someone's out there (sending out flares)

by ohhitherekate

Summary

Woken up out of cryostasis in the year 2010, Adelyn “AJ” Frost adjusts to her new life as an agent with S.H.I.E.L.D. But the biggest adjustment she will have to face will be the superhuman abilities she gained in 1945, when AJ had gone through the process of Terrigenesis while being held captive in Austria by Werner Reinhardt. HYDRA is dead, and so is almost every single person from her past. But there is one death she carries around with her more than any other. The man she loves; Bucky Barnes. How can she move on with her life and survive this new world when there are times that deep down in her heart she can still feel his presence? There’s no possible explanation as to why she still feels that Bucky is alive – but AJ just can’t seem to let him go.

Notes

OC MASTERLIST

See the end of the work for more notes
Sixty-four.

That’s how many years it had been.

Sixty-four years, eleven months, and eighteen days since Adelyn Juliet Frost had been placed into cryostasis by Howard Stark, Peggy Carter, and Colonel Chester Phillips. And according to the research AJ had been given, Peggy was the only one left alive out of the three.

So much had changed in those sixty-four years.

The technology advancement had sky rocketed. (Mostly thanks to Howard.)

Howard.

He was gone.

He had died in 1991.

December 17, 1991.

But as sad as she was over Howard's death, AJ couldn’t help but be so incredibly proud of all that her friend had accomplished in his life. Inventor, engineer, movie director, businessman. And founder of Stark Industries.

She smiled while thinking back to a conversation she had had with Howard one late night over a shared bottle of whisky.

"What do you think you’ll do after the war is over, Howard?" AJ had asked him.

He had pursed his lips while leaning back in his chair as he propped his legs up on the lab table, only to have them pushed off by AJ. Howard had huffed and AJ had shrugged her shoulders innocently. He had chuckled and shook his head before finally answering her question. “I don’t know, kid. Maybe I’ll make it into the pictures. Move to California and make a real name for myself.”

She had laughed at his answer, “As if you haven’t already?” AJ teased.

Howard had chuckled, “I suppose you have a point there.” He’d then sat up while he poured himself some more whiskey. “And what about you, AJ? What will Adelyn Frost do after the war is over?”

AJ had thought long and hard on what her life might be like after the war was over. She’d taken a long sip of whiskey while contemplating, enjoying the warm feeling it caused in her belly. And then she’d had a thought that caused her to laugh. “Probably try and come up with a polio vaccine since that’s what I told Steve and Frank I’m doing now.”

Howard had laughed at that and filled AJ’s cup. “Yeah, you really screwed the pooch with that one.”
He had then asked her if she would settle down with Frank and make an honest man out of her boyfriend but she hadn’t answered that question because deep down AJ had known all along that Frank Jackson wasn’t the guy she was supposed to live the rest of her life with.

Frank had died.

And just as AJ had felt hope that Bucky would be the man she’d spend the rest of her life with – he had died too.

AJ closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose, trying to push down her emotions.

AJ knew she could adapt well enough to the changes in take technology, but the one thing she that would take some getting used to was the new styling of clothing people wore in the 21st century. She had worn pants several times in her life but none like the ones given to her by the woman Director Fury had appointed as her handler.

Natasha Romanoff was unlike any woman AJ had ever met. She was beautiful, yet deadly. Black Widow. That was what one of the men had called her (the man whose shoes she had puked on the day before.) The name fit the red head perfectly. The way Natasha held herself together like a tigress on the hunt was intimidating yet inspiring. And from the short moments she had spent with her, AJ had truly enjoyed the woman’s dry wit.

She felt comfortable with Romanoff, and in the last day in a half since waking up...AJ had not felt comfortable with many of the people she had met.

She felt comfortable with the other man who had been there when she had been woken; Clint Barton. He was kind. Very sarcastic. In fact, he reminded her a bit of Steve when it came to humor.

Steve.

AJ moved her hand over the mouse pad of the laptop that Natasha had given her and clicked on the file containing all of the information S.H.I.E.L.D had on Steve Rogers (Still widely known to everyone around the world as Captain America even after all of this time.)

He was gone but never forgotten it seemed.

Even now, sixty-four years later, Captain America was a legend.

But she preferred her friend; Steve Rogers.

AJ ached to be back in Brooklyn with Steve. Back before he had become Captain America, when it had been just the two of them sitting in her apartment, drinking tea and poking fun at the other.

God, she missed her friend so badly.

All of those months she had spent not speaking to him after they had lost Bucky – if there were any way to take it back she would.

She lightly brushed a finger against the chain around her neck.

Howard, Peggy, and Phillips had gathered all AJ's belongings, so when she finally woke up, she’d have things that were familiar and dear to her. It was clear that after they placed her in the chamber that they didn’t think she'd be waking from cryostasis any time soon. Did they think it would take weeks? Months? Howard was a brilliant man but he couldn't create a miracle to save her back in the 40's. Years had passed on and turned into decades and Adelyn Frost had remained in the
chamber until a time when technology had advanced enough to heal her.

The belongings they had collected were pictures from her apartment in Brooklyn and letters that she'd received from her family while she was away in Europe.

Including a letter from Bucky.

It was the only letter he had sent her while in Europe because when she had never written back, Bucky had thought she just did not want to correspond with him. But AJ had been in Europe as well training to become an SSR Agent.

AJ hadn’t found the courage to open the letter from Bucky yet, but she always kept it on her person, tucked in the back pocket of the very tight pants Natasha had given her to wear.

They had collected so many things she had once treasured, things that reminded her of how life used to be.

But Peggy had found one thing that AJ had thought she had lost forever when Dr. Reinhardt had been experimenting on her.

Bucky’s dog tags.

Reinhardt had kept them for some odd reason, but when the SSR had torn apart the fortress AJ was being kept in, they had found Bucky’s dog tags locked away in the mad man's office.

AJ kept Bucky's dog tags safe and secure around her neck, hanging just above her heart.

“Knock, knock.” AJ looked over her shoulder and saw the man whose shoes she had ruined the other day standing in the doorway. “Phil Coulson.” He introduced himself again. He shifted on his feet awkwardly until AJ swiveled in her chair so she was facing his direction. “I brought you this.” He walked over to where AJ was still sitting and set a drink down in front of her. “It’s the smoothie.” Coulson told her. "Cho wants you to continue on drinking these for at least a week before venturing out into New York for actual food.”

AJ smiled politely and moved forward to pick up the drink. She sniffed at it and made a face but drank a large gulp of it. Hell, she was starving! She'd eat just about anything someone put it in front of her right now. AJ supposed that’s what happens to a person when they’re asleep for sixty-four years.

Phil pulled up a chair and sat across from AJ, causing her to raise a brow at his actions. He already seemed so familiar with her and was kind enough that she would not tell him to leave...but, after being frozen for 64 years - AJ would have preferred to be alone in this moment.

“You worked on the super solider serum with Dr. Erskine?” Coulson asked her once he was situated in his chair.

She nodded her head while licking at droplets of smoothie that had dribbled onto her chin. AJ wiped her thumb under her mouth as she set the drink down on the table and then turned her attention back to Couslon. “I did.”

“But that’s not public knowledge.” Phil said with a smile.

No, it was not. For a very good reason. “Howard,” She began to say only to have Coulson interrupt her.
“-Howard Stark.”

AJ raised her brows with a little smile in amusement at the man finishing her words for her. Not in clarification, but excitement.

“Yes.” AJ replied with a slight chuckle. She then frowned as she thought recalled why her name had never been publicly acknowledged for Project Rebirth. “Howard and Colonel Phillips wanted to keep me safe.” AJ admitted to the man. "After Hydra sent an assassin to kill Dr. Erskine and steal a vial of the serum..." Her voice drifted as her mind replayed, the events of that day. AJ had to shake her head to rid herself of the memories, "-my safety became more important than recognition for mine and Erskine’s accomplishment. I suppose I valued my life more than having my pride.”

Coulson nodded his head and AJ watched as his eyes drifted down to her drink. She repressed the need to roll her eyes and took another big gulp of her drink to appease Coulson. “No one has ever been able to replicate it.” He told her after she swallowed the thick liquid. “Many have tried. But… those did not work out too well.” He trailed off.

It didn’t surprise her that other people had tried to replicate the serum – but it did worry her. Especially from the look Phil had given her. “People have tried?”

Phil nodded. “And as I said…they did not work out too well.”

AJ opened her mouth to ask him more but Natasha came into the room. “Frost.” The red head called, causing AJ to look away from Coulson. "Are you ready?” Natasha asked.

No.

But that didn’t matter.

AJ sat up and looked down at Phil who was holding out her smoothie for her to finish. “Cho’s orders.” He said with a smile after AJ had playfully narrowed her eyes at him.

“Yeah, and you don’t want to get on Cho’s bad side.” Natasha smirked from the doorway causing AJ to look away from Coulson. "Are you ready?” Natasha asked.

No.

But that didn’t matter.

AJ took in a deep breath before she looked back over to Natasha who was giving her a warm, encouraging smile.

She wasn’t ready for this. And it didn’t matter how comfortable she felt around Natasha - the only time anyone had ever tried to activate her powers was by torture, and after months of being sliced open – AJ would rather not go through that kind of pain ever again.

They walked in silence most of the way and AJ was grateful. She was too nervous to say anything. It was odd how it felt like no time had passed since she had been strapped to table and cut into so that Dr. Reinhardt could test the new abilities she had gained. That fact was why she was so damn nervous and distrusting of the people who were interested in her abilities.

AJ took in an audible shaky breath and suddenly Natasha moved to stand in front of her. AJ shook her head to let the woman know that she was fine while she breathed in heavily to calm herself down. The look Natasha was giving her surprised AJ. It was not the anger or frustration that AJ
was having a bit of a panic attack - it was concern. “You are in control here, AJ.” Natasha spoke slowly as she tried to assure AJ. "You have the power to say no to anything you are not comfortable with.”

Natasha had somehow been able to figure out what was going through AJ’s mind. Though, Natasha was probably able to figure it out easily after she saw the absolute panic and fear written all over her face.

“-How’d you know?” AJ asked as her breathing started to calm down. “You don’t have some sort of mind reading power, do you?” She chuckled nervously.

Natasha smiled and shook her head before telling her; “Not too long ago I was brought into S.H.I.E.L.D and had the same fears as you.” She admitted. “The,” The red head paused to choose her next word carefully, “organization,” Natasha settled on, “I had been a part of was ruthless. They punished us to make us strong and no matter how hard you tried - you could never fight back. Luckily for me, someone pulled me out of that place and saved my life.” She smiled fondly at the memory. "But I was scared when I was first brought in." Natasha admitted. "However, I learned very quickly that S.H.I.E.L.D is not like The Red Room and that it is nothing like Hydra." She stressed her last few words. "So if that’s what you’re afraid of…you don’t need to be.” Natasha assured AJ.

*The Red Room.*

AJ could have sworn she had read something about the red room back in the forties. If her memory was correct, the Red Room was a place, an *organization*, where they took young girls and trained them to become killers. Or maybe it was just a story she heard through passing while working with the SSR?

Either way, the Red Room sounded familiar to AJ.

AJ looked past Natasha and towards the room where she knew that Director Fury was waiting for her. The panic started to rise again, so AJ forced herself to relax by taking in another deep breath. After a moment, she gave Natasha a quick nod to let her know that she was ready. Natasha nodded back at her and motioned for AJ to follow after her. “Who saved you?” AJ asked once they were at the door.

Natasha smirked. “Oh, that’s a long story for another time.” She chuckled before adding, "With drinks.”

AJ couldn't help but give a little snort.

God, she could *really* use a drink now. *Many drinks.*

They walked into the large room, and AJ noticed that Clint was standing next to Fury. She took in all of her surroundings. The walls were white and there were no windows. AJ realized that every room she had been in since waking had been windowless as well. Apparently they wanted to ease her into the new world.

’Ease’ that had been the word Fury had used.

But she felt no ease.

Clint clapped his hands together and walked forward. “Alright, let’s see what you got, Frosty.”

*No.*
Her hands clenched so tightly that she could hear her bones cracking. AJ squared her jaw in anger while looking at Clint.

_Frosty._

No, he shouldn’t have said that.

The room grew cold and AJ could see a cloud form whenever Clint breathed in and out and that his exposed skin was breaking out in goosebumps, the hair on his arm standing up.

“Agent Frost,” Fury said slowly. “Take a deep breath.”

_I’m doing this._

_This is me._

AJ then heard the sound of teeth chattering which caused to look away from Clint and over to her side where Natasha was standing.

The red head was rubbing her arms to try and stimulate heat. The temperature had dropped drastically and in the corners of the room, AJ could see frost forming on the walls.

AJ drew in a deep breath and closed her eyes; _relax_, she told herself, _you don’t want to hurt these people_. It took a few more deep breaths before her jaw finally relaxed and she was able to unclench her fists. She hissed once she felt a stinging pain on the palms of her hands. AJ looked down and noted the blood under her fingernails before looking at her palm and finding little crescent moon shapes caused by her digging her nails into her palm. AJ flexed her hand and watched as the tiniest bit of frost covered the marks, and when she swiped her thumb over the frost, her wounds healed.

It had happened before back in Austria. AJ remembered that whenever Reinhardt cut into her, that sometimes she’d feel a cold sensation pass over her wounds, and then they’d heal. AJ had never actually seen the healing before...she only ever felt it.

The last experiment Reinhardt had done on her would have been the one that would have ended her life if Peggy and the Howling Commandos hadn’t shown up when they did. He had been able to cut in so deep that even the cold couldn’t heal her fully. She had felt herself growing weaker and her will to fight and stay alive had slowly vanished each time her body tried to heal itself with the cold. Too much had been done and she had been too tired.

She was _still_ tired.

“Was it something I said?” Clint’s voice brought her out of her trance.

AJ looked over to him and took in a deep breath. “Just,” Her eyes narrowed at the man in a glare. “-don’t call me Frosty.” Her stern tone caused Clint to raise his brows and smile a little. The man was probably amused by attempt at intimidation. It hadn’t worked, _clearly_. She closed her eyes and drew in another shaky breath to gain the courage to say what she had to say next. If she never wanted to hear someone call her by _that_ name again she’d have to tell the them why. “That’s what Bucky used to call me...so...please.”

Clint frowned while nodding his head. “I won’t.” He promised her.

She knew that he was telling the truth.
“Well, at least we know what her trigger is. Anger.” Fury stepped forward and faced AJ. “Have you ever done that before?”

AJ shrugged, “I…maybe,” She didn’t know. Perhaps she had while she was strapped to the tables but she had never been fully conscious during those times.

“You seem to have control over it.” Natasha commented. “That’s good.”

The woman who she had been locked in with, the little English she did know was not enough to explain to AJ what had happened after she had inhaled the mist that came from the broken crystals.

“Chosen.” She had said. “Chosen.”

Chosen for what?

They knew the trigger – anger.

Now they would do their best to get her to activate her powers by digging deep down into the rage she held without letting it get the best of her.

It’d take time.

Months.

Maybe even years.

But what else was AJ supposed to do?

S.H.I.E.L.D had been formed by Peggy and Howard. She felt honored to be an agent and to carry on their legacy.

However, before she even thought about getting to work, she needed to escape these windowless rooms and experience the real world again after over half a century.
It took months of rigorous training with Natasha before AJ was finally sent on her first mission with Clint Barton, a man who had quickly become one of her best friends. Kuwait, that was where they had been sent. Taking down arms dealers and where AJ was allowed to used her physical skills – not her Cryokinesis skills.

Not many knew about AJ’s powers. Fury wanted to keep it that way.

Fury, Coulson, Romanoff, and Barton were the only ones to know about her powers. And Dr. Cho, of course.

In the months after AJ had begun her training for S.H.I.E.L.D a lot had happened.

Howard Starks son had been captured in Afghanistan.

She and Fury had fought when the Director refused to let her be on the team that would try and locate Tony. He told her she wasn’t ready for that kind of situation – she had gotten so angry him that a burst of cold energy sent Fury flying into the nearest wall.

He was right. She wasn’t ready.

Tony had been found and returned to the United States.

Howards son was brilliant, a playboy, extremely arrogant, and downright careless.

And AJ had never even met him personally

He was Howard to the T.

Well, Howard when AJ had known him.

The footage she had watched of Howard though…he was different. His personality had changed – he had looked so tired. She missed the young man she worked side by side with who talked about fate and destiny. The man she watched in videos did not resemble the man she had considered family.

Tony had changed after his time being held captive. AJ could relate. But, AJ never built a suit of armor and flew around the city protecting the citizens from harm.

Iron Man.

That’s what they called him.
Coulson and Stark had agreed that the public would not know that he was the man behind the iron helmet. But, in Stark fashion, Tony announced it at a press conference meant for him to deny the accusations.

He was Howard Starks son, that was for sure.

It had been a little over a year since she had begun her training and, in that time, AJ had gone on plenty of missions.

Kuwait with Clint had been her first, her second in Berlin with both Clint and Natasha this time.

They became somewhat of a trio and placed on many missions together, including AJ’s third, when AJ and Natasha had to rescue a captured Clint Barton while in Toyoko.

Her fourth mission had been with Natasha to Greece, where after the job had been done, the two women were grilled on their mission by the WSC – that’s when AJ’s clearance level was upped to Level 6 by Fury (unbeknownst to the World Security Council.) He hadn’t liked why they had grilled Natasha and AJ so hard. Giving AJ higher clearance level was a way to get her into many doors – and to also piss of the WSC when they eventually found out.

It was her fifth mission in Argentina with Clint and Natasha that had been the most disastrous. AJ had been captured and tortured for days. But, no matter how dangerous it was to go after her, Clint and Natasha stormed the building she was being kept in. Natasha, as the proactive one of the duo, used thermal imaging to locate AJ. It was easy enough when the woman managed to make her entire torture chamber the temperature of an icebox.

When they got back to the States, Fury put AJ on medical leave for a month, the torturing she had suffered bringing up too many memories of her time in Austria in 1945. Her powers had been out of whack since Argentina. AJ would be woken from a dead sleep by her own screams and would see that her entire room was covered in ice.

Natasha had been sent to California a few weeks ago on undercover work. She was going undercover as Natalie Rushman, Tony’s Starks personal assistant. AJ and Clint had laughed for days imagining Natasha being told to fetch things or go on coffee runs.

The woman was one of the deadliest assassins – not a personal assistant.

Fury had finally pulled AJ out of medical leave and sent her to New Mexico with Coulson after some unusual activity had been detected.

After setting up at the S.H.I.E.L.D outpost in Roswell, AJ and Phil began their journey to Puente Antiguo.

“You hungry?” Phil asked as he pulled up to a gas station.

AJ pursed her lips and thought on it, “What are those chewy fish things called? They’re red and fish.” She made a face when Coulson began to laugh.

“Swedish Fish.” He told her.

“Well, excuse me if I haven’t learnt all of the latest candies – I have been focusing on learning about other historical events I missed out on while frozen. Besides, what even makes them Swedish?”

Coulson rolled his eyes and smiled. “Okay, so do you think you can pump the gas?”
AJ looked at him blankly.

“Have you not…have you not done this before?” AJ kept on staring. “Mission upon mission with Clint and Natasha and they haven’t taught you to pump gas?” He shook his head. “Remind me to never leave them in charge of you again…”

Both of the agents got out of the car, and AJ circled around to where her senior was standing. (Senior by years involved with SHIELD, obviously.) He swiped his credit card—handy little buggers, they were—and looked back at AJ.

“Alright so, just hold this—“ Phil handed her the nozzle, “in here,” he said, opening a hatch in the side of the car and unscrewing the cap. “And pull the lever underneath.” He punched the button labeled ‘91’ and looked at AJ, who jumped slightly as the numbers on the screen started moving rapidly and gas poured into the tank.

“Just stay here, keep pumping the gas until it clicks and the gas stops. I’m going to grab some sweets.”

AJ saluted with one hand, and Coulson walked off, whistling, hands in his pockets. She made herself small behind the gas pump, watching the numbers change on the screen. Technology, she thought to herself with a small smile. This wasn’t nearly as impressive as some of the things she’d seen with SHIELD, but the little things still tended to amaze her. It was incredible how far the world had come in sixty-four years.

A gunshot in the gas station alerted AJ suddenly, and her head shot up. She poked it over the side of the pump and watched as Coulson proceeded to take down two men armed with—were those shotguns?—without so much as breaking a sweat. Coulson was a maniac, grabbing one of the shotguns and sending it careening towards one of the heads of the men, and then bashing the other one all the same. She hadn’t even heard either of them enter.

She watched Coulson through the glass, interacting with the woman at the register, who was shellshocked. She nodded as Coulson left, a small baggie in hand. The gas pump jolted and the numbers stopped, signaling that the tank was full.

“Took you a while,” AJ said wryly with a grin, putting back the nozzle and closing the gas tank.

Both of the agents slid back into the car and Coulson tossed her the Swedish Fish. “Yeah. Had to take out the trash for the nice cashier.”

“She did seem nice.” AJ agreed.

Coulson hummed.

“Did you get the digits?”

Coulson rolled his eyes as he pulled away. “I’m like, twice her age.”

“I’m ninety-four. You’re in your fifties, you aren’t dead, Phil.”

“You look like you’re in your twenties.”

“I am in my twenties.”

“You’re annoying.”
“You love me.”

The phone S.H.I.E.L.D had given her began to ring, a picture of Romanoff appeared and AJ smiled as she answered the phone. “Hey Nat.”

“Tony Stark is a real piece of work,” Natasha complained. AJ pressed her lips together in a smile, letting out a little snort hearing her so worked up. Natasha prided herself in being able to stay level headed at any moment. But apparently, Tony had gotten under her skin. And not in a good way. Natasha went on to complain about Tony and his reckless behavior with a few very choice words to describe his work ethic. “The man is not a team player, that’s for sure.”

“Yeah, Coulson isn’t really an Iron Man fan either,” AJ chuckled, and then looked over at him. “-right Phil?”

Phil response was a snort like scoff.

“He’s insufferable.” Natasha went on to complain.

“What, handsome playboy genius billionaire not good enough for you?”

“Not really my type.”

“Assholes?” AJ smirked.

“Men. At the moment.”

That caused AJ to raise her brows a bit in surprise. “I thought you and Clint were...doing the fondue?” A smile formed on AJ’s lips at the memory of Howard telling her about a conversation he had with Steve.

“I don’t know what that means – but if you’re talking about sex. That’s a definite no.”

AJ chuckled, “Oh, I’ll keep that in mind,” She could almost envision Natasha rolling her eyes at what she had just said and it made her grin.

“You’re from the 40s, you’re straight as a telephone pole,” Natasha said in a dry tone.

“Yeah Natasha, you’re right, bisexuality wasn’t invented until the late seventies, my bad.” AJ laughed.

“Ha-ha.” Her tone was dry. She then changed the subject, telling AJ about her new assignment, keeping an eye on Bruce Banner. AJ frowned, the man had tried to replicate the super soldier serum and it went horribly wrong. They hung up when AJ saw the sign welcoming them to Puente Antiguo.

