he replied, his own voice soft and raspy. He wasn’t about to blame her for any of this, and honestly, he was also beyond blaming any other human being. Tony had meant well even if he had majorly fucked up, and the twins sitting across the Quinjet from him and Darcy were just kids. Tony’s Soulmate couldn’t be more than sixteen.

“I’m sorry about Bucky,” she whispered.

“Hey, don’t.” He hugged her just a bit tighter remembering how Ultron had bellowed at them. “We’ll get him back.”

“We know where he is hiding,” Pietro Maximoff piped up. The young man nodded to his sister. “We must right our wrong.”

Wanda looked pale, and Steve wondered if she was ready to face the people she’d hurt in their last battle. He wondered if she were ready to face Tony. “We have to,” she agreed softly.

Darcy pulled away, wet tracks bisecting her cheeks. Her lips turned up in a shaky smile. “It’s okay, Wanda, I’ve got your back. The Avengers will have to get through me first.”

Steve felt his lips curl a little at the corners. “Is that so?” he asked indulgently. Darcy was by no means a small woman, but she was no match for any of the other Avengers.

A raised brow met his murmured question. Instead of answering, she cocked her arm back.

He thought for a moment that she was going to punch him, but at the last second, she slammed her fist into the bulkhead. Steve heard the crunch of metal moving out of shape, and when he turned his head found a fist-sized divot in the wall. He turned wide eyes back on Darcy.

“So,” she began, “I might have tried to convince Ultron to let me take out you and Bucky and he decided that he needed to make me better to do it so he might have reconstructed Erksine’s formula from some of Tony’s notes and then the Gamma Ray Cradle from Bruce’s notes and well . . .” She stopped, shrugging her shoulders.
“That metal bastard,” Steve growled. He noticed Wanda’s pursed lips and Pietro’s nod of agreement.

Wanda glanced around the living area, feeling even more out of place than she had on the Quinjet. Darcy and Steve had disappeared almost immediately upon landing, and that had left Pietro and Wanda with the woman called the Black Widow. The woman had given them hard looks before saying her piece. “I’m not going to lie, I would love to hurt both of you for the hell you dragged me back into, but I know your story and I know what I saw back in Seoul. You’re a couple of dumb kids that fell in with the wrong crowd. It happens. But mark my words, if you so much as breathe aggressively in the direction of any of my friends I will end you.”

Pietro had opened his mouth to reply, but wisely thought better of it. Wanda had just nodded, feeling queasy over what she had done. What she had done to all of the Avengers. “I’m sorry.”

The Widow had looked over to her, and nodded. “That’s a good first step.”

Now, Pietro was off somewhere taking a shower, and she was left to her own devices. She walked around the trashed area, grimacing at all the broken glass. She was in the den of her former enemies, her brother was gone, and her only ally was off with her Soulmate.

“So you’re Tony’s Soulmate, hunh?”

The masculine voice had her whirling around. It was the nondescript Avenger, the one with the bow and arrows. “Yes,” she answered after a moment.

The man nodded. “Name’s Clint,” he said, holding out his hand to her. Gingerly, she took it. “God, how old are you?”

She bristled. “I’m seventeen.”

He whistled. “Fate has Tony robbing the cradle. Nice.”

Wanda whirled away, unwilling to be the butt of this man’s joke. He’d already electrocuted her once, she didn’t need this on top of it. “Hey! Wait!” he cried, grabbing her hand. “I just want to say something.”

“If it’s a warning not to harm anyone,” she hissed while rounding on him, “I have already gotten the point from the Black Widow. All I want is to stop Ultron and go back to Sokovia where I belong.”

Clint blinked a couple of times, before his mouth curved up. “Nat’s a bit over protective. No, what I was going to say was that you should go see Tony.”

That was not what Wanda was expecting. At all. “What?”

He jerked his head back towards another room. “Go talk to Tony. You guys have some things to work out.”