Phil was oddly quiet.

AJ took that time to eat her Swedish fish.

He then finally spoke up, “Doing the fondue means sex, right?”

She nearly choked on her Swedish Fish as she laughed, covering her mouth with her hand.

“Was that a popular saying in the 1940’s or something? Because I have never, in my life, ever heard someone reference having sex as doing the fondue.”
AJ made herself have a straight face. “Yes, Phil. Every person in the 40’s referred to having sex as doing the fondue – for someone who works so closely with a woman from that time, you sure didn’t do extensive research.” She teased.

Phil rolled his eyes as they pulled to where Clint was waiting for them.

By the time they arrived at the base, it was dark and pouring rain. AJ had been getting settled when the alarms began to go off.

AJ ran into the tents, jumping over the injured agents who had been knocked out, just in time to see a tall, muscular blonde man drenched in rain and covered in mud attempt to pick up the hammer. He was strong. He fit the description of the legend.

But it was just a legend.

Legends weren’t real.

Fate isn’t real.

She felt a pang in her heart and gripped tightly onto Bucky’s dog tags just above her heart.

AJ still felt his presence. Somedays stronger than ever.

But that wasn’t possible.

Bucky was dead.

The man couldn’t lift the hammer and he screamed in agony up at the sky, as if someone above had cursed him. Somehow, AJ could feel this man’s grief.

He dropped to his knees.

Completely defeated.

June 3rd, 2011

New York
AJ was back in New York.

Thor was real.

Thor.

The God of Thunder.

And not only Thor, but his warrior pals as well.

Adjusting to the 21st century was hard enough but throw in a bunch of Asgardians? Sometimes she felt so over her head. Clint and Phil had been there with her during the mission, both of them executing each order perfectly. AJ both loved and envied them equally. They both made things look so easy. It was the same way with Natasha.

The woman had trained AJ, so the woman in time was able to kick as much ass as the former assassin. But the three of them, Phil, Nat, and Clint…they never seemed shocked by anything. And AJ hadn’t even known how to fill the car up with gas.

AJ laid down in her bed, moving up momentarily to pull off Bucky’s dog tags from around her neck and then laid back down. She moved her thumb over his name, stroking it.

“I feel so lost,” AJ said out loud.

It had become a habit of hers.

Talking to Bucky – well, his dog tags, while she was alone. It brought her little comfort, mostly because she knew that after she was done talking Bucky wouldn’t be there to give his response. That she wouldn’t see his little crooked grin or watch his lips twitch upward into a smirk whenever AJ would say something snarky.

She knew that he wouldn’t grab her hand or kiss the top of her head to comfort her.

And worst of all, she knew that when she began to ramble on about her worries, he wouldn’t quiet her by pressing his lips to hers in a breathtaking kiss.

“Red Skull was one thing – but an actual God.” AJ couldn’t help but laugh, her thumb moving over his name again. “I have seen a little punk from Brooklyn become a beefed-up piece of man meat from a serum that I helped create but…Gods. Howards son flying around New York in a suit of iron, a scientist tried to replicate the super solider serum and is now a very large angry green thing that tore apart Harlem,” AJ sighed. “God, I wish you were here.” Her voice trailed off in a whisper.

AJ closed her eyes, biting down on her lower lip to keep herself from crying.

“You promised,” Her voice rasped and her eyes opened, a tear rolling down her cheek. “You swore to me that you’d come back.” AJ closed her eyes again as more tears fell. “It wasn’t enough time.” Her voice was thick with tears. “A year wasn’t enough, I wanted so many more with you, Buck.”

She had known that she’d lose him but Bucky had kissed all those worries away and told her that
he’d crawl out of his own grave to come home to her and she had had hope. *Hope* that his words would not end up meaningless, that they wouldn’t be an empty promise.

AJ wiped away her tears and under her nose as she tried to keep her emotions in check. “I haven’t visited Peggy yet.” AJ admitted. “Or gone to see Howards grave. I thought that if I just inserted myself into the new world I’d be fine – that if I could let go of my past and move forward I would be able to survive but,” She pressed his dog tags above her heart. “I can’t let you go.”

It’s not like she had tried to let him go or that she ever would – but AJ had avoided all things about her past except for Bucky. She had boxed up all her things that Peggy and Howard had gathered up for her when she woke up and locked them away in her closet. AJ hadn’t gone to see Peggy, she hadn’t gone to see Howards grave to pay her respect and did not go see the memorial dedicated to Captain America. To *Steve*. It was just too hard.

But letting go of Bucky seemed absolutely impossible.

There were times that she could *feel* him. She’d feel him deep down in her soul and drive herself crazy with the small thought in the back of her head that he had survived.

It was impossible.

But she couldn’t let go.

AJ sat up in her bed, pulling the letter Bucky had sent her while he was overseas, the envelope had aged – she hadn’t. It was still unopened. Today wasn’t the day to read his letter, not while her emotions were getting the best of her. AJ looked down at the envelope, seeing Bucky’s scrawl of her name written along with her address in Brooklyn. She had never given him her address. A small smile crept across her lips, *Steve*, he must have given Buck her address.

That’s how he was able to write to her after Frank had died.

That letter too never got answered.

She ran her hand down her face and then pushed her hair back and away from her face.

If Bucky could see her now.

She wasn’t that young woman he had fallen in love with in the 40’s. *Well*, she was. But she had changed since waking up in the year 2010. Natasha had taken charge of AJ’s wardrobe so she wouldn’t stick out like a sore thumb in her outfits from the 40’s.

A lot of darks. Blacks, grays, whites, and dark blue.

Natasha got away with picking her own wardrobe, as did Clint – the two never taking their work appearance too seriously. Or as seriously as Phil did.

So, instead of wearing a woman’s business pant suit, Natasha had gone a different route in styling AJ that was similar to her own. Tight pants, leather jackets, outfits that would cause her father in his grave. But it helped AJ feel like she was a part of the new world.

“I have to say, I did a pretty damn good job.” Natasha smirked. “You look pretty badass, Frost.” The read head had commented.

AJ had made her face blank as she looked at herself in the mirror, trying to get used to the outfit. “*I don’t feel ‘bad ass’,*” She had used air quotes.
“That’s because you’re still wearing your hair like you’re from the forties.” Natasha had moved to stand in front of AJ, giving her a once over. “Do you trust me?” She asked.

AJ made a skeptical face, not liking the mischievous twinkle in her handler’s eyes. “That depends on what you’re about to try and make me do.”

Natasha had grinned like a Cheshire cat, which did not ease AJ’s nerves.

The hair had taken a while to get used to, but it had been a year now and AJ could hardly remember the shade of dark brown her hair had once been. Natasha called it Ombré hair. She wore her now shoulder length hair in soft waves or up in a ponytail (mostly while she wasn’t working.)

There were times that AJ had to wear the suits while meeting with her superiors while being questioned on each mission she went on, addressing what they called a council of the high up members of S.H.I.E.L.D.

Honestly, she didn’t mind the women’s business suits.

AJ just preferred her casual look over it.

Slipping Bucky’s dog tags back over her head and around her neck, AJ laid back down and closed her eyes and begged for sleep to come.

It had.

She dreamt about Bucky.

How it was possible to be so happy yet in so much pain while she was dreaming was hard for AJ. But the hardest part of dreaming about was waking up and rolling over on her side to see that he was not there.

In July of 2011, AJ had been assigned her first partner. A man named Theodore Adams, a descendent of her old friend; Nathaniel Adams. They had been sent to Florence, Italy together. Theodore was nothing like Nathaniel – the man was rough around the edges and hard to read. With Nathaniel, she always knew what he was thinking. Not Theo.
They had gotten into an argument over just that. “I’m not Nathaniel!” Theo had yelled at AJ.

“Yes, I am very aware of that!” She had yelled back before storming off to try and calm herself down, not wanting to blow their cover by turning the entire city of Florence into a replica of Antarctica. Her powers were linked to her anger and in that moment, AJ had been furious.

Which was why she hadn’t been paying attention and got herself captured by the terrorist cell they had been sent to try and shut down. Reckless. Natasha taught her better than to be so reckless. But her emotions had been heightened and Theo had a way of getting under her skin in a very bad way.

Theo had rescued her, following the trail of bread crumbs she had left him and the two had made up before they were sent back to the US.

“I shouldn’t have stormed off like that. It was reckless.”

“Yeah, it was.” Theo agreed, his face still so hard to read. When she narrowed her eyes, his lips twitched up the way Bucky’s used to, causing AJ’s stomach to clench in a familiar way.

When they got back to the States, AJ and Theo were assigned to work with another team. When Fury introduced them, AJ had to step back in shock.

Agents Brian and Andrew Frost.

Her nephews.

She was thrown into her past, well, her brothers past.

Little Henry. Her youngest brother.

He had gone and had himself a pair of twin boys.

Twin boys, men, who wanted nothing more than to talk about the past, about their mother and father and their uncles. But mostly, they wanted to learn more about the AJ. Their aunt who their father and his brothers had thought they had lost forever.

“We never met or Uncle Sam, but we know he had a daughter.” Brian told her on their flight to Tibet, “Juliet Adelyn Frost. She was born a few months after you were pronounced dead to the world.”

AJ’s breath had caught in her through, thinking of Sam naming his child after her. She had swallowed hard, not wanting her emotions to get the best of her.

That had been the reason why she didn’t want to dig into her past and all she had missed. The family and friends she had left behind and the life’s they lived.

But Brian and Andrew told her everything she had missed out on.

Westley, sweet Westley, had been killed in action in the Battle of Okinawa in 1945. That had been hard to hear. After he had survived Pearl Harbor only to perish while fighting the war was near devastating to AJ.

George and Sally never had any children.

Charles never married.

Henry, her little brother and the father of the twins she was now working with, had married a
woman named Margaret Calvinson.

AJ had family.

They were out in the world and literally sitting right in front of her.

“Mom and Dad were forty-six when they had us,” Brian motioned between he and Andrew. “-No health problems at all. A Hell of a woman. And Dad...he was the bravest man I had ever known.”

“He’s the reason why we joined the military and then S.H.I.E.L.D.” Andrew added. They both then looked to one another before saying what AJ already knew. “He died when we were fifteen.”

Every single one of her brothers were dead.

And just as AJ thought she would lose herself to her emotions, a hand was placed on top of her own. She had looked up to see that Theo, sitting on her right, was the one who was now holding her hand. It felt familiar. Something that Bucky would do.

July 25th, 2011

That was the day she lost yet another family member. Brian. He had been killed by Ilya Fedontenko, who was later killed by Andrew. Brian died by jumping in the way of a bullet meant for AJ. One that she could have easily avoided. He had been trying to protect her and because of that, he had taken a bullet right in the middle of his forehead.

To this day, AJ could still hear the sound of Andrews wails while he held onto his brother’s lifeless body. She had only known him for two days and she had already lost him.

Andrew blamed AJ for his brother’s death, telling her that he wished that she had really died all those years ago so he’d have his brother back. When Andrew, AJ, and Theo returned back to the US, Andrew had requested time off and a transfer, still blaming AJ for Brian’s death.

Fury had offered AJ some time off as well but she refused. She could feel herself growing colder as she began to shut down her emotions.

In August, Fury sent AJ and Theo to Cambodia.

It was there that she succumbed to the desires she had recently felt towards Theo. The two slept together for the first time in Cambodia. She had felt guilt afterwards.

Bucky is gone, she tried to tell herself. He’s not ever coming back. He’s dead.

So, she continued on with having a sexual relationship with Theo when the returned to the states. Bucky was gone. That’s what she kept on telling herself.

In November, Theo and AJ were sent to Bucharest. They had been sent to extract their fellow agent, Amanda Cogswell. They had rescued her and while they had been driving back to their hotel late that night when their car was knocked off the side of the road.

“Go! Get Cogswell out of here!” Theo had yelled at AJ, reaching to grab his gun from his holster strapped to his thigh. “Get to the safety point and if I’m not there in thirty minutes, get your asses to the jets and leave. I mean it.”

“Theo – I am not leaving you!” AJ had argued. “We can take them out together.”
It was only one man though. A man with a metal arm who she would learn later from Natasha, was known as *The Winter Soldier*.

AJ and Cogswell had escaped unscathed and Theo had died at the hands of The Winter Soldier.

She felt nothing but absolute rage. No heartache, no tears, just anger. Her partner/lover was dead. And AJ knew she needed to numb that anger before it overtook her.

Natasha had gone against The Winter Soldier back in 2009, even had a pretty little scar to remember it. “He’s a ghost story.” Natasha told AJ, seeing the look in her eyes. “I spent too much time trying to go after him, I won’t let you do the same.”

AJ and Amanda Cogswell gave their mission report to Nick Fury as well as the World Security Council, but afterwards, AJ had pulled Fury aside and requested time off.

The request had been filled by Fury.

The man knew from just looking at AJ that she didn’t have a handle on her powers anymore and sent her to re-train trying to get a handle on those powers, but this time she was sent to Clint Barton.

In January of 2012, AJ had returned to S.H.I.E.L.D. It was then that Nick Fury told AJ, Clint Barton, and Natasha Romanoff the Avengers Initiative, putting the three of them in charge of security of information on the Initiative.

Her first mission back, AJ, Clint, and Natasha were sent to Cairo.

After proving to Fury that she had her powers under her own control again, Adelyn Frost had been sent on her first completely solo mission without extraction.

Even after all of her missions with Natasha and Clint, AJ had never truly felt like she was a true agent. But now?

Agent Adelyn Juliet Frost was a known name, a name that some feared.

Despite all the death and tragedy, AJ did have good moments.

In March of 2012, Clint and AJ had to disguised themselves as spies and broke into the Helicarrier to try and trick Natasha into thinking they were stealing intelligence on the Avengers Initiative. It had been Fury’s orders. Fury had arrived to find AJ knocked out and Clint in a choke hold between Natasha’s legs. He quickly stopped her and Clint took off his mask.

Natasha had kicked her ass. AJ woke up from smelling salts to see Natasha looking down at her, smirking. “Did you have to hit me that hard?” AJ had complained, holding onto her pounding head. “I see birds.”

Clint had laughed and Natasha had helped AJ up, slinging her arm over AJ’s shoulder, “That’ll teach you to try and go up against your handler.”

“Clint was your handler and you still kicked his ass.” AJ had complained.

Clint had scoffed, “Uh, she did **not** kick my ass, I was just about to break free before Fury stepped in.”

With Fury, the three of them had discussed their choices for the Avengers.
“Thor.” Clint had said.

“Banner.” Natasha said next.

And before she could rethink it, AJ’s mouth opened and her pick came tumbling out of her mouth. “Stark.”

April 16th, 2012

AJ had been sent on a solo assassination mission to Kiev.

But mid-flight, a call came in from Fury.

“Sir?” She had said, the words he had said must have been wrong – there was no possible way what she heard him say was even possible.

“Captain Rogers body has been found.” Fury said again. “He’s alive.”

She didn’t know what to say. “He’s alive?”

“Yes. And when he wakes up, he’s going to be very confused.”

She understood. But AJ still had to finish her mission.

AJ got on the first flight back to the States after killing her target.

Steve.

He was alive.

And she had just assassinated a man.

That was not something she was going to tell him.

AJ smiled, her friend, she was getting a second chance.
She spent the entire flight back to the States trying to come up with things to tell Steve, about how she was alive or how she hadn’t aged or how everything was different in the 21st century. AJ held on tightly to Bucky’s dog tags.

“He’s alive.” She whispered while smiling, still in shock. “That little punk is alive.”

AJ would never say this to Steve, but a part of her believed that Bucky had sent her Steve in a time where she needed him the most. That if he couldn’t crawl out of his grave to get home to AJ…he’d send Steve in his place.
You're Not Alone

Chapter Notes

OC MASTERLIST

See the end of the chapter for more notes
He wasn’t listening.

The man was talking, explaining everything that had happened and how he managed to survive in the ice for all those decades very thoroughly – but Steve only heard a buzzing in his ear when the man spoke. He had survived. Steve had been a man frozen in time. He still was. Everything he knew had changed, everything he loved was gone.

“Did we win?” Steve asked, interrupting the man with an eyepatch. Steve’s blue eyes were fixed on the man; dark skin, dark clothes, a leather trench coat that fell just above his ankles. He looked older than Steve, but he knew that wasn’t possible. “Did we win the war?” Steve asked again.

The man nodded. “Yes, Captain Rogers, the war is over.” He began to explain all the details but Steve looked down at his hands, brows furrowed as he tried to focus.

The world had changed so much, so many lights, so much noise, so many more people.

“You helped shape the world into what it is today, Captain Rogers.” The man told him, causing Steve to look up again.

He didn’t know what the world was like today. He didn’t know if there was peace between all the countries, between all people – all he knew was that he was alone. And that left a dull ache in his chest.

There was no way they were alive today.

It was possible that some survived the war and lived happily ever after.

But seeing them aged, hearing about the life they had lived with him gone, hearing about the loss they all had suffered. He couldn’t imagine the pain of hearing those stories. It would be almost as hard as losing them all.

Peggy.

“I’m going to need a rain check on that dance.” Steve could remember telling her, feeling as if it had just happened only hours ago.

“Alright. A week, next Saturday, at the Stork Club.” He could hear the pain in her voice, both knowing that he would not survive the impact of the crash.

“You got it.” Steve had said.
“Eight o’clock on the dot. Don’t you dare be late. Understood?”

“Y’know, I still don’t know how to dance.” Steve had tried to joke.

“I’ll show you how. Just be there.”

He could see the water now, only seconds away from impact. “We’ll have the band play somethin’ slow. I’d hate to step on your-”

He had crashed, windows shattering and water cascading into the plane, engulfing him in the pressure. His lungs burned, his eyes began to sting, and his chest began to ache.

They were gone.

Bucky was gone.

The last he had heard from Peggy, AJ had hijacked a plane and was M.I.A. For all he knew, she was dead as well. His two best friends, the loves of each other’s lives, were dead. Steve couldn’t help but be grateful that they were together again. And then he felt his will to fight against the water slowly fading away. It was cold and the current was too hard swim out, even with his enhanced strength.

They could all be together again. Him, AJ, and Buck. Just like before. He would watch as his best friends were sitting together, AJ snuggled into Bucky’s side as he absentmindedly twirled a curl of her hair around his finger as he smiled at something Steve had said. AJ would say something smart that would cause them both to laugh and she’d look up to Bucky like he had put all the stars in the sky, with a love so intense and true that surely it would continue on in the afterlife, or wherever they were.

He longed to be with them.

But he heard Peggy’s voice in his head again, ‘Don’t you dare be late.’

And he tried to fight, fight to get to the surface and come home to her.

But it was too late. His lungs were giving out and his mouth opened in a panic, swallowing water that left a burning sensation down his throat as more and more came. He screamed, just one word; Peggy. His body grew limp and everything went dark.

The next thing he knew, he was in this very room, awake, but awake decades into the future.

Steve ran his hands down his face and inhaled sharply.

“She’s here?” Steve heard the man say, and when he looked up, the man had his finger pressed to his ear. “Bring her in."

The man dropped his hand and looked to Steve. “I know that things are confusing right now, Steve.” He used his name, no longer referring to him as Captain Rogers. “But I have to warn you – they’re about to be a hell of a lot more confusing and I apologize. I think she’ll do a better job at explaining everything in a way you might understand.”

“She?” Steve sat up in his bed.

Peggy? Was she alive? Was she here?

There was a soft knock on the door and the man walked over to it and opened it slowly, standing in
Steve’s way to shield Steve from whoever was at the door. “Good luck.” The man said, looking back at Steve one last time before he stepped forward and walked out of the room.

He felt his breath catch in his throat as he looked at the person standing in the doorway.

It wasn’t possible.

And then she let out a little laugh, her green eyes shimmering with tears as she pressed her hands to her mouth, closing her eyes to try and compose herself. “Y’know, I had an entire plane ride to try and prepare myself for this and figure out what I was gonna say to you but,” She sniffed and Steve watched as her lip began to tremble. “I’m speechless.”

Steve took a step forward, his eyes scanning the woman standing a few paces away. “Jay?” He whispered.

AJ nodded her head quickly, closing the remaining space between them and flung herself into his arms. He was hesitant, but the moment he heard her whisper his name as she pressed a kiss to his shoulder, he finally wrapped his arms around her waist tight.

“How?” He asked, voice shaking, arm still tight around her, afraid to let go. “How are you…how is this-”

“Possible?” AJ laughed, moving herself a bit out of his arms, dropping her hands from his shoulder to fall down to her waist, grabbing his hands and holding them in her own. “It’s a very, very long story.” Her voice rasped the way it always did after she cried or got herself too worked up.

It was her. But she looked so different. The dark hair that Bucky had loved so much was dark no more, and the way she dressed – it was definitely not the way she dressed the last time he saw her. But those striking green eyes, the small mole on her right cheek, the way she held herself. There was no doubt in his mind that standing before him was Adelyn Juliet Frost. His best friend. A woman he had thought to be dead.

Steve watched as the door closed behind AJ and she let go of his hands and wiped away some tears that had fallen. AJ motioned for him to follow her, sitting down at the very end of the bed he had woken up in. “So, I’m sure Fury gave you the whole, welcome to the 21st century spiel?”

Steve took a seat next to AJ on the bed. “He’s the one with the eyepatch?”

AJ nodded.

“Yes.” He said, he hadn’t listened to most of it. “He also explained how I survived but what I don’t understand is how you are here – looking almost exactly the same as when I last saw you. Age wise, at least.” He smiled a little, moving his hand to her hair, pinching a few strands between his fingers causing AJ to laugh. “Last I heard about you, Peggy had said you hijacked a plane…how-”

“I did. I knew there was one Hydra fortress in Austria still untouched by the SSR and I wanted to do something about it. Going in alone was reckless and stupid but it’s what got me here.”

“But how?” Steve asked.

He watched as AJ looked up at something on the wall. A red light that had been flashing was now turned off.

“At the Austrian Hydra fortress, I came into contact with an object called the Obelisk.” Her eyes still looking up at the wall to make sure the red light was still off. Her eyes moved back to Steve’s.
“There are only a few people in the entire world that survive when they come into contact with the Obelisk. Something in their DNA is different than any other person – and the few that had survived the Obelisk begin to change.”

“Change?” Steve said, but AJ continued on talking.

“There was a man who worked for Hydra, his name was Dr. Werner Reinhardt, he believed that somehow he’d find the answers to immortality by dissecting those who survived the Obelisk,”

“Immortal? Wait – are you – dissecting!?” He said, now angry, not able to form his words as AJ talked over him.

“Steve, I am so happy you are here with me and I love you but you need to shut up and let me explain how I’m here because I don’t have much time.” She pointed to where the red light had been. Steve nodded, not understanding but trusting AJ. “-I am not going to go into the details about what he did to me, but by the time Peggy and the other Howling Commandos found me, I was knocking on death’s door.” Steve began to open his mouth but quickly closed it when AJ narrowed her eyes at him. “-I wasn’t going to survive. I shouldn’t have survived as long as I had – but because of the Obelisk my DNA was different. I had abilities that I hadn’t before and those abilities helped keep me alive, and I promise I will explain everything better when we are really alone but all I can say right now is that my last name is very ironic.”

Steve blinked, still trying to process everything as AJ spoke a mile per minute.

“Peggy and the others found me and brought to a SSR base in Austria and that’s where Howard, Peggy, and Colonel Phillips put me in a cryofreeze chamber with the hopes that they could would keep me alive long enough for them to find a way to fully heal my injuries someday. And that day happened sixty-five years into the future. I’ve been awake for two years now working as SHIELD agent, but only a few people know the truth about me and who I am and what I can do,” She grabbed Steve’s hand and dragged her finger across his hand and Steve felt a harsh sensation against his skin, eyes moving down to see that AJ was drawing a ‘S’ on his opened palm. His eyes grew wide; he held in his hand now; a piece of ice in the shape of the ‘S’ that AJ had drawn on his palm.

AJ looked back up the camera and quickly moved her hand on top of Steve’s and suddenly he felt a cold liquid in his hand just as the light turned red again.

“And that’s how I’m here right now, Steve.” She said, completely composed now. He blinked again, trying to comprehend everything she had said.

She had almost died. Peggy had saved her. She had gained some sort of ability that had to do with ice. The reason she hadn’t aged was because of cryostasis chamber she had been kept in for sixty-four years. She was here. She was alive.

“You’re not alone, Steve.” AJ said, snapping him out of his thoughts.

He nodded and watched as relief washed over AJ’s face before she moved herself in his arms again. Steve held her for a long while until the man with the eyepatch, who AJ had referred to as Fury, came back inside.

“Agent Frost, you’re needed upstairs.”

AJ nodded and let go of Steve. “I’ll be back.” She assured him as she got up, placing her hand on his cheek as he stayed sitting on the bed.
“Okay.”

She left. And he was alone in the room with Fury.

“You and Agent Frost will be going away for a few days to a place we call The Retreat. While you’re there, AJ will fill you in and what you missed.”

Steve looked to the wall and the red light that was back on. “We’ll be alone?” He looked back to Fury, hoping he knew what he meant.

“You will. The Retreat is a safe haven for Agents, most go their while on medical or personal leave. AJ has been there and will drive the two of you there.”

Steve couldn’t help but let out a small laugh. This whole situation was comical – he was awake in the twenty-first century after being frozen in ice, AJ was alive and had abilities he still didn’t quite understand – but the most comical thing to Steve was that AJ was taking them to this place called the Retreat. “I wake up in the future and the first thing you want to do is put me in a car with Jay?” He shook his head, “You do know that she’s a terrible driver, yes?”

“A lot has changed, cars included but…I can’t say the same for Agent Frost’s driving.” Fury smirked.

Steve shook his head. He woke up just in time to have AJ kill him with her terrible driving.

April 18th, 2012
The Retreat

“Director Fury did warn me that your driving has not improved,” Steve said with a chuckle after AJ had to slam on the breaks to avoid hitting a deer.

AJ had to scoff at that, watching as the deer moved out of the way, she stepped on the gas,
purposely sending it lurching forward causing Steve to move his hands to the dashboard to avoid colliding into it. Dammit, Jay, he muttered under his breath causing her to chuckle as they drove down a very long road that would lead them to the forest where the Retreat was located.

“I think my driving has improved.” AJ said, rolling down the roofs window to enjoy the scent of fresh air. New York had a certain stench to it now that it did not have in the 40’s and each time AJ had gone to the cabin, she felt serene to smell the fresh air.

“Where is this place?” Steve asked, purposely not commenting on AJ’s driving skills. It made her smirk.

“It’s about 12 miles away. We hike the last three miles since you can’t get to the cabin by car – usually they send us in one of the jets SHIELD has now, but I know how much you loved when I drove back in the 40’s.” She teased.

Steve let out a harsh laugh at her words. “I will never forget the look on Bucky’s face when he first got in the car with you – I’ve never seen someone grip the dashboard so tightly.” He chuckled, looking over at AJ who kept one hand on the steering wheel now, her other hand pressed just above her heart where Bucky’s dog tags hung. There was no avoiding talking about Bucky. But she just wanted some time with Steve where she wasn’t in physical pain remembering the man she loved and lost. Steve seemed to sense that and quickly went back to teasing her, “How you ever managed to get your license is still a mystery to me.”

AJ smiled, looking over at Steve with a little eye roll. “It must have been my charm.”

She drove the nine miles it took until they would be on foot for the rest of their journey, Steve’s eyes going wide when AJ pressed a button on the keys that camouflaged that car. “Is it gone?” He asked. She had walked forward and knocked on the car, the thud causing Steve to lift his brows at her. “As I said, technology has advanced.” AJ said as they began their trek through the woods.

“Do all cars do that?” Steve asked. AJ answered, “If they’re issued by SHIELD, they do. You should see the jets.”

AJ explained to Steve how the SSR came to be SHIELD, how Peggy and Howard had formed something revolutionary that helped the world from ever falling into the hands of a radical group like Hydra ever again.

He didn’t ask about Peggy and AJ completely understood. AJ had been the same way. She knew that Peggy was alive, living in a home for people suffering with Alzheimer’s disease – AJ had worried that if she had gone to see Peggy, it would only confuse her older fragile state. He did, however, bring up Howard on their hike to the cabin.

“Howard was one of the founders?” He had smiled, shaking his head a bit as he looked forward. AJ looked over at and chuckled. Steve hadn’t known Howard the way AJ had, he didn’t get to witness his brilliance every day or his determination when he worked. It didn’t surprise AJ in the slightest that Howard had helped create SHIELD. “I’m sure he had a hand in all the new technology.”

She frowned, eyes shifting away from Steve. “He did.” AJ said, keeping her eyes ahead as they continued walking forward. She could feel Steve’s eyes on her, just waiting for her to give him the bad news, but she couldn’t find herself to say the words. So, instead, she spoke about Tony. “His son, Tony, he has taken over Stark Industries…he uh,” AJ had to laugh a bit. “He’s a lot like his father. A bit more arrogant but very much like Howard in many ways.”

“Have you met him?” Steve asked, sounding amused.
“No.” AJ spoke honestly. “But the people I work with have spent some time with Tony.”

Steve cleared his throat. “And Howard?”

AJ closed her eyes, licking at her lower lip before she opened her eyes, her gaze falling on Steve as they continued to walk. She knew it was coming, no matter how much she tried to dance around it. “He died in a car crash.”

It took a while before Steve asked, “When?”

“December of 1991.”

She could see him frowning.

He didn’t say much else but it was easy to fall into a comfortable silence with Steve. It always had been, even when they first started hanging out. AJ knew that she had missed Steve, she just hadn’t known how much she truly needed him until her eyes finally locked with his again. For the first time since she woke up, AJ felt at home. It wasn’t any destination – it was the feeling she got.

The only thing missing was Bucky to make her home complete.

They hiked the rest of the way in silence and when they arrived to the cabin, Steve had stopped, looking back at the scenery as AJ watched. He took in everything around him, a soft smile on his face. AJ knew he’d like the cabin. It was simple. It was the place she stayed at while on medical leave and after Theo had been killed. It was peaceful and serene and remote. Fury had a few things added to the cabin so AJ could help Steve’s adjustment into the twenty-first century – but it would be just the two of them for a week with no one to listen in and play ‘big brother’, that’s what Clint had called it.

It was a week where they would get to know each other again. Though, Steve hadn’t changed, AJ had. And not just her hairstyle (as Steve continued to point out, still teasing her about the color choice). She wasn’t the girl he knew back in the forties. Since waking two years ago, AJ had changed, she was different. Harder. She had to become hard to adapt to the new world. And a part of her was terrified that when Steve got to know the person she was today…he wouldn’t like it. He wouldn’t like her. And that feeling of home would disappear.

*That* was what AJ was most afraid of.

“You ready to go inside?” AJ asked Steve, he turned around and looked to the cabin. He took in a nice deep breath of fresh air and nodded his head, looking at her before he took a step forward and towards the cabin.

AJ waited before following after him, trying to build up her courage and not be so afraid that Steve might hate the person she had become.
They had both gone to bed early, (though, Steve could hear AJ stirring all night long.) Around 5 AM, he heard the door to the cabin open and close. He got up, throwing on a light jacket to go outside to see what AJ was doing.

He hadn’t been able to sleep well either. Steve just laid in bed and looked up at the ceiling in the room. There were two bedrooms in the cabin and Steve had told AJ to take the largest bedroom with the private bathroom. But they were right next to each other. And Steve could hear it whenever AJ would get up and walk around the bedroom.

When he got outside, AJ was sitting by the lake in front of the cabin as the sun rose in the sky leaving a pink tint to all the clouds. He stayed on the porch for a long moment, just looking at AJ as her fingers dipped into the lakes water.

He smiled, wishing Bucky were here to see her in that moment.

He stepped forward to make his way over to AJ, only to stop watched when his friend steadied her hand over the water. And with wide eyes, Steve watched as the entire lake transformed into ice.

He knew she had powers now. But he had only seen a slight glimpse of what she could do. This. This, he had not seen. And to be honest, it scared him.

He wasn’t scared of her, he could never be scared of AJ.

But Steve had never dealt with something like this.

He took in a deep breath, trying so hard to think of what Bucky might do in this situation – what he might have said to try and make her feel at ease and not different to him. He’d hold her and tell her that he loved her unconditionally – but Steve wasn’t Bucky. And no-one would ever take Bucky’s place in AJ’s heart, so trying to think of what Bucky might do to make her feel better wouldn’t help Steve in this situation.

So, he did what he would have done back in the forties and walked over to her and crouched down beside her. “What is that called?” Steve asked.

She didn’t look over at him and it took her a while to answer, but she eventually did. “Dr. Cho calls it Ice Transmutation.” AJ moved her hand over the water again and Steve watched as the lake slowly but surely turned back into a liquid substance. “Or, Cryokinetic Transmutation – it’s just a fancy name for being able to transform matter and objects into ice.”

“Objects?” He asked slowly, hesitant to ask, “Does that include the living?”

AJ looked over at him, the corners of her lips turned upward in amusement as she moved her body to face his. “Well, I’ve never been given the opportunity to freeze a living, breathing human – but if you miss being in the ice that badly I can always try.” She smirked, quirking her brow up causing Steve to playfully roll his eyes at her.

Steve sat down now on the ground next to AJ. “Is this all you can do?” He asked her, “I know you
were able to create ice in my hand.”

She chuckled, “Yes, your clammy hands were the perfect canvas.” She teased. He chuckled at that comment, ducking his head. Could she blame him? He had just woken up in a different century only to have her walk through the doors looking almost exactly the same. It was going to take some time until he was used to her new hair. Hair that was carefully pulled up and out of her face at the moment. When Steve looked back to AJ, she was frowning.

He didn’t know what to say, so he stood up and held out his hand for her to grab. “Show me around?” He asked her.

AJ’s smile was hesitant and nowhere near the way she used to smile – in fact, the last time he saw AJ truly smile was before Bucky had died. A smile that caused her green eyes to shimmer, the corners of her eyes crinkling as her grin stretched across her face. It was the smile she always had on when Bucky was around. *Bucky’s smile, Howard had called it.*

It was the smile she wore when she was at her happiest.

She didn’t wear it now, but she still took his hand.

Steve pulled her up and they began to walk around the grounds for about an hour, the sun had risen and the sky was bright. AJ showed Steve where the laser fence was located around the perimeter that would keep them safe.

He had frowned, “Safe from who?” Steve raised his brows as AJ threw a rock at the invisible barrier that was keeping them from some sort of danger.

Steve watched as AJ licked at her lower lip and then turned to face him, almost as if she were bracing herself for impact. “Hydra is gone - but there are still other threats in this world that SHIELD agents have to deal with.”

He nodded slowly, “And you are one of those agents?” Steve already knew the answer. But he needed her hear her say it.

Silence, but she finally answered, looking him in the eyes. “Yes.”

Steve looked at her for a long moment, trying to get a read on her. But he couldn’t. She used to be so easy to read, a complete open book – but now? She had hardened. “And how do you deal with these threats?” He asked.

She squared her jaw, clearly not liking his tone. “Depending on the severity of the threat, we either bring them in or eliminate them.”

“You mean *kill*?” She didn’t answer and Steve had to shake his head in disbelief, “Come on, Jay!” This wasn’t the girl he knew, “You can’t tell me that you’re happy doing this – you know it’s not right!”

Her stare turned cold. The whites in her eyes becoming lighter, if possible. “I never said I’m happy, Steve.”

He shook his head in disappointment, “This isn’t you.”

“What the hell else was I supposed to do, Steve!” AJ said in anger. “Everyone I ever loved was dead and if I didn’t have SHIELD and the friends I have made there…” She closed her eyes as her words drifted off. “I woke up; scared, and alone, and with powers that I could not control. And
SHIELD helped me. I owe them everything, Steve. SHIELD is Howard, it’s Peggy, it’s,” She gestured to him, “It’s you! So, yeah, I held onto it! So, do I regret my decision to become an agent? No. Never.” AJ looked him in the eyes, “Because it gave me a purpose.”

Steve scoffed. “And your purpose is what? To eliminate threats now? AJ, you were never a soldier – you were a damn biochemist!”

AJ huffed, “I do not need you reminding me of who I used to be, Steve – so drop the judgmental tone!” She was breathing hard and Steve could see the way her hands were now balled up into fists at her sides as she spoke.

The average eye wouldn’t be able to detect the small bursts of cold air coming out of her fists, but Steve could seem them. But almost as soon as the clouds of cold air appeared, they disappeared and when Steve looked back at AJ, her eyes were closed and her lips were moving.

AJ opened her eyes and looked at him, “I don’t expect you to understand my choices, Steve.” She took in a deep breath. “But I had hoped you wouldn’t look at me like I’m a monster.” AJ shook her head and walked away, muttering to herself, “But you are.”

Steve sighed, rubbing his brow as he watched AJ walk away, leaving him alone in the wooded area. He hadn’t meant to judge her, he had wanted to be someone she could lean on in this time but as Peggy had once said, you still don’t know a bloody thing about women. He could hear her words echoing in his head and knew that he was wrong. AJ needed him just as badly as he needed her right now and he was making it so hard for her. He was judging when he should have been trying to understand.

AJ had been in this new world for two years now – two years spent knowing that every single person she loved from her past was dead. And now he was here, he was here with her and he was judging who she became in those two years.

It wasn’t right.

He needed to apologize to AJ and let her know that it didn’t matter to him who she was now – that she would always be his Jay. That he would always be her friend until the end of the line.

“What’s that thing you and Bucky are always saying to each other?” She had asked him once.

“I’m with you till the end of the line.” He had told her.

“I like that saying.”

“So do I.”
AJ looked at herself in the bathroom mirror, her hand wiping away the steam on the glass. She sighed, AJ knew that Steve would never be okay with what she had done and what she’d continue to do. But she had hoped that he would understand that things were more complicated than when he knew her back in the forties. Times were different, yes – but there were still threats in the world. Steve used to be the one to deal with those, as well as Bucky and the other Howling Commandos.

Bucky.

AJ gripped the bathroom counter and closed her eyes.

He’d probably think that she was a monster too. That she wasn’t the girl he had fallen in love with. That thought hurt more than the way Steve had looked at her earlier.

“If you fall asleep now, you are going to sleep until morning and won’t be able to sneak out.” AJ could see it in her head now, her fingers gliding across the line of Bucky’s jaw as she peered up at him. His arms were wrapped around her body and his eyes were closed, but she could see the corners of his lips twitching upward. “I’m serious, Buck, I can’t have Howard and Steve knowing that you’re sneaking in here every night.” She had pouted.

Bucky had smiled fully at that, opening his eyes and looking over at her, his blue eyes tired but filled with something AJ could only describe as pure magic. The way he looked at her sometimes – Hell, the fact that they weren’t naked in that bed truly showed the restraint the two of them had. Bucky had never pressured her, he was always so gentle with his words, never wanting to take things too far and it was usually AJ that would initiate something that’d bring out a more animalistic side to him once she got him alone. And she had really enjoyed that side of him.

“Howards no prude, sweetheart.” Bucky had teased. “I’ve heard plenty of stories about that man sneaking women in these quarters - and most of those stories have come from you.” He had smirked causing AJ to playfully pinch his skin causing him to laugh. “And Steve,” He rubbed his thumb against her covered shoulder. “He may be a judgmental little shit at times, but he knows how I feel about you.” His eyes had locked with hers and it had made her heart race and stomach clench.

AJ had smiled softly at Bucky, moving her body so she was fully facing him. “And how do you feel about me, Sarge?” She teased.

Bucky had laughed, shaking his head as she looked at AJ in amusement, “Ehhh, you’re alright.” He smirked causing AJ to move forward and press her lips to his in a long kiss. When she pulled away, she had raised her brows at him and he grinned. “A little more than alright.”

She had chuckled, “I guess you’re alright too. But you still need to leave before sunrise because I don’t want anyone judging me or calling me a floozy.”

Bucky had pressed his hand to her cheek, his thumb rubbing gently against her skin. “If anyone ever judges you – you tell me. I’ll have some words with them.” Bucky smirked.

AJ had smiled, raising her brows in amusement at his macho behavior. “And what if it’s you who’s
judging me?” She asked him.

He had shaken his head and looked at her softly. “I’ll never judge you.” He promised her.

“Why?” She had asked softly.

He pressed a kiss to her lips and AJ knew. It didn’t have to be said out loud and she knew Bucky was aware of her fears of moving too fast - but she knew just from that kiss that Bucky loved her.

They hadn’t been together long at that point, but AJ wished she could go back in time and shake herself, tell him you love him! She would say to herself. Tell him everyday until his last. Stop wasting time! But that wasn’t possible.

Bucky was gone.

AJ opened her eyes and got dressed in a pair of black leggings and a white V-neck t-shirt.

She had been in the shower for about a half hour (maybe closer to forty-five minutes). She just wanted to have some time to think and also to avoid seeing Steve.

AJ wasn’t mad.

She was upset.

Her best friend was back and he was looking at her like she was no better than the people who worked for Hydra themselves.

Steve didn’t know what they had done to her – what Dr. Reinhardt had done to her. He didn’t know that every single night it was hard for her to sleep because she still felt the phantom stinging pain of a blade slicing through her skin. He didn’t know about how each morning she’d wake up in a panic thinking they had drained her of her blood once again, only leaving the slightest bit to keep her alive. He had never seen the white lines on her skin that hadn’t been able to heal fully or disappear. Steve didn’t know.

And she didn’t want him to know. Because Steve was and always had been so empathetic that he’d feel such guilt and grief for not being there to save her. And she would not have that. Because he was her best friend. And even if he never looked at her the same – he’d always be her best friend.

AJ walked out of the bathroom, drying her wet hair with a towel but stopped when she saw Steve sitting on her bed, holding something in his hand.

She knew what it was.

“You still have these?” He asked, not looking up at her.

AJ licked at her lower lip and moved forward, taking a seat next to Steve on her bed. “Reinhardt took them from me when he had me prisoner but Peggy and the SSR tore apart that fortress and she found them in his office.” AJ told him, “Howard and Peggy gathered a lot of my things after I was put into cryostasis and saved them for me. Howard even started putting things in that I think he thought I might enjoy for when I finally woke up. But those,” She looked down at Bucky’s dog tags in Steve’s open palm and smile softly. “That’s the only thing I’ll ever need from my past.” She admitted. AJ looked at Steve for a long moment, watching as his eyes stayed glued on the tags. He missed Bucky just as much as she did. “Those dog tags and…you.”

Steve looked up from his palm and over at AJ.
“A lot has happened since I woke up, Steve. A lot has changed…but you’re here now and I can’t…I can’t ever imagine losing you again. It’d kill me.”

Steve grabbed AJ’s hand, turning it over and placed Bucky’s dog tags in her open palm before he covered her hand with his own. “I’m not going anywhere, Jay.” He promised her. “You have me. That’ll never change.”

AJ smiled, leaning her head against his shoulder.

After a beat, Steve spoke up again. “I have to be honest with you though, Jay.” He said softly and AJ feared what he might say. He took in a deep breath and wrapped his arm around her shoulder, feeling her tense. “I just got back to the cabin – I’ve been trying to find it for like an hour.”

AJ laughed, moving her face to hide against his chest. “Yeah, sorry, it’s kinda tricky to get back here. At least you didn’t get electrocuted.” AJ felt the vibration of Steve’s chest rumbling and felt instant comfort.

Things might not be perfect between them, but AJ had hope that soon enough they’d be back to how they were before.

Maybe even better.

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April 25th, 2012
Brooklyn, New York

Brooklyn sure had changed. Everything had changed. Steve and AJ spent their week at the retreat where he got to meet the woman AJ had become since she woke up two years ago. A lot had
changed but she was still AJ. Smart, funny, caring, snarky. Her hair might have changed and her heart may have hardened a little – but Steve knew she was still in there. The girl he once knew.

AJ took him to a building where she told him he’d be staying, a small apartment in Brooklyn that she thought he might like. Steve watched as AJ pushed open the door with her shoulder, making a comment about how the apartment had been vacant for years – no one in SHIELD wanting to stay somewhere with so little to entertain them while undercover. “Everything is pretty low maintenance here since you’re still a virgin to 21st technology,” She teased causing Steve to let out a little huff of laughter. “But you’ve shown that you adapt to new things very well,” She looked back, motioning to his body, referring to how well he adapted to the serum. His cheeks reddened and he looked away from her as he smiled. “Minus you tripping over your own legs after getting the serum.”

“Ha-ha.” Steve rolled his eyes but followed AJ into the apartment. She showed him around, pointing out all he had and then took him to his bedroom.

“Whaddya think?” She took a seat on the bed, smiling at Steve. He smiled, liking that he could see happiness in her eyes again.

“Spacious.” He said, eyes scanning the room.

“Your bathroom is down the hall.” AJ sat up from the bed and walked past Steve. He followed her as she showed him the bathroom. It was small, just a toilet, sink, and a shower. But it’d do. He wasn’t too high maintenance. “I figured that since you didn’t mind letting me take the master room at the cabin you wouldn’t mind letting me have the master here, too. I mean, I’m a lady, I’ll need my privacy.”

He looked over at her with one raised brow, watching as her lips formed into a smirk. “You’re staying here too?” He smiled.

“Yup.” She popped the p.

He grinned, feeling relief that he wouldn’t be alone. AJ must have seen it in his eyes because she moved forward and moved herself into his arms.

“You’re stuck with me, Steven Grant Rogers.” She said softly.

He chuckled, holding onto her tight. “I’m okay with that, Adelyn Juliet Frost.”