“So some things to work out?” she snapped. “I invaded his mind, made him live his worst fear, and indirectly caused him to create Ultron. How exactly are we supposed to work things out?” Her heart shattered as she truly took in the enormity of her mistakes. Maybe a part of her had thought before that she could be happy, but now more than ever she realized how much she had destroyed her future.
Clint didn’t look phased. “One of my ‘Mates shot me.”

Wanda reared back and her face twisted. “What?”

“Nat – one of my Soulmates – shot me.” He smiled.

Something he said earlier registered again. “Wait, Nat? The . . . The Black Widow is your Soulmate?!”

“Yeah,” he said with a grin. He pulled up his shirt, showing a scar high on his abdomen. “I was sent out to take her down. She got me first. I still remember the face she made when I said ‘Fuck me sideways with a spoon.’ She’s so beautiful, you know? And she said ‘I might just.’ I was in the hospital for over a month, and I lost a piece of my left lung. But you know, if I can forgive the fact that my ‘Mate tried to murder me, I think Tony can too.”


Clint’s smile was paternal and warm. “Yeah. Tony’s been pretty eaten up by it. I think . . . I kinda think he blames himself a bit. He keeps saying that he never came and got you because he knew you’d hate him. I think he was convinced even before all of this that you hated him. He may not even think that you are to blame for any of this. Tony . . . a lot of people like to think that Tony’s just this whole playboy-billionaire-philanthropist schtick like he’s goddamn Bruce Wayne or something. They don’t look past it to realize that he’s got more issues than National Geographic. Think about it. He’s dealing with the fact that his company supplied terrorists and rebels with weapons right under his nose.” He took a step closer to her and handed her the water bottle that had been dangling from his other hand.

“His company sold the weapons that killed your parents,” Clint continued, softer, more gently. “You invaded his mind and are responsible for Ultron, but Tony’s blind eye killed your parents and made you.”

Those warm words made Wanda pause. Made her consider and think. “Okay,” she said quietly. “Where can I find Tony?”

It was Jarvis.

Well, not Jarvis but JARVIS, but . . . they were more or less the same in Tony’s eyes. Jarvis had been with him in some form or another for his entire life. First, the human Jarvis had been the only male influence in his life to never openly betray him. Then the AI JARVIS had served him faithfully in adulthood, his confidant in even things he could never tell Rhodey. Rhodey was his best friend, but there were some things he had trouble admitting to even him. JARVIS had been there.

And now he was nearly dead. JARVIS had been able to transmit a log of his activities since Ultron’s first boot, but he could barely speak. The algorithms for his speech were hopelessly garbled. If Tony had two weeks, maybe he could straighten it all out, but he would have to rely on JOCASTA or FRIDAY for his suit in the foreseeable future. Probably for at least a year since the speech code was the least of JARVIS’s corruptions. Huge chunks of memory were gone, including a lot of key programs to help JARVIS run the tower. If not for the stoicism taught to him at his father’s knee, Tony would have been in tears.

A door opened behind him, but he didn’t turn, unwilling to let anyone see the wetness in his eyes. A small sound, a feminine hiccup, made him whirl in confusion.
Wanda Maximoff stood in the doorway, a hand covering her mouth. Her eyes were wide, and at first he thought she was surprised to see him, until another hiccup came out of her throat. Tony blinked. “Did you seriously just come in here and start hiccupping?”

She nodded, her dark eyes soft and sweet. “I didn’t—” Another hiccup cut her off. She looked pained. “I should go—”

“No!” Tony found himself crying out, “No, stay.”

The younger woman covered her mouth when another hiccup rocked her chest. She was pale, small, so small. A swell of feeling settled like a rock in Tony’s chest. “Stay.”

She nodded, and then stepped forward. She looked past Tony, her eyes going to the floating orange orb of JARVIS’s code. “Is . . . What is that?”

He looked back at it, trying to see it through the eyes of a girl from a war-torn nation. A nation whose tech was generally five to ten years behind anywhere else because of lack of funds and frequent outbreaks of violence. “That’s JARVIS.”

“Your robot butler?”

He grinned, remembering how he had explained it to a much younger girl. “Yeah.”

“What happened?” she breathed, moving forward without thinking. She brushed by him, reaching the edge of the holofloor. “You loved him so much.”