Chapter End Notes

Please forgive any typos. And always feel free to leave kudos and/or comments!
Chapter Notes

OC MASTERLIST

See the end of the chapter for more notes
She had begun to lose track of time. AJ no longer knew the what time of day it was – they’d only give her the smallest amount of food but it felt sporadic. All she did know is that when all the guards entered the prisoner’s area, the woman caged up next to her would be first. There was no way to muffle out her screams and try and ignore them, sometimes AJ could still hear them in her sleep. Her own throat was raw from the last time they had come and got her. The first few times they began to slice her open, she had passed out from the pain. Now they kept her awake. Sniffing salts, anything to keep her aware of what was happening.

It was too much.

She was tired.

AJ just wanted to be with Bucky.

“Chosen.” The woman next to her kept saying in English.

“For what?”

And then she’d continue on in Mandarin.

Adelyn Frost was fluent in many languages; French, Spanish, German, Italian, Russian.

Mandarin? No, she hadn’t mastered that language yet.

Water.

They needed water.

She could feel her bones aching, her veins burning and knew that her throat was damaged, probably beyond repair. She didn’t even recognize her own voice when she spoke. Her voice was harsh, a stronger rasp, and cut in and out whenever she began to argue with the guards who dragged her in and out of each room.

During the torture, AJ would close her eyes and imagine soft kisses on her face instead of a surgical blade, Bucky’s fingers softly running down her arms instead of the feeling of her arms being sliced open, the bonds that kept her strapped down onto the table was just Bucky softly grasping onto her wrist whenever she’d walk away from him, and he’d pull her back in a tug until her back was pressed against his chest and her laughter filled the air and he nuzzled his face into her neck. Bucky. He was the only reason she was still alive.

He came to her in her worst state, begging her to stay alive. She’d hear him tell her that he loved her and that Steve would find her, that when they got back to Brooklyn, he was going to introduce her to his mother and ask for his grandmothers wedding ring and make AJ his wife. Adelyn Barnes. Mrs. Barnes. He’d ask her to marry him and with no hesitation, AJ would say yes. Always. That’s what he would say to her.

Stay with me, He’d tell her.

Always, she’d whisper back as she felt herself drifting away. And then there would be a chill in the air and when she woke up again, her wounds were healed, the opened wounds they had sliced into her were just white little lines that marked her body.
The doors to her cell opened and AJ looked over to the woman cowering in the cell next to her. They had opened her door – not the woman’s. She was first today. “No,” AJ protested as they grabbed at her. She found more strength the next time she shouted, “No!” And the guards were blown back by cold air.

It left her drained, so tired and weak, she could barely keep her eyes open when the guards charged at her and dragged her out of the cell. “NO! NO!” She heard the woman she was jailed with yell at the men.

When she finally did wake, Dr. Reinhardt was looking down at her, a malicious smile playing on his lips. “Hello, Agent Frost.” He let the surgical blade stroke her cheek.

She groaned, his face her least favorite thing in the entire world.

“I heard you exhibited a new development in your gifts. The guards said it came from her fingers, so-” He drew out the word as he held up her hand. “I am going to see exactly what is inside these pretty little fingers of your.”


And then she felt something piercing through her abdomen. Harsh, cold and hot at the same time. It made her breath catch in her throat and when she was able to breath again, she was coughing up something warm and metallic.

Blood.

This is it.

This is my end.

Reinhardt didn’t dress her afterwards, he only had her brought to her cell and hung upside down by her feet, letting the blood drip down into a bucket.

Cold.

Warm.

Cold.

Warm.

She felt everything. AJ couldn’t replace her pain with the thought of Bucky, she couldn’t imagine his lips kissing her skin or his fingers running down her arms. No, it was just pain. Never ending pain.

The last thing she remembered was screaming.

She saw Bucky.

And then she woke up in the future.
AJ woke up with a gasp, hands going to her abdomen to search for any wounds. The temperature in the apartment had lowered drastically – she was glad Steve woke up early each morning to explore the city.

It had been almost a week since they had gotten to New York and AJ had moved her things in from her own apartment.

Living with Steve was an adjustment.

She thought that after spending time with him at the cabin she’d be used to his constant presence. But she hadn’t grown used to it yet.

She had lived alone ever since she woke up – aside from living in one of SHIELD’s compounds while they were testing her powers – and now that she didn’t have her alone time, well, that was an adjustment. Steve usually got up every morning at 4:30 AM. He’d shower, make himself coffee (which always woke up AJ, smell - not noise.) And then leave for his run, always forgetting to lock the door when he’d leave.

So, AJ would get out of bed, walk through the apartment until she reached the door and locked it, contemplate going back to bed but would ultimately get herself a cup of coffee and be awake three hours more than she really to be. Today, Steve had left around midnight. AJ did her normal routine a couple hours earlier, and then fell back asleep on the couch, too tired to go back to her bed, and had hope that somehow if she slept in a different place that the nightmares wouldn’t come.

They did.

They always did.

Her phone went off and AJ groaned, looking at the time. 1 AM.

It was Clint.

“You do realize that I am three hours ahead of you, yes?” AJ answered, still a little breathless from the dream.

“You sound out of breath.” Clint said in concern. “Either you just had sex or you had another nightmare.” She couldn’t help but chuckle at that.

Clint was always the one she’d call after a particularly bad nightmare (flashback. Clint called it PTSD.) Clint had been the one to check up on her at the SHIELD compound when she first woke up in the future and would have nightmares that sometimes caused the entire compounds temperature to drastically drop.

He always knew.
It wasn’t her screaming that woke him up.

It was the cold.

“It’s fine, Barton.” AJ said as she got up off the couch. “But I will remind you again, 3-hour time difference between us, Buddy. It’s 1 AM in New York.”

“I know.” He replied and then pressed on, “What was the memory?”

AJ inhaled, really not wanting to talk about her dream, “Clint – don’t worry about me.” She tried to get him to drop the subject only to hear him sigh. That’s when she knew he was keeping something from her. It clicked now. How he knew exactly when to call. SHIELD was monitoring her apartment. “You sure did pick a good time to call, Clint.” Her voice grew stern. “Just after I woke up from a nightmare. If I didn’t know any better – I’d think you guys are monitoring me. But you would never let them invade my privacy like that, would you, Clint?”

“I’m not monitoring your apartment, Adge. I’m monitoring New York which had a 30 degree drop within five minutes only to drastically get back to normal after you answered the phone.”

She shook her head, running her fingers roughly through her hair. There was no use in denying what had happened, she might as well tell him her fears. “It’s getting stronger.”

“They’ve gotten worse since Steve woke up, Adge.”

Adge.

She had been called by many nicknames throughout her life.

Adelyn, AJ, Jay…Frosty. But no one had ever called her Adge (read: age)

But that’s what her friends in this century called her now.

Natasha, Clint, and at times even Coulson.

It was easy to get used to.

It was easier to fall into a new life with that nickname.

But now Steve was back and every time he’d say her name or Jay, all that pain would come back to her and she’d have to block out the memory of Bucky calling her Jay as well. Or Frosty.

“I know.” She agreed with Clint.

“Coulson said he can get you on a quinjet to New Mexico in an hour. Maybe have some time away from Rogers.”

“No,” AJ shook her head.

“Adge,”

“Don’t Adge me, Clint. You don’t have to be worried about me – I’ve got things under control. I just have to…work on my breathing or whatever Helen told me to do.” She walked into the kitchen where she could still smell the coffee Steve had made earlier. She sighed upon hearing how quiet Clint was. When he worried, he was silent. AJ leaned against the kitchen counter and tried to make her voice sound more assuring so that Clint wouldn’t be able to tell that she was lying through her teeth. “Clint, I love you for looking out for me – but I can handle this.”
"I know you can." He agreed.

She smiled. “Tell Maria she still owes me that bottle of Scotch she dropped while helping unpack everything for us last week.”

Clint chuckled, “What was it called again?”

She paused. “Uh,” AJ swallowed hard, closing her eyes. “Buchanan’s.”

AJ didn’t intend to drink the scotch. It was just something to keep close to her that reminded her of Bucky. James Buchanan Barnes.

She knew that Clint knew Bucky’s history, he read his file extensively. So, she knew that he knew why the specific brand scotch was so important to AJ.

“I’ll make sure she gets it, kid.”

That made AJ laugh, “You do realize I’m very, very much older than you, right?” She teased.

“Would you prefer I call you Grandma?”

She snorted. “No.”

“That’s what I thought, kid.”

“I’ll see you when you get back, Clint.”

They hung up and AJ cleaned herself up after having coffee. She showered, threw her hair up in a messy bun and went to where she knew Steve would be.

Goldie’s Boxing Gym.

Chasing down Captain America at 1:15 AM.

Great.
Goldie’s had changed. But not as drastically as most things in Brooklyn had changed since Steve had last been home. The world had advanced while he was frozen, so much. But Steve had always been able to adapt to things fast. Even AJ agreed.

He was worried about her.

Every night he’d listen to her toss and turn in the bedroom down the hall from his. There were times that she’d even wake up in the middle of the night and pace around their apartment. On the worst nights, he’d hear her quietly try and sneak out of the apartment and wouldn’t come home for at least two hours.

Steve had begun to notice changes.

Not just with the way she spoke or carried herself – but changes that had to do with her powers. At night, he’d be awoken by a chill in the apartment. He’d walk around to check and make sure he had closed all the windows, but the cold would be coming from AJ’s bedroom.

Nightmares.

He had them too.

Mostly it was watching Bucky fall to his death.

But AJ had gone through things a lot worse than Steve had.

He had seen the barely visible white lines on AJ’s arms, he even saw a large white line going from her neck to the bottom of her spine one time when he had walked into her bedroom without knocking. She had quickly thrown on her shirt, snapping at him for walking in unannounced.

AJ had talked to him about her abilities, and how they kept her alive. How the cold helped heal her wounds. But that they had become so fatal when Peggy found her that the only way she could fully heal was to be put in cryostasis. The cold preserved her until there came a day that technology would advance and a team of medical experts were able to heal her fully where she’d no longer need to stay in a frozen state.

A woman, a doctor, named Helen Cho had been the one to wake AJ from cryostasis. Steve had yet to meet her, he hadn’t met any of AJ’s friends. Aside from Director Fury. But he seemed to be more of a boss to AJ than a friend.

Steve threw another hard hit at the punching bag, the force of his swing nearly causing it to break apart from the chain that held it together. He sighed, resting his head against the bag as he held it still.

“You do realize that I have to pay for each bag that you end up destroying.”

Steve smiled, looking over his shoulder to see AJ leaning against the boxing ring, arms folded over her chest as she watched him in amusement.

“I’ve only broken three.”

“Four.” She corrected, pushing herself up a bit to walk over to where Steve was. Steve watched as she pointed up at chains, “One more hit – even if it was from an average joe – will send this bad boy falling to the ground, or, if it were you, flying across the room.”
Steve chuckled, facing AJ now. “You pay for it, or SHIELD pays for it?”

AJ grinned, shrugging her shoulders innocently. “Go get cleaned up – I’m taking you out to eat.” She informed him, not even giving him a chance to say no before she was walking out of the gym.

It wasn’t even 1:30 in the morning and AJ was making him go out to eat with her.

Adelyn Frost was still bossy as ever.

That was one of the things that hadn’t changed.

The 24-hour diner was in Brooklyn, around AJ’s old neighborhood. Her apartment building had been knocked down in the 60’s (that’s what AJ had told him). Steve hadn’t found the courage to go to his old apartment, but he knew there was no chance of it still being there.

“Load up on your carbs.” AJ told him as they sat down, his eyes scanning over the menu. “I suggest the French toast. It’s earth shatteringly good.”

Steve let out an amused snort at her choice of words to describe the French toast.

A waitress came up to them a while later and took AJ’s menu without her even ordering, “Coffee or tea this time, AJ?” The woman asked.

Steve looked over at AJ with a raised brow. “Coffee.” She answered.

“And you, handsome?” The woman was beautiful, blonde curls and beautiful blue eyes.


The woman grinned, clearly amused by his stammering. “Just French toast?”

“He’ll have a side of sausage, eggs, bacon, and hashbrowns.” AJ ordered for Steve. “And a cup of OJ.” She smirked at Steve, to which he narrowed his eyes at her in annoyance.

The woman laughed and wrote down the order before walking away from their booth.

“She didn’t ask for your order.” Steve said after a moment of silence where AJ moved her hand over the dog tags under her shirt.

“Yes,” AJ said just as the waitress brought AJ her coffee and Steve his cup of OJ, giving him a wink before she left. When she was gone, AJ cleared her throat and pulled Bucky’s dog tags out from under her shirt, where Steve could see a thin white line on her chest. She covered herself when she saw he had noticed it and began to talk quickly. “This is where I took Bucky on his last
night in the states.” AJ said, probably wanting to avoid Steve asking questions about the scar he had just seen.

“And you get the same dish each time you come here?”

AJ nodded her head. She closed her eyes and smiled, reliving a memory. “He put too much pepper on his eggs. Bucky said the shaker was broken but he just put too much on.” She chuckled. Steve smiled, liking the way her green eyes would twinkle whenever she spoke about Bucky. But just as soon as her happiness appeared, it’d drift away bit by bit.

“He was worried he wasn’t going to see you before he shipped off.” Steve said after watching her smile fade away. Her eyes met his as she inhaled sharply.

“You think she’ll go to this thing?” Bucky had asked.

“She might. I know she works with Stark.” Steve then looked to Bucky with a raised brow and amused expression. “What’s it matter to you? I thought we had a double date tonight?” He had smirked.

Bucky rolled his eyes and shoved Steve on the shoulder. “Punk.”

Steve smiled and kept walking. “Jerk.”

“Well, he found himself a date that night.” AJ tried to joke.

“And promptly left her the moment he saw you.” He reminded her.

Her smile was soft, but it didn’t reach her eyes. “I told him to go back to Connie. She was a nice girl – too good for Bucky.” There it was. The real smile. Steve laughed, shaking his head. “And yes, I do realize that I ended up falling in love with the man, that irony is not lost on me.”

“He loved you so much, Jay.” Steve said, causing AJ’s eyes to close. “I think he’d move all the stars in the sky if you asked him too.”

She licked at her lower lip before her eyes went back to Steve’s. “But he didn’t stay.”

The waitress came over with their food and AJ quickly changed the subject as she spread butter and jelly on her toast, peppering her eggs lightly and breaking her bacon it half. The waitress had also bought a piece of chocolate pie. Steve didn’t question it. He just sat quietly as AJ began to talk about a man named Bruce Banner, who had tried to replicate the super solider serum but had failed.

AJ had inserted herself back into the present instead of longing for her past. Steve understood. Sometimes he wished he could go back as well.

He’d have his date with Peggy, they’d dance and laugh and he’d be happy.

But, AJ still wouldn’t have Bucky.

It was not a good thing that she had gone through all she had – but it was helping her move forward. Inserting herself into the 21st century was helping heal her broken heart. He could see that. But he could still see her struggling.

AJ’s phone buzzed on the table and she frowned. Steve looked at the clock on the wall of the diner, seeing it was barely even 2 AM.
She answered her phone. “This is Frost.”

Her face formed into a worried scowl.

“When?”

Steve watched as she nodded.

“I’ll be there in fifteen.”

AJ hung up and sat up out of the booth, throwing down a twenty-dollar bill on the table as well as their house keys. “Is everything okay?” He asked, seeing her visibly shaken.

“The apartment is locked – do not forget to lock it back up when you are home. I’ll be in contact with you when I can.”

Steve stood as well, not liking the way her voice had slight tremors. He grabbed her hand, “Jay… what’s going on?” He asked again.

AJ looked at him for a long moment and eventually said once again, “I’ll be in contact with you when I can.” She said as she pulled her hand out of his grip and then left him standing alone in the diner.

He looked down at the booth that they sat at, the money on the table as well as their apartment keys. She hadn’t even gotten to eat her chocolate pie yet.

Compromised.

Barton was compromised.

She had just been talking to him not even an hour ago.

“Are you sure it’s him?” AJ asked Fury over com.
Loki of Asgard. Brother of Thor.

“Well, he made a hell of an introduction.” Silence. “He was able to take down nearly every agent in that room. Many scientists as well. Selvig and Barton and a few other agents were compromised. Loki used a weapon – we’re not entirely sure how, but it was able to control them. I watched him touch it to Barton’s chest and then he withdrawing his weapon, ready to follow Loki’s command.”

“The Tesseract?” She asked. Howard should have left it in the damn ice when he was searching for Steve. No good would come from having it – it’s what Steve ultimately died trying to prevent ever happening again.

“Gone.” Fury sighed. “Barton took it after he shot me.”

AJ took a deep breath, “But he made it out?”

“Killing a few hundred agents in the process. Yes.” He confirmed. “The compound is destroyed. Anyone that was still inside are dead. There’s no way anyone could survive that kind of destruction. It’s a damn sinkhole now.”

“Hill and Coulson?”

“They got out.”

AJ ran her hands over her face, trying to take deep calming breaths. The kind that Helen Cho had taught her to do when she was too triggered by her own emotions.

“This is a Level 7, Agent Frost. As of right now; we are at war.” He told AJ. “We’re having agents bring in Rogers. He’ll be with you soon enough.”

“That’s not going to work.” AJ told Fury. “He won’t trust random agents – he needs someone he knows and trusts to bring him in.”

“Well, I’d have you go but you are needed elsewhere. So, I’ll go to Rogers myself. Do you have any idea where he’ll be?”

“Goldie’s Boxing Gym.” She knew it’s where he’d go. Not to their apartment like she instructed him to. Steve wasn’t one to sit around and worry, he needed to work out those worries by punching a bag. And, Steve never listened to her when she made orders. “Where do you need me?”

“Stay on the Helicarrier. Coulson will be there shortly and the two of you are going to bring in Stark.”

Fury disconnected from her and AJ stood in place, closing her eyes as she tried to steady her rapidly beating heart. Fury was trusting her – no, believing in her enough to go bring in Stark with Coulson. When a few months ago she wasn’t allowed to step within 200 yards of the man. Fury knew he was a trigger – he knew what Howard had meant to AJ and knew that when it came to her old life, her powers became unpredictable when emotions surfaced that she had tried to keep buried down since waking up.

She could do this.

Fury believed in her.

And she believed in herself.
Coulson arrived and debriefed her on what had happened at the desert compound.

“I wasn’t inside, I was helping evacuate the building when he came through the portal. I don’t know where the Hell he came from – Asgard? I would assume he’d be public enemy number one there. AJ? Adge? Earth to Frost.”

She looked up at Coulson, trying to focus. “Yes, I’m sorry. I’m just-”

“On edge. Understandable.” He nodded. “I’m sure you would prefer to meet the son of one of your oldest friends on different non-end-of-the-world type of circumstances.”

AJ let out a huff as she smiled at Coulson’s words. “You took the words right out of my mouth, Phil.” She said sweetly, giving him a cheeky grin. “How are we going to get him to talk with us?” AJ asked, knowing that the Stark men were incredibly stubborn.

“I figured I’d call him. And if that doesn’t work, hack into his security system and let ourselves in.”

After a few attempts to get in touch with Tony, Coulson looked over at AJ and gave her a quick nod, letting her know that they’d need to override the system. She pulled off the device given to her by Hill and pressed it against the building until it locked into place, creating the security system to breach and Coulson was able to get through to Tony.

“Mr. Stark, we need to talk.” AJ heard Coulson say through the comms.

“You have reached the Life Model Decoy of Tony Stark. Please leave a message.”

AJ motioned for Coulson to follow her as the elevator doors opened for them. “This is urgent.” Coulson said as they took the elevator up to the top floor.

“Then leave it urgently.” Tony remarked.

The elevator doors opened revealing Coulson and AJ.

“Security breach!” Tony said as he looked at them both. “That’s on you.” AJ heard him mumble to the woman with strawberry blonde hair sitting next to him: Pepper Potts.

“Phil! Come in!” She said happily.

Tony made a face, “Uh – Phil?”

“I can’t stay long,” Coulson said as he and AJ walked up to where Pepper met them.

“Uh, his first name is Agent.” Tony said, following behind Pepper. His eyes met AJ’s briefly before he turned his attention back to Pepper.

“Come on in, we’re celebrating!” Pepper said with a smile.

Tony gave a fake smile. “Which is why they can’t stay.” He looked to AJ once more before his eyes focused back on Pepper when she began to speak again.

“I don’t think we’ve met. I’m Pepper Potts.” She held out her hand for AJ to grab. She smiled, moving to grab a hold of Peppers hands only to have her wince slightly, “Your hands are freezing! How cold is it outside?” She asked, looking out at the large windows in the room to see what the weather looked like.
AJ quickly moved her hands behind her back, holding them together tightly. “AJ.” She introduced herself. “I work with SHIELD.”

Pepper smiled again, “It’s very nice to meet you.”

Coulson interrupted them, pulling out a laptop. “We need you to look this over, as soon as possible.”

“I don’t like being handed things,” Tony began only to have Pepper interrupt him.

“That’s fine because I love to be handed things, so let’s trade.” She gave Phil her glass of champagne as she took the laptop, but only briefly as she then took away Tony’s glass of champagne and handed him the laptop.

Tony huffed, “Official consulting hours are between eight and five every other Thursday.”

“This isn’t a consultation.” AJ said, looking directly at Tony. He seemed taken back by that.

“Is this about the Avengers?” Pepper asked causing both Phil and AJ to turn their heads sharply to look at the woman. “Which I know nothing about.”

Tony walked away. “The Avengers Initiative was scrapped, I thought. And I didn’t even qualify.”

“I didn’t know that either.” Pepper said innocently.

AJ fought hard not to laugh.

“Yeah, apparently, I’m volatile, self-obsessed, don’t play well with others.”

“That I did know.” Pepper said causing AJ to smile.

“This isn’t about personality profiles anymore. Your name was brought back up by someone important who sees past your negative attributes.” Phil said causing AJ to smirk.

“Whatsoever! Ms. Potts, got a sec?”

Pepper excused herself and AJ looked to Coulson with a cocked eyebrow in reference to his previous comment. Important, she mouthed with a smirk. Coulson rolled his eyes and looked back over to where Pepper and Tony talked quietly.

They both watched as Tony grabbed a hold of the holograms on the laptop and throw them up so that the holograms filled the room showing each pick for the Avengers Initiative.

Bruce Banner, Thor, and Steve.

“I’m going to take the jet to DC tonight.” Pepper said after observing everything.

“Tomorrow.” Tony objected.

“You have homework. You have a lot of homework.”

“Well, what if I didn’t?” Tony replied.

“If you didn’t? You mean when you finish? Well, um, then-” She began to whisper in Tony’s ear, changing his mind drastically.
“Square deal. Fly safe.”

They kissed and when they pulled apart, Pepper leaned in and said softly, “Work hard.” She then walked over to where Phil and AJ stood. “So, any chance you’re driving by LaGuardia?”

“We can drop you off.” Coulson agreed.

“Fantastic, Ooh, I want to hear about the ah-cellist! Is that still a thing?” Pepper went on as she followed after Coulson towards the elevator.

“You.” Tony said loudly causing the three of them to turn and face him. “Female Agent. I’d like a private word with you.”

AJ looked to Coulson who gave her a nod of approval. “I’ll wait for you at the car.” He told her as he and Pepper got into the elevator.

She moved to walk forward only to see that Tony was now standing closer than he had before, looking at her with his head inclined. “Is there something I can help you with, Mr. Stark?” AJ kept her voice steady.

He stood in front of her now, eyes squinting as he looked to her face. “Your name?” He asked.

She licked at her lower lip before putting on an unreadable face. “Agent.” She replied.

Tony smirked. He tilted his head again and studied her face yet again. “I know you.” He told her.

“We’ve met.”

“I don’t forget faces and I have seen yours before, I am sure of it.” Tony took a step back, almost as if he were trying to force some memory of her into his mind. It wouldn’t work. She had never meant Tony until today. Though, she had wanted to meet him for a while now.

“Maybe I just have one of those faces.” She shrugged her shoulders innocently.

Tony moved back and reached for the glass of champagne Coulson had set down before leaving. “You know who says things like that?”

“No.” AJ replied.

He looked over his shoulder, “People who are pretending they have never met before.”

AJ couldn’t help but laugh, “Trust me, Mr. Stark – If we have met before, I would have remembered it.”

Tony turned to look at her, brows raised with an amused smile.

AJ scoffed, rolling her eyes. “Get your head out of the gutter.” Filth! Something she had said to Howard many times. It made her pause and look down at the phone in her hand. “I need to be going now – unless you’d like Ms. Potts to miss her flight to DC.”

He squinted his eyes at her once again before finally nodding, “Yes. go on now, Agent-Agent. I’m sure the world needs saving.”

AJ left Tony watching after her as she disappeared into the elevator to meet up with Coulson. He was waiting outside while Pepper was on the phone in the car. “Does he know who you are?” Phil
asked AJ as she walked around to the passenger side.

“Not yet. But I have a feeling he’s stubborn enough to figure it out.”

Would it be the worst thing for Tony to find out?

Her records were classified, only a few agents knew who she was. If word got out that Steve Rogers wasn’t the only person to metaphorically travel in time via ice (cryostasis) – they’d ask questions. Questions AJ could not answer.

She was not a super solider.

Steve was. *That* is how he was able to stay alive and preserved through time.

AJ couldn’t really go around telling fellow agents that she had been working with for the past two years that she was actually a powered-person, and that the only reason why she had survived was because of her abilities. That through the many decades her cells had regenerated rapidly in order to heal herself while she was kept in the chamber - and that’s why she had never aged. It was too much.

Someday she’d explain it all.

Just not today.

That would be a nightmare.

Chapter End Notes

kudos and comments are greatly appreciated!
Legends

Chapter Notes

please forgive any spelling errors or mistakes, I think faster than I type and sometimes get things jumbled!

OC MASTERLIST

See the end of the chapter for more notes
FEBRUARY 14th 1944
London, England

“Do you think it’ll ever end?”

His voice caused her to open her eyes and turn her head a bit to look up at him. “Hmm?” She hummed, the sun warm against her skin on this February day. Her birthday. Bucky had gone to Carter and asked if he could take AJ out for the day to celebrate her birthday. Peggy worked her magic and convinced Colonel Phillips that she would need both Bucky and Adelyn for the day. When really, Bucky had the whole day planned where it was just the two of them in a part of London that hadn’t been hit by the war too badly.

It was a nice little park, the grass still green, the pond in front of them was still and the tree they sat under had just the right amount of shade to keep the sun out of their eyes.

AJ had her back pressed against Bucky’s chest, his arms wrapped around her middle as they sat in a serene silence. It was always so easy to just sit with Bucky and be comfortable with the silence. It was familiar, it was something she couldn’t really understand. But sometimes as they sat together in complete silence, AJ wondered what it’d be like to do just that years from now when they were old and wrinkled.

The thought didn’t scare her and it didn’t surprise her.

Because even though it had taken her a long time to admit it (to even herself) – she saw a future with Bucky. And if there was one thing in the entire world that she was sure of, that she believed in with her whole heart; it was her feelings for Bucky. It was Bucky.

“The war?”

AJ frowned, her fingers skimming against his arm. “This war will end.” She told him. “But do I think that this will be the last war ever?” She shook her head, “No. Sadly. The last war; the war to end all wars – It wasn’t too long ago and yet here we are.” She moved Bucky’s arms up a bit so they fell just above her chest that way AJ could nuzzle her face against them. “I think that when there are people like Adolf Hitler and Johann Schmidt in the world, there will always be chaos. And chaos leads to war.”

Bucky sighed, pressing a kiss to the side of her head causing AJ to close her eyes and hold onto his arms a little tighter, her lips pressing against his arm. “Maybe we’ll catch a break.” He said after a moment. “Maybe the next war won’t be until we’re old and gray.”

AJ chuckled, pressing another kiss to his arm before she craned her neck to look up at him. She
was smiling up at him and Bucky had an amused smirk playing on his lips. “I can picture it now – you and your gray hair.”

He chuckled. “Would I still be handsome?”

“Still?” She teased causing him to playfully roll his eyes. “Yes, Bucky, you’ll still be incredibly handsome – I don’t know how any woman would be able to contain themselves around you with your gray hair and wrinkled face.”

He smirked, “I only need one woman to think I’m still handsome.”

AJ raised her brows up at him with an amused smile and then moved her face so she was nuzzled against his arm again, trying to hide the pink tint against her cheeks.

“What are you going to do when we defeat the Nazi’s and Hydra?” Bucky asked next, and though she couldn’t see his face, she could hear the smile in his tone.

“I’m not sure,” AJ spoke honestly. “Howard said that he could use someone like me working for him - but…I kind of want to be my own boss. Or, someone else’s. At Camp McCoy, even though it wasn’t for long – I really did like being lead scientist. I liked that I wasn’t questioned or looked-over by some man because I happen to have breasts. I know that I am smart, I know that I am capable of a lot more than anyone believes I am.”

Bucky pressed a kiss to her head. “Anyone who thinks you won’t change the world someday is a damn fool. You already have, Frosty, Steve is proof of that!”

“But it wasn’t just me,” She began to say, wanting Dr. Erskine and Howard to get the credit they deserved, but Bucky stopped her from saying anything further.

“I know how much Dr. Erskine meant to you, how much he still means to you – but if it wasn’t for you? He would have never finished the super soldier serum. Your work is what helped create it. If you hadn’t, Steve would still be a scrappy little punk.”

She smiled, looking up at him again, squinting her eyes at him playfully before she moved up more and met his lips in a sweet kiss. “You’re a flatterer, James Buchanan Barnes.”

“And you’re a genius, Adelyn Juliet Frost. And someday the whole world will know it – I’ll shout it from every rooftop in Brooklyn if I have too.”

AJ laughed, shaking her head a bit. After a moment, she asked him the same question. “What are you going to do when we defeat the Nazi’s and Hydra?”

She felt his chest rumble and smiled, “Who knows.” He replied. And then spoke again, “I’m going to build a house.”

AJ moved herself out of his arm and moved so she was facing him. “A house you say?” She grinned.

Bucky nodded his head, moving forward to hold her hands in his. “A big house. With an apartment over the garage for Steve to live in.” He added causing AJ to laugh.

“I got news for you, Buck – Steve is pretty smitten with Agent Carter and I doubt she’d ever want to live in an apartment over your garage.” She teased. Bucky smiled at her, almost as if he was holding back from saying something. “I’m sure you wouldn’t be entirely alone – that you’d have company over at your house.” She looked down at their linked hands. AJ looked back up at him
with a grin, “Frequently.”

Bucky shook his head and grinned, moving so himself to lay AJ down on the ground where he hovered over her, his left hand running through her dark curls while the other hand kept him from falling right on top of her.

“Promise?” He smirked.

AJ nodded, her face serious, “Always.”

“Happy birthday, Frosty.” He whispered before leaning his face down, kissing her deeply.

It was probably the best birthday AJ had ever had.

Nothing else would ever compare.
Steve sat next to AJ on the jet that would take them to the ship-carrier, during their flight, AJ had given him what she called a tablet, where he watched footage of the man who had tried to replicate the super soldier serum but had greatly failed.

The man; Bruce Banner, he morphed into something that some might call monstrous – something that could have happened to him if AJ and Erskine hadn’t perfected the serum. He had picked up a military tank and threw it yards away. Not to mention that the man had turned green and much, much bigger.

When Agent Coulson walked over to where AJ and Steve sat, Steve finally spoke.

“So, this Dr. Banner was trying to replicate the serum they used on me?”

He didn’t know who knew that AJ had worked on the serum – the military and the SSR had tried to keep that classified, not wanting her to be a target for Hydra. Though, in the end, they ultimately got to her.

“A lot of people were. You were the worlds first superhero.” Coulson told Steve, but he kept his eyes trained on the tablet he held in his hands. “Banner thought Gamma radiation might hold the key to unlocking Erskine’s original formula.”

AJ shifted in the seat next to him.

“Didn’t really go his way, did it?” Steve frowned.

“Not so much.” Coulson agreed. “When he’s not that thing though, guy’s like a Stephen Hawking.”

Steve looked to the agent with raised brows. *Stephen who?*

“He’s like a – smart person.”

Steve looked over to AJ briefly to see her biting down on her lip in amusement.

AJ had been quiet since they took off from New York. He had asked her how her meeting with Tony went but she didn’t say much. It was like she was lost in her own head, her brows pinching together like they would whenever he would walk into the lab at the SSR and find her trying to work what equations Erskine may have used while working on Project Rebirth.

“I gotta say,” Coulson said, gaining Steve’s attention again. “It’s an honor to meet you, officially.” Steve gave him a friendly smile. “I sort of met you, I mean – I watched you while you were sleeping.” Steve raised his brows, looking to AJ briefly before he stood up, clearly uncomfortable, but finding the situation very humorous. “I mean, I was, I was present, while you were unconscious from the uh, ice.”

Steve made his way over to the pilot, hearing AJ let out a little snort before whisper to Coulson, “Real smooth, buddy.”

“You know, it’s really – it’s just a – just a huge honor to have you on board, it’s…”

Steve looked out at the sea as they flew above it. Fury said that they needed him. That he needed to save the world again. What if he couldn’t this time?
“Well, I hope I’m the man for the job.” Steve said quietly, not wanting AJ to hear the doubt in his tone.

“Oh, you are! Absolutely. Uh – we made some modifications to the uniform.” Coulson said, causing Steve to look at him again. “I had a little design input.”

Steve was confused, “The uniform?” He said back. “Aren’t the stars and stripes a little…old-fashioned?”

“Everything that’s happening, the things that are about to come to light…people might just need a little old-fashioned.”

AJ walked up to them just as the jet flew over a giant carrier in the ocean. “What do you think?” She pressed her hand to his back as she stood a little bit behind him. Steve turned and looked down at her, brows raised; she knew he had seen things like this during the war. “Pretty advanced, hu?” She smirked. He shrugged, not seeing anything special about the carrier other than some more advanced jets. “It’s okay – I near fainted the first time I saw it too, you don’t have to be embarrassed.”

They landed and AJ walked out first before Steve and Coulson, walking up to a woman with short red hair. He watched as the red head smiled at AJ, pressing her hand to her shoulder before AJ walked past her and went on her way, leaving Steve alone with Coulson, and now the woman with short read hair.

“Agent Romanoff,” Coulson said once they were standing in front of the woman. “Captain Rogers.” He introduced them.

“Ma’am.”

“Hi.” She said briefly, the smile she wore for AJ masked now. “They need you on the bridge – they’re starting the face trace, Adge is already on her way but another set of eyes can always help.”

Coulson nodded, “See you there.” Coulson said, leaving Steve and Agent Romanoff to walk to where ever they were going together.

“It was quiet the buzz around here, finding you in the ice. I thought Coulson was gonna swoon.” She said causing Steve to give into a crooked little grin as they walked on. “Did he ask you to sign his Captain America trading cards yet?”

Steve looked over to Agent Romanoff, amused. “Trading cards?”

“They’re vintage. He’s very proud.” Romanoff replied. “And yes, it is childish – as was him asking Adge to tell him countless stories about the forties, and yet he still did.”

Adge? Wait…AJ?

Steve stopped walking and looked at the back of her head. AJ hadn’t mentioned anyone other than Fury knowing she was from the forties – not while they were at the Retreat or since they had been back.

“How,”

He stopped when he saw someone walking around, awkwardly bumping into people as he tried to observe the carrier. Steve recognized him – the man he was before turning into what his file had referred to him as; The Hulk.
“Dr. Banner.” Steve said, walking over to where the man stood, trying to stay out of the way. *Or calm?*

Dr. Banner met him hallway, shaking his hand once he was standing in front of Steve. “Oh, yeah, hi. They told me you’d be coming,” He continued to look around the large carrier.

“Word is you can find the Cube.” Steve said.

Dr. Banner looked around before looking back to Steve. “Is that the only word on me?” He asked. *Do you know what I am?* Steve was sure Dr. Banner was thinking.

“Only word I care about.” He made clear, wanting to put Dr. Banner at ease.

Dr. Banner nodded and motioned around them. “Must be strange for you – all of this.”

Steve smiled, watching men and women that he assumed to be agents doing drills he had done while in the army. “Well, this is actually kind of familiar.”

Agent Romanoff interrupted either of them from saying anything further, “Gentlemen, you might wanna step inside in a minute. It’s gonna get a little hard to breathe.”

Steve and Dr. Banner both looked back at Romanoff for clarification, only to feeling the carrier rumbling and the sound of engines starting. Steve walked forward, hearing over the intercom; *Flight Mode. Secure the deck.*

Steve and Banner made their way over to the edge of the helicarrier after hearing the sound of loud whirring and clunking noises from down below.

“Is this a submarine?” Steve asked, still confused.

Dr. Banner let out a little huff of a laugh, “Really? They want me in a submerged pressurized metal container?”

Once they were at the very edge of the carrier, they both watched in awe (well, Steve, not Dr. Banner) as propellers began to emerge out of the water and spin – lifting the carrier into the air.

Steve took a step back, almost in a state of shock at what he was seeing, but Dr. Banner stayed put, shaking his head in amusement.

“Oh, no, this is much worse.” Banner commented with a little chuckle.

Once they were safely inside, Steve and Dr. Banner followed Agent Romanoff into what she had called *‘the bridge’* where she left them to go off on her own, her duty to bring them in was over – so she went on her way. Dr. Banner wondered off on his own as well, while Steve shook his head with a little smile as he observed everything. It was all very busy, many SHIELD employees working at their various stations and communicating over their own ear pieces.

This was the Peggy, it was Howard – it was the future they had created. He understood why AJ so willingly joined SHIELD. Though, he wasn’t as trusting – he could see what attracted her to the job.

Steve spotted AJ standing next to Agent Coulson, her arms were folded over her chest and her face was pinched in frustration. He frowned, not liking how stressed out AJ clearly was – especially in a room full of people who he knew had no idea what might happen when AJ can’t calm down.
But he knew she could handle herself – this was her environment now. If she had been able to keep her powers a secret for over two years now, he was sure she could do it now too.

He made his way over to where Dr. Banner was, finding Fury there as well.

“Gentlemen,” Fury addressed them.

Steve instantly pulled out some cash and slipped Director Fury a ten-dollar bill from their bet earlier about nothing be able to surprise Steve anymore.

Fury chuckled and Steve looked to back to where AJ had been, only to not find her where she had just been. He walked away from Fury and tried to locate her.

He found her crouching down next to Agent Romanoff, the two of them talking quietly as they looked at one of the screens, a picture of a man on it that they both seemed incredibly worried about.

“-We’re sweeping every wirelessly accessible camera on the planet, cellphones,” He understood now – the screen AJ and Romanoff was watching so closely was doing scan on the mans face, trying to match it. “Laptops, if it’s connected to a satellite, it’s eyes and ears for us.”

“It’s still not gonna find them in time.” Romanoff said.

Steve walked over to where AJ was still crouched, watching the screen. “Who is he?” He asked, causing AJ to look up at him.

She swallowed, standing up and pulling Steve to the side. “He’s an Agent with SHIELD.” She explained.

“A friend, I assume?” Steve asked.

AJ nodded, avoiding his eyes. “One of the first I made here.”

“The redhead as well?” Steve asked, “She knew about you – about the forties. As does Agent Coulson, apparently.”

AJ narrowed her eyes at him, a way of telling him to quiet down. “Only a few people know. Coulson, Natasha, and Barton,” she gestured to the screen where his face was still being scanned was, “-are one of the few that do. Because they were there when I woke up.”

Steve was surprised to hear that. “You never mentioned them.”

AJ sighed, motioning for him to follow her. He did and they stood off to the side where he assumed AJ believed no one could hear them, “I know what it’s like waking up in the 21st century, Steve. I wanted my focus to be about you these past few weeks – after you first wake, it’s a very vulnerable time, I needed to get you adjusted to the new world.” AJ explained. She then smiled a little, nudging him a bit, “My social life would have been brought up eventually.” She teased.

Steve blew air out of his nose as a laugh, shaking his head.

AJ smiled and then spoke again, “Have a look around – it’ll blow your mind.”

“Where will you be?” Steve asked her.

“I got to suit up.” She said, motioning to her normal clothes compared to all the other SHIELD
agents. He grinned as he watched her walk away.

He knew technology advanced – he saw the car AJ drove to the Retreat turn invisible – but a flying ship? That was something new. Not to mention everything inside the damn thing! He was so proud of Peggy and the legacy she and Howard had created.

Steve just wished he could have been there to build it with her.

It was odd having Steve around while she was working. He hadn’t seen her in this type of setting before – yes, he had been around while she worked with the SSR – but he had never seen her in action. She stayed behind a beaker most of the time during her SSR days, and when she did go on a mission, Steve was someplace else.

Bucky had never seen it either – he never watched her fight and succeed, it was a side that neither of her boys had seen back in the 40’s.

*Her boys.*

It’s what they had been.

Bucky Barnes: the love of her life, and Steve Rogers: her very best friend.

AJ knew that anything thrown her way she would handle gracefully and successfully, if there was an attack and she had to fight – she believed in herself enough to defeat the enemy. It had been a while since she was able to properly train since Steve had woken up – but she doubted any of the men Loki took would be able to take her down.

*Well…* Clint might be able too.

He and Natasha did train her. He’d know her every move before she even did them. He knew her, knew her fighting style, but *worst;* he knew her weakness. AJ just hoped that she wouldn’t have to
fight against Clint – that somehow, they could bring him back to their side.

Whatever mind control Loki had both Barton and Selvig (and multiple SHIELD agents) under was strong. He had *shot* at Fury.

…But he hadn’t taken the kill shot.

Maybe there was hope?

“Agent Frost, Loki has been detected by our scans. Meet at the bridge. You’re going with Romanoff and Rogers.” Maria Hill said through the comm.

AJ took a deep breath and shut her locker door closed after shoving the clothes she had worn on board in the metal container. She caught a look at herself before she left the lockers, dressed in her SHIELD uniform.

Whether Steve Rogers was ready for it or not – he was about to see Adelyn Frost in action.

**STUTTGART, GERMANY**

Using the quinjet, they arrived just as Loki began to wreak havoc.

Steve jumped out right as Loki aimed his weapon at an older man with the intent to kill. Steve used his SHIELD for the first time since he got out of the ice and saved the old man and caused Loki to fall to his knees. AJ let out a breath of relief knowing that the man was safe.

Natasha and AJ could hear Steve over the comm system.

“You know, the last time I was in Germany and saw a man standing above everybody else – we ended up disagreeing.”

“The soldier-” Loki said in a snarl as he got to his feet. “-The man out of time.”

Steve shook his head, “I’m not the one who’s out of time.”
The reflectors that kept the quinjet hidden disappeared, allowing Loki to see that Steve had help behind him.

Natasha began to speak over the speaker system while AJ typed in the controls to access the guns under the ship, pointing them right at the God of Mischief, “Loki, drop the weapon and stand down.”

Loki was quick, aiming his scepter at the jet – but they had already seen that one coming and the jet moved swiftly out of the way to avoid the blast.

Steve threw his SHIELD at Loki as the people around them began to flee and charged at the God, balling his hand into a fist and taking a swing at Loki. He barely even flinched before fighting back, sending Steve flying into one of the statues outside the museum.

AJ held her breath as she watched Loki stand over Steve, his specter to his head, “Kneel,” She heard Loki hiss.

“Not today!” Steve now fought back.

“Do we have the shot?” Natasha asked, knowing that AJ’s attention was not on the screen. Her green eyes quickly went to the monitor in front of her, seeing if there was any way they could fire at Loki without multiple people getting hurt in the process. “-No. Steve, try to get this guy to move a little more to the right,” AJ said over comm.

“I’m a little busy, AJ.” Steve grunted, still fighting Loki.

“Oh, is Agent Frost up there?” Natasha looked to AJ after Loki spoke, not knowing what to do. If they turned off the coms – they’d be silent to everyone back at the Helicarrier. Loki’s tone meant that he knew AJ’s secret – probably both of them. “Oh, Agent Barton has told me much about her.” He chuckled.

Steve threw a punch so hard at Loki that he stumbled backwards.

“Oh – have I struck a nerve?” Loki laughed.

Natasha looked over to AJ and she could only reply, “He’s right in the line of a bunch of people – we don’t have the shot!” I can’t shut him up.

And then they heard something come in through the comm system. “Agent Romanoff, you miss me?”

AJ recognized the voice just from the cockiness – Tony Stark was here. She looked down at the screens in front of her to see a message appear, ‘PA SYSTEM OVERRIDE’ and then very loud music began to blast from the quinjet.

Natasha huffed out a laugh, “Stark.”

“Quite the dramatic entrance.” AJ replied while Tony flew down in his Iron Man suit and fired a repulse blast, knocking Loki down.

“Make a move reindeer games.” They heard Tony say over comm to Loki.

AJ looked to Natasha in confusion who simple shook her head with a sigh, “Not a reference worth needing to remember, trust me.”
Natasha flew the jet just above where Steve and Tony were standing over Loki, “Mr. Stark,” Steve said, sounding out of breath.

“Captain.”

The quinjet landed and Steve and Tony brought in Loki.

This was too easy.

Once everyone was on board, Steve walked up to AJ and told her to stay in the cockpit, not wanting her anywhere near Loki. “Steve, I’m not a child – I’m not going to hide from him, that’s not my job. My job is to bring him in and question him.” She said, moving past him. Steve grabbed her by the wrist, trying to stop her, but AJ pulled away and made her way to Loki.

“He’s fond of you,” Loki said once AJ was standing in front of him. “Though, I can see why.”

His smile reminded her of one she had seen in a movie that Theo had her watch one day – Alice in Wonderland – he had even rented it for her and after their mission, she had gone home and watched it just so he would shut up about it.