Something about that phrase, something about this girl saying it, struck Tony in the heart. The emotion that had settled like a rock began to choke him from the inside out. He had loved Jarvis the human, loved JARVIS the AI, and loved Wanda Maximoff the Scarlet Witch. He had watched her grow from a scared child to a ferocious young woman, all the while so different from the women of the tower. She was gentle and mild beneath her ferocity, at odds with Natasha’s sharp edges or Maria’s cool calculation. She reminded him a little of Pepper, but she lacked Pepper’s bone-deep sense of self. Maybe in a few years she would be the same self-contained, ultimately composed woman, but she still was so young. “I did,” he finally gasped.

She hiccupped again.

The sound, the emotions, they all swirled around inside until Tony found himself laughing. It was not joyous laughter, not malicious either, but instead the outpouring of a world-weary soul that had no other outlet. The hysterical cries of someone who has too often had love and happiness snatched just outside their grasp. Tony had managed to temper it all with women and drink, but there were never enough women to make up for his lack of Soulmate beside him, no drink that could erase the last horrible things he’d said to his father. He laughed until tears rose in his eyes, laughed until he bent double. Laughed until cool hands cupped his cheeks. “Tony,” she whispered, “why are you laughing?”

“Look in my head,” he chuckled snidely. “Here we are, two poor schmucks caught up in a bit of melodrama. In the movies this would be the part where we dramatically either come to terms with each other or part forever . . . and you’ve got the hiccups.”

A grin curved her lips. “When you put it that way . . . It is kind of hilarious,” she replied, chuckles giving way to giggles. Then Tony’s laughter turned sweeter, his mirth finally able to claw it’s way up from beneath his despair. Wanda’s laugh was sweet, and when she managed to hiccup and snort in quick succession, his gout of laughter managed to make Jane and Bruce – who’d been
quietly on their way to Hulking out in the Hulk-proof room next door – sit up and take notice.

When his hysteria finally began to fade, Tony found himself holding Wanda. She’d leaned against him in her mirth, but was now quietly petting his jaw. “So,” he said softly, “which is it going to be? Are we working this out or walking away?”

Wanda pulled his head down, and kissed him on the cheek. “I’m sorry I used your fear against you.”

“I’m sorry my weapons killed your parents,” he replied.

She nodded, her forehead against his cheek. “I forgive you. And I love you.”

“And I forgive you, and I love you.” He said, but put a finger against the lips coming for his. “But we’re waiting a couple of years before we do anything.”

Wanda reared back, an angry hiccup behind pursed lips making her look like an adorably confused hen. “What do you mean we have to wait?”

“You’re seventeen, and I’m thirty-eight,” he said. “It’s robbing the cradle.”

“But what if the cradle wants to be robbed?” she snapped.

“Oh.”

The two turned to find Jane blinking owlishly from the doorway into the Hulk-proof room. Bruce was standing back a bit, the edges of his eyes a little greener than the rest of him. They were trained on Wanda. She disengaged from Tony’s embrace, but wisely didn’t go within a few feet of either Hulk. “I’m sorry,” she said quietly, “for all that I’ve done.”

Bruce nodded, the green never leaving the crow’s feet around his eyes. He pointed at her, his subtle rage just beneath the surface. “I’m going to let this go because Tony is my friend, and I want him to be happy, but make no mistake, you are not forgiven. Its going to take a hell of a lot more before that happens.”

“I understand,” Wanda said softly. “I will stay away from you.”

Jane looked between her and Bruce. She gave Wanda a small smile. “Have you had a shower?”

The younger woman blinked. “No.” She hiccupped again.

“Here,” Jane said, reaching for her hand. “Let’s go get you one. No offense, but you are a little ripe.”

Wanda wrinkled her nose. “You are right about that.” She looked back at Tony and smiled.

“Jane,” Bruce said softly.

Tony recognized the tone. “Take her up to my floor.” He watched her leave with a curious lightness in his heart.

“No Tony! Look what happened last time!” Steve bellowed. “And Thor, I don’t care what you say, we’re not doing it!”
Darcy sighed, and glanced around. It was approximately two in the morning, and the Avengers had reconvened in Tony’s lab just in time for Tony to share his latest cockamamie scheme. Apparently, the plan was to load the shattered remnants of JARVIS into Ultron’s weird homunculus, and then use him to help fight Ultron. Thor had shown back up, agreed to the arrangement, and for some reason thought Loki’s scepter was a good accessory. That, of course, had led to a monumental argument, one that Darcy was pretty much done with. The newest super soldier took a deep breath, and used her best bark. “Everyone shut it!”

Since none of them – even Jane – had ever heard her speak at anything louder than a normal conversational tone, her bellow shocked them into compliance. “Look, I know we’re all bitchy about Tony and AI Robots running amok, but he’s got a good idea. We have an ally who is in need of a body, and worse come to worse, have Wanda check Jarvitron’s mind before the upload finishes. If he’s a homicidal maniac, she’ll know.”

The other Avengers blinked amongst themselves, before Natasha and Jane shared a grin. “Darcy’s right,” Wanda piped up. “We are going to need any help we can get.”

The other young woman smiled. “Yeah, Ultron’s built himself a nice little army beneath Sokovia. All of them are at the very least titanium with steel plate.” She glanced up at her Soulmate. “I know exactly where he’d hold Bucky.”

Steve gave her a hard look. “You’re not coming with us.”

Darcy cocked a brow. “You’re not coming with us.”

Darcy cocked a brow. “Really?” Her voice was soft and mild, completely belying the righteous anger welling up within her.

Jane winced in the background.

Before Steve could blink, Darcy’s fist was slamming into the side of his head. The ringing in his ears didn’t have time to clear before she punched him hard enough to the solar plexus to make him double over. She turned, and her dainty left foot smashed into the side of his knee cap. He fell, finally rolling away from her. The whole thing had taken only about five seconds, but had left the entire Avengers corps gaping at the two of them. Except, of course, for Natasha who was grinning and giving Darcy a slow clap.

When he finally opened his eyes, Steve was staring up at one pissed off brunette. “Just because I don’t know any fancy martial arts doesn’t mean I don’t know enough to be damned dangerous. You best be happy that I didn’t poke your pretty eyes out just to show you I can. I know where Bucky is. I’m going.”

Steve sat up slowly, his body already well on its way to being healed of the minor bruises and tearing she’d inflicted. He raised one knee, and rested his arm on it. He watched her stride out of the lab, her backbone ramrod straight.

Jane stepped up and held out her hand. “I guess maybe I should have mentioned that Darcy was taking some self-defense classes before we got here?”

“That might have been helpful to know, yes,” Steve said hoarsely. He glanced at her hand, “Thanks, but give me a minute.”

“Your years catching up to you?” Tony snarked.

“Something like that,” he muttered, unwilling to admit that it was not stiff knees, but a stiff something else keeping him on the floor.
Another hour passed, a new ally was born, and Steve and Tony were left in the lab.

“Hey, does the fabrication machine still work without JARVIS?” Steve asked out of the blue.

Tony looked away from where Vision was speaking softly to Jane. She was helping Bruce run some preliminary tests on the new being. “Yeah, why?”

Steve sighed. “Body armor.”


Both men shared a long look. “You design the looks, I design the function?” Tony asked.

“Deal.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your patience. I know most authors are not big fans of the "update soon please!" type of comments, but really, yours have helped me kick myself out of my rut.

This fic isn't dead - none of my fics are at this point - its just that I have been dealing with a lot lately. Usually I do a lot of writing during the summer and winter holidays, but this past summer didn't leave me a lot of time or inclination to write. The first half was spent feeling too sick because of the end of my pregnancy, and the latter half was spent dealing with a newborn. (I was nine minutes away from having a July 4th baby, y'all. So close.)

So here it is! Not the penultimate chapter, but close! Thank you all for continuing to read my works! I hope you enjoyed it!

End Notes

And feel free to come say hi to me on Tumblr! LadyKnightSkye

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!