“Why did you come here, Loki?” She ignored his comments.

“That is a very good question – one I have wondered for quite some time. Why come to Midgard? I don’t see why my brother loves it so much.” He tilted his head at AJ, “You were there when my brother saved your people – Agent Barton told me so,” He did the grin again, “He told me many things about you Agent Frost,” He put emphasis on her name.

He knew about her powers.

“You look quite well for your age – considering.” He added. Okay, so he knew everything. “Very beautiful.”


He sighed, leaning his head against the metal of the jet. “I’m afraid I can’t tell you that just yet, darling. But you will see.”

“-AJ, I need you up front,” Natasha said from the cockpit causing her to look away from Loki.

When she looked back at him, he was grinning again. “I don’t think they want you alone with me.”

AJ walked away from Loki and walked up to the front of the jet where Steve and Tony were speaking to one another.

“I don’t like this,” Steve said once AJ was standing in front of him.

Tony spoke before she could, “What? Rock of Ages giving up so easily?”

“I don’t remember it being that easy,” His eyes met AJ’s briefly, “This guy packs a wallop.”

“Still, you were pretty spry, for an older fellow.” Tony said and then looked to Steve. “What’s your thing? Pilates?”

“What?” Steve said in confusion, then looked to AJ to explain.

“It’s a type of workout.” AJ clarified.
“Yeah, it’s like calisthenics. You might have missed a couple thing… Y’know, doing time as a Capsicle.” Tony said nonchalantly.

Steve was clearly not amused by the nickname, “Fury didn’t tell me he was calling you in.” He said and then looked down at AJ with raised brows. She shrugged, from their last talk – AJ honestly thought Tony wouldn’t come.

“Yeah, there’s a lot of things Fury doesn’t tell you.”

A bolt of lightning struck right in front of them.

Thunder.

_Lots_ of thunder.

AJ moved past Steve and Tony and into the cockpit, looking up at the sky. “Where the hell is this coming from?” She sat down in her seat and began to go over the weather patterns. The storm just appeared out of nowhere.

“What’s the matter? Scared of a little lightening?” AJ could hear Steve say to Loki.

“I’m not overly fond of what follows.”

And then it came to her. She had seen weather patterns like this before – in New Mexico!

“Thor.” AJ said as she looked to Natasha.

There was a thud on the roof of the jet and they all look up, even Loki who was still shackled. The jet shook and they were beginning to lose control over it. AJ helped Natasha, not paying attention to Steve and Tony while she focused on trying to not let them all die from the plane crashing. They were catching more speed but the storm surrounding them was making it impossible for AJ to see her surroundings – she yelled out commands to Natasha who followed them to try and get them out of the storm.

But then the back opened for the ramp to lower, “What are you doing!?” Both AJ and Steve yelled at the same time, but AJ kept her eyes focused on the storm in front of her.

She heard Tony’s suit start up only to feel a thud against the back of her seat, her head turning to see that Tony was now on the ground. AJ watched as Thor grabbed Loki by the neck and jumped out of the jet.

Tony stood up, “And now there’s _that_ guy,” He said in annoyance.

“That is Thor, right?” Natasha yelled over the winds to AJ, “That’s not just some pissed off Asgardian – it’s Thor?”

“It’s Thor.” AJ replied.

“That guy’s friendly.” Steve said, getting up after being knocked down when Tony was thrown by Thor.

“.Doesn’t matter. If he frees Loki or kills him, the Tesseract’s lost.” Tony said, walking to the edge of the ramp now.

“Stark, we need a plan of attack.”
“I have a plan,” He said once he was at the edge. “Attack.” Tony flew out of the jet and Steve scrambled to find a parachute.

“Sit this one out, Steve.” AJ yelled.

“I can’t, AJ.” He replied, strapping the parachute on him. “You know that.”

Natasha intervened, trying to help AJ. “-These guys come from legend, Cap. They’re basically Gods.”

“They are Gods!” AJ emphasized. “You won’t win going against them by throwing a few punches.”

Steve shook his head, “There’s only one God, AJ, and I’m pretty sure he doesn’t dress like that.” He said as he grabbed his shield and dove out the plane head first.

AJ took in yet another deep breath to calm herself down. The storm was clearing up and it seemed that it was her that would have to get used to going into battle with Steve, not the opposite. “He’s going to give me a goddamn stroke.” She said in frustration.

“Oh, come on, you knew him back then – does it really surprise you that he’d do something like that?” Natasha smirked only to have AJ narrow her eyes at the redhead.

“Exactly. The last time he did something that reckless was when he crashed into the artic in 1945 and wasn’t found until a few weeks ago.”

If Steve died again, AJ swore she’d kill him. And yes, she knew that was a contradiction – but she was pissed off enough to not care.

This is what Bucky must have always felt like before the war and Steve would pick a fight with guys twice his size – a constant state of stress, fearing that Steve would do something that would get himself killed.

She didn’t like it.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos and comments are always appreciated! I hope you all liked this update! Thanks for reading!
Please forgive any typos or mistakes, I think faster than I type and sometimes things get jumbled!

See the end of the chapter for more notes
They were back on the Helicarrier, the skies dark around them while they hovered over the Atlantic Ocean. AJ briefed with Fury about her conversation with Loki and how Barton had revealed to him just who and what AJ was, or, what she could do. Fury brows had furrowed and his lips twisted in frustration.

“We knew that might happen,” He had told her, watching as troop of armed guards who worked for SHIELD had brought in Loki, the God of Mischief had smirked when he walked past AJ and Fury, his eyes lingering on the female agent.

He could expose her secrets.

AJ wasn’t ready for that.

“Agent,” Tony Stark walked up to where AJ was standing, watching as Steve spoke with Coulson from across the area. AJ looked away from the super solider and her eyes met Tony’s.

“How can I help you, Mr. Stark?” She asked him.

He smiled, “I have something for you. I was going to give it to you on the plane ride back – but with the prisoner on board, I thought it might not be the most appropriate time.” He dug something out of his pocket. “Also, the walking L'Oreal add crashed the party and I became distracted.”

AJ raised her brows, tired and slightly annoyed, wanting Tony to just get on with it.

He presented her with a picture.

She held the picture in her hands, her eyes trained on the image. Three people were in this picture. Dr. Erskine, Howard, and AJ. They had taken the picture the day they had perfected the serum completely. They all looked so thrilled, Howards smile bigger than ever, Dr. Erskine had pride in his eyes as he smiled wide. And AJ, dressed in her lab coat with her hair done up so it was out of her face, beamed. That had been such a happy day.

AJ felt her breath catch in her throat, her finger skimming over Howard and Erskine’s faces, trying to recall the very moment.

“Dr. Adelyn Frost.” Tony said, causing AJ to look away from the picture and up at him. “My father talked about you constantly when I was a child.” AJ looked away from Tony, but he went on. “I just don’t understand how you are standing right in front of me looking the exact same age as you did in this picture. You might have changed your hair, doc, but your face gives you away.”

AJ looked back at Tony, biting down on the inside of her cheek. “It’s a long story, Tony.” She decided to say.

“Oh, I have time.” Tony leaned up against the railing, crossing his arms over his chest. “Dear ol’ Dad told me that you died back in the forties. “Feel free to explain now.”

She shook her head, “Another time.” She moved to walk away but Tony grabbed her by the arm,
stopping her from walking away. “Hands off – or you won’t have hands anymore.” AJ said with a glare, not liking being man-handled. It had happened too much in the forties and her mind couldn’t help but drift back to that day at Camp McCoy when Dr. Bateman had slapped her around.

Now she was capable of defending herself without any help.

But she’d give anything to have Bucky here to step in. Because that would mean that he was alive.

“How are you here?” Tony stressed the word.

“Do we have a problem here?”

AJ closed her eyes, dreading what was bound to happen.

Steve walked over to where Tony and AJ were, where Tony still kept his hand wrapped around her arm. “Oh, no problem, Cap. Adelyn here was just about to tell me how she is even here.” He took the picture out of AJ’s hand and thrust it forward, smacking it against Steve’s chest.

It was her moment to escape from Tony’s grip, which she did. But she placed herself between Steve and Tony and looked up to her friend.

He was already giving Tony a weird look, more than likely confused as to why Tony referred to AJ as Adelyn, since no one in this time (except for him on certain occasions,) ever called her by her actual name. And then he looked down at the picture.

His eyes quickly moved from looking down at the picture to looking at AJ. “It’s fine, Steve.” She tried to assure him, not wanting him to make a bigger deal out of the situation that it granted.

“We’re going to walk away now,” She rest her hands-on Steve’s chest, trying to get him away from Tony. She looked over her shoulder as she got Steve to begin to walk backwards and away from the man. “And Tony and I will have a long conversation when the world isn’t about to end. You have my word.”

Tony huffed, arms folded over his chest again. “Sure thing,” he spoke sarcastically and walked away.

AJ prayed that he’d let her tell him about her story and that he wouldn’t blurt out to everyone that she was actually in her nineties, something it did not say in her SHIELD record (well, the one that wasn’t classified.)

Steve and AJ walked over to where Natasha, Thor and Bruce were, gathering around a table that Fury often sat at while on the Helicarrier. She passed Natasha after quickly bending down to her ear to whisper that Tony figured out who she was.

Natasha had snapped her head in AJ’s direction, standing up to follow after her, but AJ just shook her head, holding her hand up to tell her that they’d deal with it later. They all sat at the table, minus Bruce and Thor who both preferred to stand, neither choosing to watch the interrogation, only listen. But AJ, Natasha and Steve all watched the monitors where Loki was being held.

“In case it’s unclear, you try to escape – you so much as scratch that glass-” Fury revealed to Loki how the floor beneath the cell could drop away to nothing, the wind howling below Loki. “-Thirty thousand feet straight down in a steel trap. You get how that works?”

Fury pushed the button and the floor closed, he then gestured to Loki. “Ant,” and then back to the control panel where the button was to open the floor, “Boot.”
Loki smiled, “It’s an impressive cage. Not built, I think, for me.”

“Built for something a lot stronger than you.”

“Oh, I’ve heard.” He grinned, turning his head so he could look into the security camera. AJ sat next to Steve, watching on the monitor as Loki began to talk about Dr. Banner. “A mindless beast – makes play he’s still a man.”

AJ looked over at Bruce who had an amused look on his face as his eyes were direction to Natasha. She frowned, feeling pity towards the man. But her attention was quickly drawn back to the monitors as Loki continued.

“How desperate are you, that you call on such lost creatures to defend you.”

“How desperate am I?” Fury shot back in anger. “You threatened my world.” AJ watched as he walked slowly towards the glass. “You steal a force you can’t hope to control, you talk about peace and you kill ‘cause it’s fun. You have made me very desperate. You might not be glad that you did.”

“Oooh,” Loki breathed out, “It burns you to have come so close, to have the Tesseract, to have power – unlimited power, and for what?” Loki looked back over to the security camera, “A warm light for all of mankind to share?” He mocked as he smiled at the camera. Loki then turned back to face Fury. “And then to be remind that really power is.”

Fury smiled and then walked away, still talking to Loki as he exited the area. “Well, let me know if ‘real power’ wants a magazine or something.”

The monitors on the table went away.

AJ ran her hands through her hair, trying to push down any emotions.

If she got emotional; scared or angry to the point that she couldn’t control her powers? The entire room would be blasted with ice. And then she felt Steve place his hand on her knee that bounced under the table, settling it. AJ gave him a thankful smile.

“He really grows on you, doesn’t he?”

Steve moved his hand off of AJ’s knee. “Loki’s going to drag this out. So, Thor,” He looked to the God of Thunder. “-What’s his play?”

“He has an army called the Chitauri.” He turned to face the table, “They’re not of Asgard nor any world known. He means to lead them against your people. They will win him Earth, in return, I suspect, for the Tesseract.”

“An army…from outer space.” Steve had to clarify.

They all nodded, agreeing that this wasn’t exactly ideal.

Another countries army they could face – but an army of an alien race? How could they ever defeat them? How could anyone on earth ever survive.

“So, he’s building another portal.” Banner said, realizing Loki’s motives, “That’s what he needs Erik Selvig for.”

“Selvig?” Thor said back to Bruce.
“He’s an astrophysicist,” Banner explained.

But AJ was aware that Thor knew who he was already.

“He’s a friend.” Thor state.

“Loki has them under some kind of spell – along with one of ours.” Her eyes met AJ’s briefly.

“I wanna know why Loki let us take him. He’s not leading an army from here.” Steve said, looking back at Bruce.

Bruce shook his head, “I don’t think we should be focusing on Loki. That guy’s brain is a bag full of cats, you can smell crazy on him.”

Thor stepped forward, his eyes on Bruce. “Have care how you speak. Loki is beyond reason, but he is of Asgard, and he is my brother.”

“Thor,” AJ said, trying to get him to see that he was defending a murderer. “He has killed seventy-eight people in two days.”

“Eighty.” Natasha corrected her.

She motioned to Natasha and nodded her head before for looking back at Thor, waiting for him to try and stand up for his brother again.

Thor looked to her, not able to justify Loki’s actions after being told how many he had killed, instead, he simply said, “He’s adopted.”

AJ couldn’t help but huff out a laugh at that.

“I think it’s about the mechanics. Iridium, what do they need the Iridium for?” Bruce asked.

“-It’s a stabilizing agent.” Tony said as he walked in with Coulson, speaking quietly to the man before turning his attention back to the group as Coulson walked away, “It means the portal won’t collapse like it did at SHIELD.” Tony saw Thor glowering at him and held up his hand in defeat, “No hard feelings, point break. You got a mean swing.” He patted Thor’s arm with the back of his hand, referring to the forest demolishing fight Thor, Tony, and Steve had had before returning to the Helicarrier.

AJ smiled when Thor gave Tony a nasty look as the man walked away.

“Also, means the portal can open as wide and stay open as long as Loki wants.” He walked over to Fury’s control panels, “Ahhh, raise the mizzen mast, ship the top sails.” He told some of SHIELD’s personnel who all looked at him strangely. Tony then pointed behind him at a man who had his back facing him, “That man is playing Galaga!” Tony shouted. Steve looked over at AJ in confusion, but she simply shrugged – she didn’t understand the reference either. “Thought we wouldn’t notice, but we did.”

Tony stood at the command area and then covered one eye and looked at each panel, he lowered his hand, “How does Fury even see these?” He said, turning to look at them.

“He turns,” Maria Hill said, attitude in her tone.

“Sounds exhausted,” Tony said as he spun around. He then began to mess with the screens, pressing random things. It was odd. But AJ paid no mind to it. “The rest of the raw materials,
Agent Barton can get his hands on pretty easily. Only major component he still needs is a power source of high energy density. Something to – kick start the cube.” He turned and look at Maria Hill.

“When did you become an expert in thermonuclear astrophysics?” She asked, not amused.

“Last night.” Tony answered. They all looked at him in confusion, “The packet. Selvigs notes, the extraction theory papers,” He raised his hands up when he looked around and saw that no one understood what he was talking about, “–am I the only one who did the reading?”

“Does Loki need any particular kind of power source?” Steve asked.

“He’d have to heat the Cube to a hundred and twenty million kelvin just to break through the Coulomb barrier.” Bruce said, looking down at his hands as he paced.

“Unless, Selvig has figured out how to stabilize the Quantum Tunneling effect.” Tony walked in the direction of Bruce.

“Well, if he could do that he could achieve heavy-ion fusion at any rector on the planet.”

“Finally!” Tony motioned to Bruce as he walked over to him. “Someone who speaks English.”

Steve looked at AJ, “Is that what just happened?” He asked as Tony and Bruce shook hands behind him.

AJ smiled, recalling how animated Howard would get while they talked science. Tony wasn’t as enthusiastic. But the guy knew his stuff. But AJ wouldn’t expect anything less from Howard Starks son.

“It’s good to meet you, Dr. Banner.” Tony said as they shook hands, “Your work on anti-electronic collisions is unparalleled. And I’m a big fan of they way you lose control and turn into an enormous green rage monster.”

AJ looked over her shoulder to see that Bruce was taken back by his words – mostly the last comment. Green rage monster? Really, Tony?

“Um…Thanks.” Bruce replied.

Fury walked in. “Dr. Banner is only here to track the cube. I was hoping you might join him.” He told Tony.

“I’d start with that stick of his. It may be magical but it works an awful lot like a Hydra weapon.” He looked to AJ who nodded her head in agreement. She had thought the same thing when she had first saw the scepter.

“I don’t know about that,” Fury said back, “-but it is powered by the Cube. And I like to know how Loki used to turn two of the sharpest men I know into his personal flying monkeys.”

Thor frowned in confusion, “Monkeys? I do not understand-”

“I do!” Steve said and pointed to Thor, most likely glad to finally understand a reference someone had made. AJ looked down at her hands, trying to hide her amusement while everyone else stayed quiet but kept their eyes on him. Steve shifted awkwardly in the chair, “I…I understood that reference.”
He then looked to AJ, almost as if he were trying to get her to be on his side. But she already was. AJ smiled, patting him on the back, “You did good, Buddy.”

“-Shall we play, Doctor?” Tony said to Bruce from behind AJ and Steve.

The two both looked over to their direction.

“This way, sir.” Bruce said as he led the way to his lab.

When most everyone had gone their separate way, leaving only Steve and AJ sitting at the table, the super soldier look at her. “The stick,”

“Scepter.” AJ corrected him but Steve waved his hand, brushing her off.

“Hydra’s weapons looked exactly like the scepter.”

AJ inhaled, “I agree. I think that Hydra sourced their power from something like the Tesseract.”

“Or maybe the Tesseract itself,” Steve suggested. “Howard fished the damn thing out of the ocean when he was looking for me – it could have been on the jet with me. I flew the damn thing in the oceans trying to rid the world of Hydra ever being able to create weapons like that again and Howard,” He shook his head in frustration. “He should have left it in the ocean.”

She frowned, she hated to speak ill of the dead, especially when they had been such a good friend, but she did agree with Steve. “I think Howard didn’t know just how over his head he would be by getting it out of the ocean – I think he was blinded by his fury of losing the both of us that he wasn’t thinking properly.”

“-Fury said that he fished it out because he thought that the Tesseract could be the key to unlimited power and sustainable energy.” Steve told her, “But something like that only brings death and destruction.”

AJ sighed, rubbing her brow and leaned back into the chair she was sitting on. “I am aware.”

Steve frowned. “I’m sorry.” He said, “I shouldn’t–”

Bucky had died after he tried to block a blast from one of the weapons with Steve’s shield, only to have it knock him back to where he had fallen off the train, grasping onto an unstable piece of the train that had been damaged by a previous blast. Steve had climbed out and tried to reach Steve. But the bar that Bucky had been clinging to broke off the train.

He fell.

He died.

She had gone over the report a thousand times just trying to understand what went so wrong that cost Bucky his life – but the more times she read over the report, the more frustrated she grew.

AJ cleared her throat and sat up, getting out of the chair. “I have to go find, Natasha.” Steve stood up, reaching to grab her hand but AJ moved so he couldn’t make contact. “It’s fine, Steve.” She lied to him, “I’m fine.”

She left.
He was angry.

Not at AJ.

He understood that he had brought up something she didn’t particularly like to talk about – he hadn’t even thought, before the words came out – they just spewed out and then he saw the look in AJ’s eyes and felt the atmosphere shift. An average person wouldn’t be able to detect the slight drop in temperature. But Steve could. But she quickly composed herself and he no longer felt the cold air around them.

No. He was mad because Tony Stark was nothing like Howard.

He was arrogant and thoughtless and completely egotistical and felt that AJ owed him an explanation when she didn’t – just because he knew who she truly was didn’t mean that she had to tell him anything. He should just leave it as that.

And yeah, Steve was aware that he was becoming extremely protective of AJ, but she was his best friend and she meant a great deal to him. And if Tony planned on exposing her – it would hurt AJ. And if AJ was hurt – Steve was going to have to hurt the person who hurt her.

He walked into the lab just as he watched Tony poke Dr. Banner with something that shocked him, causing him to yelp out the word ‘ow’. He stormed in, even more angry with Tony. “Hey!” He yelled, walking over to them.

Tony moved in closer to Bruce, “Nothing?”

He was testing to see if Bruce would turn into the Hulk – did this man have a death wish?

“Are you nuts?” Steve said in anger.

“Jury’s out!” Tony said to Steve and then looked back at Bruce, “You really have got a lid on it,
haven’t you? What’s your secret? Mellow jazz, bongo drums, huge bag of weed?” He then looked back to Steve, “Speaking of secrets – is Adelyn ready to talk?”

Steve huffed out in anger, “Is everything a joke to you?” He snapped.

Tony pointed the stick he had zapped Bruce with at Steve from across the lab table, “Funny things are.” He answered.

“-Threatening the safety of everyone on this ship isn’t funny.” He then looked to Bruce, “No offence, Doc.” He said apologetically.

“No, it’s alright. I wouldn’t have come aboard if I couldn’t handle pointy things.” Bruce said, but his focus was on the scepter.

“You’re tip-toeing, big man.” Tony said as he walked away from Bruce. “You need to strut.”

“And you need to focus on the problem, Mr. Stark.” Steve glared

“You think I’m not?” Tony countered back. “Why did Fury call us in? Why now, why not before? What isn’t he telling us?” He walked back over to the lab table and looked across at Steve, “I can’t do the equation unless I have all the variables.”

So, Tony was suspicious to Fury too.

“You think Fury’s hiding something from us?” Steve spoke quietly.

“He’s a spy. Captain, he’s the spy. His secrets have secrets.” Tony said, plopping a blueberry in his mouth and then gestured to Banner, “It’s bugging him too, isn’t it?”

“Uhhhh,” Bruce drew out the word, clearly uncomfortable, “Aah, I just wanna finish my work here and-”

Steve cut him off, wanting to know the answer. “Doctor?”

Bruce was quiet for a moment, he looked as though he was debating to say something or not. The man took off his glasses and began to speak, “A warm light for all mankind. Loki’s jab at Fury about the cube.”

“I heard it.” Steve said, still not understanding.

“Well, I think that was meant for you.” Bruce pointed to Tony.

Tony nodded, holding out his hand for Bruce to grab some of his blueberries. Almost as if he was a dog who earned a treat. Nevertheless, Bruce grabbed some from him.

“Even if Barton didn’t tell Loki about the tower,” Bruce continued on, “it was still all over the news.”

“The Stark Tower?” Steve made a face, “That big ugly-” Tony gave him a pointed look and Steve hide his smirk, “-Building in New York?”

“It’s powered by an arc reactor, self-sustaining energy source.” Bruce said, “That building will run itself for, what, a year?” He asked Tony.

“It’s just a prototype.” Tony said nonchalantly and then looked to Steve. “I’m kind of the only name in clean energy right now, that’s what he’s getting at.”
Steve looked back to Bruce, “So, why didn’t SHIELD bring him in on the Tesseract project? What are they even doing in the energy business in the first place?”

“I should probably look into that as soon as my decryption program finishes breaking into all of SHIELD’s secure files.” Tony said as he walked over to Steve, looking down at a device in his hand.

“I’m sorry, did you say-” Steve began but Tony interrupted him.

“JARVIS has been running it since I hit the bridge. In a few hours I’ll know every dirty secret SHIELD has ever tried to hide. So, I suppose my chat with Agent Frost isn’t necessary.” He smirked and then held out the small bag in his hand, “Blueberry?” He offered.

Steve inhaled deeply, trying not to let his anger get the best of him. “-Yet, you’re confused about why they didn’t want you around.”

Tony rolled his eyes, “An intelligence organization that fears intelligence? Historically, not awesome.”

Steve shook his head, “I think Loki’s trying to wind us up. This is a man who means to start a war and if we don’t stay focused he’ll succeed. We have orders, we should follow them.”

“Are you so apprehensive because of your girlfriend; Agent Frost?” Tony asked and Steve glared, “-I’m sorry, Cap – but following’s not really my style. No matter how pretty she is.”

Steve took a step forward into Tony’s space. “And you’re all about style, aren’t you?” He cocked his head to look down at him.

Tony popped a blueberry into his mouth, “Out of the people in this room, which one is ‘A’ wearing a spangly outfit, and ‘B’ not of use?”

“Steve,” Bruce said softly, causing Steve to look over to him. “Tell me none of this smells a little funky to you?”

He trusted AJ.

He trusted SHIELD because Howard and Peggy had created it.

Steve looked back at Tony, “Just find the Cube.” He told him and walked away and out of the room.

But as he was out of the lab, Steve stopped. Bruce and Tony were getting to him – he was confused. Peggy and Howard helped create something brilliant – something to help the world from ever being corrupted by Hydra again. And AJ would never join something if she didn’t one hundred percent trust in her gut that it was the right thing.

He trusted AJ.

…but he didn’t trust Fury.

So, he went looking for answer for questions he didn’t even know yet.
AJ had found Natasha.

The former assassin was asked to speak with Loki by Director Fury.

“I can help.” AJ had offered, but Natasha shook her head, telling AJ no.

“We both know that he knows who you are and what you can do. Stark may know who you are now, but Banner and anyone else who could be listening does not know. I won’t risk your secret getting out because he wants to play mind games.”

“I,”

“Stay outside.” Natasha told her. “Watch my back – if things go sideways, you’ll be there to step in. But do not come in unless I give the signal.”

AJ reluctantly agreed and watched the door, listening for when Natasha and Loki spoke.

It took a moment for Loki to even realize that Natasha had entered the room. And the God was quite amused by that.

“Hm. There’s not many people that can sneak up on me.” AJ listened to Loki say over the comm system.

“But you figured I’d come.” Natasha replied.

“After.” Loki said back. “After whatever tortures Fury can concoct, you would appear as a friend, as a balm. And I would cooperate.” He sounded amused by the mere thought.

“I wanna know what you’ve done to Agent Barton.”

“I’d say I’ve expanded his mind.”

Natasha was quiet for only a moment, and AJ could hear the sound of feet hitting the metal of the bridge that lead to Loki’s cage. She was walking up to him, “And once you’ve won. Once you’re
“King of the Mountain. What happens to his mind?”

“Ooh,” Loki cooed. “Is this love, Agent Romanoff?”

“Love is for children. I owe him a debt.”

Loki was quiet. AJ pressed her finger to her ear to see if she was missing anything, but the God just wasn’t speaking. Yet. “Tell me,” He finally said, urging Natasha to tell him about the debt she owed Clint.

“Before I worked for SHIELD, I uh- well, I made a name for myself. I have a very specific skill set. I didn’t care who I used it for, or on. I got on SHIELD’s radar in a bad way. Agent Barton was sent to kill me. He made a different call.”

“And what will you do if I vow to spare him?” Loki asked Natasha.

“Not let you out,” She said in a light tone, it was her teasing tone. She used it often on AJ.

“Ah, no. But I like this. Your world in the balance, and you bargain for one man?”

“Regime’s fall every day.” Natasha stated back, acting unaffected. “I tend not to weep over that, I’m Russian. Or, I was.”

“And what are you now?” Loki questioned.

“It’s really not that complicated.” She said, “I got red in my ledger. I’d like to wipe it out.”

Loki was quiet, contemplating what she said, “Can you?” He asked. “Can you wipe out that much red? Drakov’s daughter? Sao Paulo? The hospital fire? Barton told me everything.” He was trying to shake Natasha, and she’d let him believe that he was doing just that. “Your ledger is dripping, it’s gushing red, and you think saving a man no more virtuous than yourself will change anything?” This is the basest sentimental. This a child, a prayer. Pathetic!” He spat out in disgust. “You lie and kill in the service of liars and killers. You pretend to be separate, to have your own code, something that makes up for the horrors. But they are a part of you and they will never go away.”

The sound of a loud bang caused AJ to jump slightly, not expecting it.

“I won’t touch Barton! Not until I make him kill you. Slowly, intimately, in every way he knows you fear. And then he’ll wake just long enough to see his good work, and when he screams I’ll split his skull!”

AJ felt her heart racing, the blood pumping loudly in her ears.

It was trying to rile Natasha up. But it wouldn’t.

It was working on AJ though, and she felt her nails dig into her palm, leaving crescent moon shapes as the penetrated her skin. Her hands felt colder and she knew that if she didn’t do something soon – she wouldn’t be able to control herself.

But the thought of Loki killing Clint was just about enough to send her spiraling into an absolute rage.

“This is my bargain, you mewling quim!” Loki spat out.

AJ could hear Natasha fake crying – but she kept her eyes closed and took in deep breaths, trying to
not let Loki affect her. Natasha was right to have her wait outside.

“You’re a monster!” Natasha said through fake sobs.

Loki chuckled, “Oh, no. You brought the monster.”

There it was.

The absolute excitement in his voice when he said monster. And the way he had spoken about the cage being for someone else earlier – it was Banner he wanted.

“So, Banner.” Natasha’s voice was back to normal, completely unaffected. “That’s your play?”

“What?” He was taken back by the sudden change in her voice. Probably her calm exterior as well.

“Loki means to unleash the Hulk. Keep Banner in the lab. Frost and I are on our way. Send Thor as well.” Said to everyone over the comm system who was listening. “Thank you,” She said now, to Loki. “For your cooperation.”

The doors opened and AJ could hear Loki yelling her name, “FROST!” He shouted.

Natasha grabbed her arm as soon as she walked out and kept AJ moving. “We need to get to the lab.”

AJ walked, but could see out of the corner of her eye that screens had appeared on many of the doors.

VIRUS DETECTED

Dammit, Tony.

“Stark hacked into SHIELDs system.” AJ said as they hurried down the corridors.

Just before they got to the lab, Thor joined them. “What’s happening?” Thor asked.

“Your brother wants to unleash the Hulk.” Natasha said.

“The what?”

“Banner.” AJ said.

“That short man?”
“Trust me, you don’t want to see him when he gets angry.” Natasha said as they made it to the lab. AJ could hear Steve. He was angry.

“I was wrong, Director. The world hasn’t changed a bit.”

AJ walked over to where Steve stood, “What’s going on?” She asked. But he refused to meet her eye. Something had happened.

“Did you know about this?” Banner pointed his question at Natasha.

“You wanna think about removing yourself from this environment, Doctor?” Natasha suggested. But it didn’t really sound like a suggestion.

Banner laughed, “I was in Calcutta, I was pretty well removed.”

“Loki is manipulating you.” Natasha tried to explain, moving forward slowly.

“And you’ve been doing what exactly?” Bruce shot back.

“You didn’t come here because I bat my eyelashes at you.” Natasha replied, annoyed.

“Yes, and I’m not leaving because suddenly you get a little twitchy.” Bruce said back. “I’d like to know why SHIELD is using the tesseract to build weapons of mass destruction.”

AJ snapped her head in Fury’s direction. “What?” She said through gritted teeth. And then a weapon on the table caught her eye. She felt her blood boil. She began to breathe heavily. Those were Hydra weapons! Why did they have them! AJ looked to Steve who still refused to meet her eyes. Did he think? “Steve, I didn’t-”

“Because of him.” Fury said, trying to defuse AJ from getting too upset by distracting her. The Director pointed at Thor.

“Me?” The tall muscular blonde said back in confusion.

Fury looked to everyone in the room as he spoke, “Last year earth had a visitor from another planet who had a grudge match that leveled a small town. We learned that not only are we not alone, but we are hopelessly-hilariously, outgunned.”

“My people want nothing but peace with your planet!”

“But you’re not the only people out there, are you? And, you’re not the only threat. The world’s filling up with people who can’t be matched, they can’t be controlled.” Fury said back.

Control? SHIELD wanted to control people now.

What had AJ agreed to when she woke up? This whole time they had weapons from Hydra that they had planned on using. For what? Control? Because that’s exactly what Hydra did! That is what Bucky died for to try and stop!

AJ closed her eyes, trying to calm herself down as she rocked back and forth on the heels of the back of her feet.

“Like you controlled the cube?” Steve said in an accusing tone. It was spiteful. And AJ couldn’t help but feel like it was directed at her.

“Your work with the Tesseract is what drew Loki to it, and his allies.” Thor walked forward, “It is
the signal to all the realms that the earth is ready for a higher form of war!” Thor raised his voice.

“A higher form!?” Steve shot back.

Fury interrupted Steve and directed his anger towards Thor. “-You forced our hand! We had to come up with some-”

“Nuclear deterrent!” Tony mocked. “’Cause that’s what always calms everything right down”

Fury turned to look at him, “Remind me again how you made your fortune Stark?”

“I’m sure if he still made weapons, Stark would be neck deep,”

“Stop.” AJ whispered, trying to block out all the noise.

“-Wait-wait! Hold on! How is this now on me?” Tony asked Steve.

“I’m sorry – isn’t everything?” Steve shot back.

“Stop.” AJ said again.

“I thought humans were more evolved than this.” Thor joined in.

“Excuse me, did we come to your planet and blow stuff up?” Fury looked at Thor.

“Tis your champion!”

“You’re not my champion!” Fury yelled at the God.

“Stop.” AJ now pleaded. She wasn’t going to be able to control herself if this kept going on.

“Are you boys really that naïve?” Natasha started in now. “SHIELD monitors potential threats.”

Now they were all talking and AJ couldn’t keep track of who was saying what. She just tried to focus on the sound of her own breathing. But it was too loud. And she was furious – something was happening. AJ had gotten angry before and was able to control herself but this was something entirely different. She had no control right now. Something was wrong.

AJ stumbled backwards a bit, her anger becoming overwhelming. She gripped onto the lab bench.

“You speak of control, yet you court chaos!” Thor said to Fury.

“It’s his MO, isn’t it? I mean, what are we, a team? No, no, no. We’re a chemical mixture that makes chaos. We’re – we’re a time bomb.”

“You need to step away!” Fury said to Bruce.

“Why shouldn’t the guy let off a little steam?” Tony stuck up for Bruce, but it was really just to antagonize Fury.

When Tony pressed his hand on Steve’s shoulder, he smacked it away. “You know damn well why! Back off!”

“Oh, I’m starting to want you to make me.”

“Yeah, big man in a suit of armor. Take that off, what are you?”
“Stop.” AJ said again, this time a bit louder.

“Genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist.”

Steve scoffed, “I know guys with none of that worth ten of you. I’ve seen the footage. The only thing you really fight for is yourself. You’re not the guy who makes the sacrifice play, to lay down on a wire and let the other guy crawl over you.”

“I think I would just cut the wire.” Tony said back.

“Always a way out.” Steve snarked. “You know, you may not be a threat, but you pretending to be a hero.”

“A hero?” Tony replied, “Like you? You’re a laboratory experiment, Rogers. Everything special about you came from a bottle that she helped create!” Tony pointed to AJ, his eyes wild with anger.

Steve blocked Tony’s view of AJ.

“You?” Bruce looked to AJ, who was gripping onto the lab bench. She met his eyes apologetically – Bruce became the Hulk because he had tried to replicate the super soldier serum, a serum she helped create.

“I,” AJ began to say but Tony interrupted her.

“Oh, please, let’s hear your explanation about how you were declared dead in 1945, Agent Frost.” Tony looked to AJ now, “– or how you helped create Project Rebirth with Dr. Erskine and my father. Please, share with the class. How are you here?”

Steve got in Tony’s face. “Put on the suit, let’s go a few rounds.”

Thor laughed, “You people are so petty.” He said in amusement, “And tiny.”

“Yeah, this is a team.” AJ could hear Banner say in anger.

“Agent Romanoff, would you escort Dr. Banner back to his-”

“Where?” Bruce shouted. “You rented my room!”

Fury sighed, “The cell was just in case-”

“In case you needed to kill me. But you can’t! I know – I tried!” Banner yelled.

AJ felt her anger slowly drop – concern her only emotion now. They all looked to Banner.

“I got low. I didn’t see an end so I put a bullet in my mouth and the other guy spit it out.” He said in disgust, “So, I moved on, I focused on helping other people. I was good until you dragged me back into this freak show and put everyone here at risk!” He looked to Natasha now, but AJ and the others watched as he grabbed onto the scepter behind him, not even realizing it, “You wanna know my secret, Agent Romanoff? You wanna know how I stay calm?”

AJ moved her hand to her side where her gun was strapped in a holster, Natasha and Fury did the same.

“Dr. Banner,” Steve finally said. “Put down the scepter.”
Bruce looked down, blinking when he saw that the spear was in his hand.

The monitor went off in the room, “Got it!” Fury said – the monitor that went off was the one Tony and Bruce had been using to try and find the Tesseract.

Bruce set the scepter back down on the table and walked over to the screen on the other side of the room.

“Sorry, kids.” Bruce said, “You don’t get to see my party trick after all.”

They began to fight again about who would go retrieve the Tesseract, but AJ kept her eyes focused on the scepter.

*That. The scepter was causing this. It had been able to brainwash Clint – who’s to say it wasn’t making them all so hostile just from being in its mere presence? That’s why Loki didn’t fight back – that’s why he didn’t seem to care when he was brought in. Because the scepter would be there and he knew that they would try and study it. Loki knew that it would be able to control their emotions just as it had controlled Clint and Selvigs mind!*

“STOP!” AJ yelled, gaining everyone’s attention. “Don’t you see what’s happening?” She yelled.

But Bruce took the attention away from her when he uttered the words, “Oh my God.” And not even a second later, an explosion was heard all throughout the Helicarrier and they all dove for cover as the explosion reached the lab. Steve had grabbed AJ just before the blast went off in the room, throwing her out of the room so she wouldn’t get hurt.

He and Tony came scrambling out of the lab moments later, both reaching for her to grab her up by her arms, dragging her away from the flames.

“No time to nap, Mee-maw,” Tony said as he slung one of AJ’s arms over his shoulder as Steve did the same thing with her other arm. “-I don’t know exactly how you were able to stay alive – but if it will help us kick ass right now, I’m gonna need you at your best, okay?”

She nodded, head still spinning and her ears still ringing. “Go,” AJ shrugged them away from her. “Go, go suit up!” She yelled. Tony went without looking back but Steve hesitated. “Steven, go!” She ordered.

He left and AJ tried to crack all her joints back in place and then made her way to the armory.

“Fury, Loki’s scepter was controlling our emotions,” AJ said over the comm. “He was trying to distract us.”

“You don’t say, Frost.” He shouted back, “Coulson – initiate defensive lock down in the contingent center. Then head to the armory.”

AJ ran down the corridors, “I’m on my way to the armory now, Phil – I’ll meet you there!”

There was too much chatter in her ear and AJ needed to focus. So, she grabbed her piece out of her ear and threw it while she continued to run to the armory.

She had just gotten to the armory when she heard the monstrous roar.

AJ moved her finger to her ear, forgetting that she had thrown away the ear piece out of her ear on the way to armory – Natasha was next to Bruce when the blast went off. And if The Hulk was awakened, that meant Natasha was trapped with him, “Shit!” AJ cursed.
Natasha needed her. And AJ wasn’t going to leave her to die.

So, she ran out of the armory, passing Coulson on her way who had yelled her name – but AJ just ran as fast as she possible could so she could get blew deck in the engine room where Natasha and Bruce had fallen.

“Nat!” AJ screamed once she was finally in the engine room, jumping over the torn apart pieces of the helicarrier that Hulk ripped off. “Nat!” She yelled again, pushing her legs harder to jump over broken rumble to find her S.O and friend. It didn’t matter to AJ if Natasha knew that SHIELD was building weapons of mass destruction or were planning on using the Cube to power some of Hydras old weapons – what mattered was finding her. “Natasha!” She screamed her name.

AJ found her hiding in a corner, rocking back and forth as her lower lip quivered.

“…Nat?” She whispered, moving to kneel in front of her. “Hey, it’s okay.” She tried to calm Natasha down, but she wouldn’t meet her eye. “Natasha, look at me. Look at me, Romanoff.” She snapped, Natasha took in a deep breath, nodding her head as she looked to AJ. “That’s right – keep on breathing. That’s what you and Clint always tell me, yeah? Breathe.” AJ started breathing as well, “In and out. Just like that.”

She did as AJ instructed, taking deep breaths in and out.

AJ could hear a whisper of Fury’s voice from the ear piece Natasha was wearing. The red head moved her shaky hand to her ear before responding. “This is Agent Romanoff. I copy.” She dropped her hand and pushed herself up, Natasha looked at AJ. “We’re going after Barton.”

Great, AJ thought bitterly.

Natasha was clearly still shaken by her run in with the Hulk – and now they were supposed to go up against Clint, a man who had trained AJ how to fight – and the man who Natasha couldn’t bear to lose.

This was going to go swell.

The two made their way back to the main engine deck, quickly, quietly. They had eyes on Clint, and the drop on him would have been absolutely delightful.

But as Clint turned on a dime, any hopes of the element of surprise vanish from AJ's mind.

Clint fired an arrow that Natasha and AJ both narrowly dodged. AJ held her breath as she watched her superiors begin to fight, not knowing how to help. She could use her powers, yes, but the last thing she wanted to do was to hurt Natasha. And she was in the line of fire. AJ couldn’t risk it.

AJ ran past as Nat and Clint slid through the beams. She followed, Natasha wasn’t in the way – and no one was around to risk her being exposed. So, AJ opened her palm and did something she had only ever practiced, she fired off a ray of ice at Clint's back. He turned and smashed through it with his bow, before stepping forward and engaging AJ. She ducked as the bow swung overhead, completing a full 360 and hitting Natasha back on its way around. They jumped to another platform as Clint fired off another arrow. Natasha kicked out, sending Clint staggering forward. AJ caught the bowstring, but her former SO pulled back and let go, the shaft hitting her squarely between the eyes. As AJ rubbed her nose, Clint had pulled out a knife and was fighting with Natasha.

It wasn't going well.

Natasha was in full defense mode as Clint swung and jabbed forward. AJ watched as one strike
flew overhead. Natasha caught Clint's arm, but he dropped the blade into his other hand and began another onslaught of attacks. The two got caught in a deadlock moments later, the knife inches away from Natasha's nose as Clint pushed it closer...closer...

AJ began to panic, she kicked out her feet, buckling Clint's knees causing the archer to fall forward, head smacking squarely into the metal guardrail. The resounding clang was loud and echo-y. When Clint started to get up, his eyes focused between the two girls, the glowing blue of his eyes fading away.

He was back.

"AJ...?" He breathed out, "Natasha...?"

Before he could say anything else, Natasha punched him in the nose, knocking him out.

She couldn’t help it when the corners of her lips quirked up, "Nice." AJ commented, as she wiped at her bloody nose, leaving a red stain under her nose and a streak of blood on the back of her hand.

"Thanks." Natasha said, looking over at AJ. “I’m pretty sure that he broke your nose.”

AJ simply shrugged. “Pretty sure you broke his too.”

She expected Natasha to smirk, but she kept her expression serious, “You used your powers.”

AJ nodded.

It was a first.

Natasha didn’t say anything else about it.

“I’m going to go make sure Steve didn’t do anything stupid...like die.” AJ said to Natasha, “You good with him?”

Natasha finally smirked, lifting her chin to tell AJ to go find Steve.

She left, hands shaking, feeling a little out of control. She had used her powers on another human. She had used her powers on Clint. She opened and closed her hands, trying to compose herself. But she was feeling everything too strongly. She could feel the chill in her body, the cold that was pumping through her veins – she needed to find Steve.

Because if she didn’t find him soon, her mind would run wild with thoughts of him being dead and she would absolutely lose control of the little composure that she maintained right now.

Seeing that Steve was alive would keep her from exploding like she felt like she was going to.

The last time she had felt this way was when Peggy and the Howling Commandos found her. How her powers were out of control trying to save her life but AJ’s body was refusing. She felt the same way she had been feeling just before she yelled at Peggy and The Howling Commandos to get back and away from her – how she felt a burst of cold leave her body and her cell became covered with frozen crystals.

She just needed to get to Steve. AJ cursed herself for throwing out her earpiece – if she was still connected to the comm system, at least she’d know if Steve was alive.
Steve had been searching for AJ. The engine was repaired, Hulk and Thor were missing, and Loki escaped. Many were injured, multiple were dead. Including Agent Phil Coulson. The man who had been so kind, who had been so excited to meet Steve, a friend of AJ’s had been killed by Loki.

“Agent Coulson is down.” Steve had heard over the comm system.

“A medical team is on it’s way to your location.”

“They’re here…they called it.”

Did AJ know?

Was she even alive?

He had gone to Fury, asking if he had seen or heard from AJ, that she wasn’t answering through the comm system. Fury had a grim look on his face and shook his head. Steve explained that he had looked all over for her but couldn’t find her.

“If she’s alive,” Fury said, making Steve’s stomach drop, “She’ll find you.”

Tony was with Steve, waiting to see if AJ would show up. He apologized for his behavior towards AJ – none of that mattered now. Coulson was dead and anything else wasn’t important. “I’m letting it go.” Tony said, sitting next to Steve at the table they had all gathered around earlier.

Steve sat still, trying not to get too in his head about AJ and his fear that she had been one of the casualties. And just when he felt like he was going to lose it, AJ appeared and he could finally breathe.

“Jay!” Steve said, jumping out of his chair and running over to her. He saw the bloodstain under her noise and the bruising that was appearing under her eyes. He took her face in his hands once they were in front of each other and he examined her for any more injuries, “I thought you were dead!” He breathed out, his eyes focusing on hers. “You didn’t answer through the comms when I was calling for you.”

AJ stopped him from going on, moving her hands to his, pulling them away from her face. “I’m
“Fine.” She assured him. “Everything was so chaotic and loud and I couldn't hear myself think – so I took out the ear piece. I’m sorry.” She apologized, still holding onto his hands. AJ closed her eyes, shaking her head. ‘I’m just so glad that you’re alive.”

Steve dropped her hands and moved forward, pulling her to him and hugged onto her tightly.

“Barton is back,” She said, her words muffled a bit by his shirt, “-Natasha and I kicked his ass.” AJ chuckled, “But we got him back.”

She was too happy – or relieved.

Steve stiffened. AJ didn’t know about Coulson. He should have put two and two together when she told him she had thrown out her earpiece but he was just so blinded with relief that she was standing in front of him and was alive that he didn’t realize that there was no way AJ could have heard about Coulson.

“Jay,” He said softly, pulling back a bit and dropping his arms from around her.

“Did Thor manage to get Bruce back to being Bruce? Natasha said Thor came in just at the right time to toss Hulk away from her.”

Steve swallowed hard as he looked down at AJ.

“What is it?” She asked, “Why are you looking at me like that – what’s with the face?” She took a step back from Steve. It was as if she was anticipating a blow.

“Thor and Banner are missing.”

“MIA or presumed dead?” She asked, folding her arms over her chest.

“Banner, Hulk, jumped off the helicarrier to attack a fighter jet that was shooting at him and went down with the jet.” Steve explained.

“The pilot?” AJ asked.

“He’s alive.”

She nodded her head, “And Thor?”

Steve licked at his lips, “Loki got out.” He told her and he watched as AJ’s eyes widened. “Somehow he got Thor trapped in the sky cell and Loki dropped it from the Helicarrier.”

AJ let out a quick breath and covered her mouth with her hand while she shook her head. “That son of a bitch,” She said, dropping her hand and looking back at Steve. “Where is Loki now?”

“He fled.” Steve told her. *God, he really didn’t want to say what he was going to say next.*

But he didn’t have to. Tony walked up to them, “He fled right after he killed Agent Coulson,” He said in a rough tone. He then patted AJ’s shoulder, “Nice to see you alive.”

Steve felt the air change, the cold air was like a slap to his face, and he wasn’t the only one who felt it. The people in the area began to look around to see where the cold air was coming from – they didn’t know it was AJ.

“Jay,” He said softly, trying to calm her down.
She was breathing hard, in and out, in and out.

“Stark, you need to get out of here.” Steve said, keeping his eyes focused on AJ while he spoke to Tony.

“-Why?” Tony said, looking around for the source of cold air. “And did the air condition just turn on? It’s a bit nippy.”

Steve watched as little clouds of cold mist seeped out of AJ’s hands that were violently shaking. “Adelyn, look at me.” He said in a stern voice.

But before he knew it, her eyes glazed over and the green had disappeared, only white orbs staring back at him. And before he could do anything, he and Tony were sent flying back by a burst of cold air and the areas around them were covered in ice.

AJ collapsed.

“Well,” Steve heard Tony say from behind as he got up and ran to AJ. Steve checked her pulse and let out a sigh of relief, her heart was still beating. Tony was next to him now, having crawled over to where Steve was, both looking down at AJ, “Dad never told me she could do that.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey ya'll. I haven't really been getting any feedback - are you guys still enjoying the story? Would really love to hear some feedback! Thanks so much for reading! Kudos & comments are always appreciated!
Chapter Notes

Oh my goodness - you guys, I am so grateful for all the comments and kudos letting me know that you guys are still digging the story! It really means a lot. Please forgive any typos or mistakes, I think faster than I type and sometimes things get jumbled! Also, previous OC's from 'Frosties and Fireworks' are mentioned. You can find their faceclaims in that story.

OC MASTERLIST
FROSTIES OC MASTERLIST

See the end of the chapter for more notes
There was a cool breeze that touched AJ’s face, this summer night was feeling cooler than the normal warm weather that Brooklyn had been experiencing. There were hands covering her eyes and she could hear a low chuckle behind her. AJ smiled, the hands so familiar and the sound of the laughter damn near musical.

“Where are you taking me, Buck?” She asked him as he stayed behind her but moved her in the direction of wherever he was taking her on this night.
“Just trust me, sweetheart,” He said in her ear, his warm breath tickling her skin, “You’re gonna love it.”

AJ giggled, “Last time you said that you convinced me to sneak off of base and go for a midnight swim while we were in France.”

“And you loved that, don’t deny it.” Bucky whispered again.

AJ smiled, Bucky’s hand still covering her eyes. She shrugged innocently, “Nope.” She popped the ‘p’, “I did not.”

“Liar.”

“Bucky, come on!” She whined. “How much further? I wore the wrong shoes for this.”

“Just…a little bit more and…here.” Bucky stopped her from walking forward and dropped his hands from her eyes.

AJ blinked, adjusting her eyes and saw an empty lot on a field. “Hmmm.” She said, looking back at Bucky. “Grass.” She gave him a cheeky grin causing him to playfully roll her eyes.

“Look at the view, Frosty!” He told her, turning her back around, standing behind her with his arms wrapped around her middle, chin dropping down onto her shoulder as they both looked at the view in front of them. “Can’t you just imagine seeing mini-Adelyn’s and Bucky’s running around here.”

AJ laughed, “Getting a little ahead of yourself, don’t you think?” She teased, moving her head slightly to rest against his as she closed her eyes.

“Oh, come on, sweetheart, we have been married for about four months now.” Bucky said and she could feel him smiling.

She blinked in confusion, not understanding. “Wha-?” And then she caught a glimpse at her left hand, a wedding ring on her ring finger. They were married. The war was over. “Wait, did you buy this land, Bucky?” She asked.

“I sure did.”

AJ turned and face him, eyes wide. “James Buchanan Barnes!” She scolded him.

“I had to. With the little one due any day now.” Bucky said, placing his hand on her stomach.

AJ shook her head, trying to understand what he meant. But then she looked down and saw the round bump making her dress stick out. She smiled, moving her hand on top of his. “This little guy will be here any day now – and you bought land.” She laughed.

“Open your eyes, sweetheart.” Bucky told her, turning her around again and when she was facing the land, a big blue house with red shutters and a big porch stood there.

“Oh, Bucky!” She said happily. “I love it!”

“We built it together.”

AJ turned around and saw Steve standing next to Bucky now.

“Hey! I helped too!” Her little brother Henry was there too, standing on the other side of Bucky, a
hammer in his hand.

“We all did.”

AJ’s eyes widened when she saw her entire family standing in front of the house now. Sam and his wife Eileen with their three children, Dougie, Lauren Grace, and Juliet Adelyn. They were all so big now! Westley stood next to George and his wife Sally and on the other side of Westley was her brother Charles.

“But I helped the most.” Henry chimed in causing AJ to look over her shoulder. Bucky was next to him holding something in his arms.

“Oh, this little guy is getting fussy.” Bucky said and a baby began to cry. AJ shook her head, trying to understand everything but went to him, grabbing the baby out of his arms and began to rock it back and forth, watching as the little boy cooed while smiling up at her.

“Practically a pro.” AJ looked up to see her father and mother standing in front of her now. “Your mother was the same way.” Her dad said.


“We couldn’t miss James Jr.’s first birthday!”

AJ looked down where the baby had been in her arms and found that he was no longer there.

But then she heard a squeal of laughter and watched as her boy wobbled over to another child. A child who stood at the feet of Steve…and Peggy.

“I don’t understand…” She said quietly.

“AJ! Come to the kitchen!”

She wasn’t alone.

“Ah, there you are!” Lydia said, turning around to reveal a large baby bump. “The cake is ready to be frosted!” She was holding a birthday cake and placed it down on the kitchen counter. “And where is that husband of mine?”

“I’m right here, darling.”

AJ saw Nathaniel walk into the kitchen, “Nate-” She whispered in surprise.

“And I brought in a few strays.” Nate walked over to Lydia, bending down to place a kiss on her belly and then looked to AJ and smiled. “Picked up those two from the airport.”

Anthony and Jane walked into the kitchen holding hands. “Oh, don’t be sour, Nathaniel – you should feel honored we even asked you to pick us up!” Jane teased. “You’re a worst driver than AJ.”

“Mommy!” A little boy ran into the room. “Daddy wants to know if the cake is ready!”

AJ smiled, hand moving to the little boy’s cheek, his blue eyes looking exactly like Bucky’s. “Tell your Daddy that if he wants cake, he can come into the kitchen and help his wife.” She said in a teasing tone.
“Hey, I heard that.” Bucky said, walking into the room. “Now, don’t be picking him up, Frosty – you know the doctor said no more lifting James Jr. until after the baby comes.”

She looked down at her stomach and saw that a bump was there again.

“Isn’t it so great that we’re having girls together, AJ!” Lydia said from next to AJ, placing her hand on the bump.

“And it’s always good to have your kids close in age.” Sam was now in the room. “James only being five years older than Maggie will be good. He’ll want to look after his baby sister, just like I did with you. Though, I hope she wasn’t as much trouble as you were.” Sam smirked.

“Frosty, come sit down.” Bucky said, moving his arm around her shoulder and they began to leave the kitchen.

“But I want to stay.” She said sadly, looking back into the kitchen only to find it empty now.

“The kids are finally asleep.” Bucky told her. “The dishes are done and it’s time for bed.”

“But,”

“No buts, sweetheart.” Bucky lead her up the stairs. “You need to get off your feet.”

“Are you sure James and Maggie are asleep?” AJ asked Bucky as they walked down the hallway, passing two bedrooms on the way.

“Yes, I read them both two stories and they were both out before I even finished the second story.” Bucky chuckled. “And baby Howard fell asleep the moment I sent him down in his crib.”

“Baby Howard?” Things were becoming fuzzy. “Bucky, I don’t understand.”

They were in a bedroom now, Bucky pulled off his shirt and climbed into the bed after pulling down the covers. “Do you miss it?” He asked, laying down in the bed.

AJ followed after him, getting into bed as well. She laid on her side, looking over at him. “Miss what?” She asked.

“This.” Bucky said. “Being with each other.”

She felt tears fill her eyes as she nodded. “Yes, Bucky.” AJ whispered. “I miss you so much.” Bucky pulled her into his arms and she snuggled against his chest, tears falling on his skin. He kissed the top of her head and rubbed up and down her arm.

“I’m here.” He told her.

“Please don’t leave me, Bucky.” AJ cried, “I love you so much.”

“I love you too, Frosty.”

“Adge.”

“Adge.”

Her eyes opened, Clint was looking down at her. “Clint?” She said, still confused. AJ tried to sit up but felt something tug at her the back of her hand.
“Hey, hey, easy.” Clint said, placing his hands on her shoulders to keep her from moving.

“Where’s Bucky?” She asked. Clint frowned, looking to his side. AJ followed his eyes and saw Natasha sitting next to him. The red head had the same worried look as Clint. AJ shook her head, “I mean,” She began to correct herself, hearing what she had just said, “-Where’s Steve?” She asked instead.

“He’s with Fury and Tony.” Natasha answered.

AJ could hear the beeping of a heart monitor, she began to recognize the area she was in, “Why am I in infirmary?” She asked, looking to both Clint and Natasha.

The red head stood up, walking over to AJ and undid the straps that kept her hands secure on the bed, AJ look up at her in confusion – why was she restrained? “What’s the last thing you remember?” Natasha asked.

She opened her mouth to answer, and it all came flashing back.

Phil Coulson was dead.

Loki killed him.

And not just that – when she had found out about Phil being killed, she had lost all control of her powers.

“Oh, God,” AJ said quietly, sitting up slowly. “Everyone knows now.”

Natasha and Clint both nodded their head.

“Did I hurt anyone?”

“No.” They both answered.

AJ closed her eyes in relief. But not much relief. Everyone knew about her powers now.

“What happened, Adge?” Natasha asked her, “How did you lose control?”

“It’s not the first time this has happened.” Clint added causing Natasha to raise her brow. AJ looked to Clint and glared.

“Clint, what just happened is not the same thing as what happens during my nightmares.” She argued.

“You’re right.” Clint agreed. “It’s worse. AJ, your powers have been acting up ever since Steve was found.” She looked away. “He’s a trigger.”

“He’s not a trigger, Clint.” AJ spat out.

“He’s from your past.” Natasha said, taking Clint’s side.

“That means nothing.”

Natasha gave AJ a pointed look. You know it means something.

AJ breathed in heavily and listened to the sound of her heart rate spiking. “He’s not a trigger.” She said again, “He’s my friend. Just like to two of you are.” AJ reminded them, but they weren’t
listening. AJ shook her head in frustration, “Do you see that,” She pointed to the heart monitor, “It says I’m pissed – and here I am, not turning anything in to ice. Because I have control right now. But, after having to use my powers on you,” AJ pointed to Clint who looked away from her, still probably feeling guilt, “And still feeling the effect of having used it while I found out about Phil – yeah, I lost it a bit. Not to mention the whole ordeal with Loki’s scepter heightening all of our emotions – and yet, here I am. Completely in control.”

Natasha and Clint shared a look.

They still didn’t buy it.

AJ carefully took out the IV that was placed on the top of her hand, “Fine, don’t believe me. Just please go get Fury so I can be released from infirmary and put back out into the field where I should be.” AJ sat up more, “Because I plan on killing that son of a bitch Loki.”

Natasha and Clint shared another look but got up. “I’m next door if you need me.” Clint told her.

“I won’t.” AJ said, her tone too cold for her own liking. She closed her eyes, shaking her head. Natasha was out of the door when she opened her eyes and Clint was close behind her, “Barton,” She called out, stopping him from leaving the room. He looked over his shoulder. AJ took a moment and then said, “I’m glad you’re back.”

He nodded his head and left the room.

AJ took off all the wires they had on her and dressed in her SHIELD uniform again, now out of her hospital style gown they kept in medical bay.

Her dream had felt so real, even with every confusing part, it somehow made sense. Because Bucky was there and live and she was happy. So happy.

AJ sat down where Natasha had been sitting earlier. She placed her head in her hands and rested her elbows on her knees.

“Frost,”

She looked up and saw Fury standing in the doorway.

“I can’t clear you.” He told her.

AJ stood up, walking over to him. “Yes, you can.” She disagreed. “Loki has some sick fantasy in his head about who I really am – and we can use that.” Director Fury shook his head. “-My presence will be a distraction, I guarantee it.”

Fury sighed, “It’s not a risk neither myself or the council is willing to take.”

AJ took in a shaky breath, “They know now?”

He nodded. “Too many people witnessed what happened.”

She crossed her arms over her chest, for some reason feeling like she needed to protect herself. “So, what now? I get put in some lab where they can test me all day? Because I’ve been through that already. In 1945 where I was dissected by a mad man to see just what I was capable of – I’m sorry, Fury – but I’m not going to go through that again. You’ll have to knock me out because I will fight you for my freedom.”
“I would never take away your freedom, Adelyn.”

“Why not?” AJ asked. “You’re the director – you have kept numerous secrets from me including the fact that you have Hydras weapons and are trying to rebuild them! The kind of weapons that killed the man I love!” She yelled in anger.

But she didn’t lose control.

She had a handle on her powers again.

And AJ would prove that to Fury.

“Using weapons made by Hydra was a backup plan. You know my real goal. To build a team. And trust me, I know what Hydra took from you, I know what they did to you!” Fury rose his voice, “And that is the exact reason why I’d never take your freedom from you! I made a promise to both Howard Stark and Peggy Carter a long time ago when I became director of SHIELD that if I were still around when you finally woke up – I’d protect you. And that’s what I’m doing, Agent Frost. Whether you chose to believe that or not.” He told her. “So, no. You are not cleared to go out into the field. That’s an order.”

AJ squared her jaw, shaking her head. She pulled out her credentials from the holster around her waist and pressed it against Fury’s chest. “Then I quit.”

She left Fury in the room and went to go find Steve.

Being an agent with SHIELD had been her entire identity since she was woken up from cryostasis – AJ didn’t know who she was without it. But she was done following orders.

She was not going to sit back and let Loki try and enslave the human race, or worse, destroy it.

AJ would die before she let that happen.

She was making her way to the hangar bay when she felt someone fall into step with her. AJ looked to her side as she continued to walk and saw that Tony was now walking with her. “Hey there, Ice Queen.” They were in the hangar bay now, surrounded by many jets. “You wanna go on a mission?”

AJ felt her lips quirk up into a smirk. “Thought you’d never ask.”
Steve had gone to get AJ, only to find that she was no longer in the infirmary, but on his way, he had spotted Natasha in a room that he knew Agent Barton was being kept in. They had both agreed to come with him to Stark Towers, where Tony believed Loki would be. By the time they got to the hangar bay, Steve saw that AJ was already there talking with Tony.

“Jay,” He had rushed over to her, “-Are you okay?” He asked.

“Never been better.” She smiled, and he actually believed her. “You guys ready?” She looked to Clint and Natasha.

They nodded.

“Clint says he can fly one of these,” Steve told AJ as he pointed to the many jets.

AJ laughed, “Are you joking?” Steve shook his head. AJ looked to Steve and then at Clint. “Are you on drugs? I mean, I know you just came out from brainwash but you are a terrible pilot.” She had to remind Clint.

“I’m better than you.” Clint said with a smirk, walking past AJ.

AJ let out a loud scoff. She had gotten her pilots license back when she was in her early twenties in 1940 – and yes, planes had changed dramatically since that time – but Clint was still a horrible pilot!

It was only AJ, Steve and Clint now, Tony was suiting up in his Iron Man gear while the three of them walked onto a jet.

Upon seeing them enter, a young engineer quickly stood up and walked over to them. “Hey, you guys aren’t authorized to be in here!” He told them.

“Son,” Steve said, clearly exhausted already by the young man, “Just don’t.”

AJ smiled as the young mans eyes widened as he looked behind Steve at Natasha, who was giving her best; if you don’t step aside I will skin you alive, stare. “Smart choice.” AJ said when the guy quickly walked past them and got off the jet.

Tony flew out first, and then the jet they were in followed after them. As they left, they could hear over the comm system; We have an unauthorized departure from base.

On their way back to New York, Clint flew the jet at maximum speed, getting them there a lot quicker than it would normally take (and on one of SHIELD’s enhanced jets, that was saying something.) AJ sat in the back of the jet while Natasha helped Clint co-pilot the jet. Steve walked over to where she sat and stood in front of her.

“Are you ready for this?” He asked her.

They had a plan.

Steve was very vocal about not liking AJ’s part of the plan, but he agreed to it. Well, AJ didn’t really give him much of a choice. It was happening whether Steve agreed to it or not.

“My being there with Tony will distract Loki. That’s the goal.” AJ said in a sure tone.

“Everything steady?” He asked, referring to her control of her powers.
AJ held out her hand, still as a statue and smiled as shards of ice flew from her finger tips, hitting the wall across from where she sat. AJ looked back at Steve, eyebrow raised in challenge. Steve had followed the ice shards and watched them as they hit the wall and then looked back to AJ. “You were aiming for that, right?” He said playfully.

“You want me to aim at you next? ‘Cause I will.” She countered back with a smirk, just as playful.

Steve smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “Be careful, Jay.” He said quietly. “I don’t know,” He stopped himself and exhaled deeply, “I don’t know what I’d do if…”

She knew what he was getting at.

AJ stood up and grabbed Steve’s hands. “I promise to stay alive if you promise to stay alive too.”

Steve shook his head and closed his eyes but squeezed tightly onto her cold hands. “Okay.” He nodded, eyes open now as he looked down at her. “I promise.”

“Good.” AJ smiled, dropping his hands. “Because if you die before I do – I am going to be incredibly pissed off at you.” She teased. Steve grinned.

“Hang on!” AJ heard Clint say from up front and quickly grabbed onto something to hold her steady, Steve followed her lead and soon enough, they were crash landing on the ground.

But they made it.

“Told you he was a bad pilot.” AJ said once she was steady and walked towards the back of the jet with Steve.

They got out of the jet and were on the street now, people running in their opposite direction, probably terrified of who might come out of the crashed jet. Panic in the city was already beginning.

“You got the-” Natasha asked AJ only to have her cut her off.

“Mm-hm,” AJ replied.

“And the-” Clint started to add and AJ cut him off as well.

“Yup.”

“How about the-” Steve began.

“-You guys,” AJ stopped Steve from speaking and looked to all three of them. “It’s going to be fine. I’ve done solo missions before. And technically this isn’t even a solo mission.” She reminded them. “Tony is already up there. And I trust him.”

“Just,” Clint began but AJ stopped him again.

“Be careful. I know.” AJ said softly. “You too.” She told him. She then looked at Steve and Natasha, “All of you.”

“Oh, come on, going up against a vengeful God? It’s a total walk in the park.” Natasha smirked.

AJ chuckled and took one last look at Steve before she left them to head to Stark Towers. He looked worried – but Steve always had a worried look when he was staring at AJ.
Once she was inside, she spoke into the bracelet Tony had given her that would give her access to his person AI. “JARVIS,” AJ said as he ran into the building. “Over-ride security.”

“Right away, Agent Ice Queen.”

AJ rolled her eyes at that. Of course, Tony would program that as her name for JARVIS.

“Agent Ice Queen, there is an entry way into the penthouse that will not be detected by Loki or his men, turn right in three feet.”

AJ did as JARVIS told her to do and rounded the corner and headed up a flight of stairs.

“I have gained access to the security footage, you will be encountering four agents at the fourth landing, Agent Ice Queen, should I let Mr. Stark know you need assistance?”

AJ huffed, running up the stairs now. “I can handle it, JARVIS.” She said just as she made it to the fourth landing, thrusting her hand out and knocking the four-armed agents that were still under Loki’s spell, to the ground with a gust of cold air. Each one of them hit the ground hard, head knocking onto the floor with a bang. When they’d wake up, they’d slowly come out of whatever hypnosis Loki had them under. Just as Clint had.

“Well done, Agent Ice Queen.”

“JARVIS, stop calling me that.” AJ said, running up more flights of stairs.

“What would you prefer I call you?”

The AI asked you.

“AJ.”

“Very well, AJ. I will no longer refer to you as Agent Ice Queen unless Mr. Stark programs me to again.”

AJ couldn’t help but let out a harsh laugh at that.

She’d have to tell Tony to come up with a cleverer nickname for her if he insisted on programing JARVIS to call her something that related to her powers. She made it to the last flight of stairs when JARVIS spoke in her ear again.

“AJ, Mr. Stark will need your assistance soon.”

“Almost there, buddy.” She told the AI, pushing herself harder to get up the last flight of stairs, “I’m here JARVIS, what do I do?” She whispered.

“Look up.” JARVIS commanded. AJ did, her eyes going up to the ceiling. “To the right, you see a small dot, that is a glitch to show you there is a force field – if you throw an object at it, the protective shield will fall and a vent will appear. You will need to climb up to the vent and then go through it. It will lead you to Ms. Potts bedroom closet.”

“Right. No problem.” AJ said, looking up at the small dot. She held up one finger, a shard of ice flew up and hit directly at the dot and a vent appeared, nothing keeping her from not being able to easily get inside it.

She looked around, trying to calculate in her head which way would be an easier way to get up to the vent but upon hearing a loud bang, AJ ran at the railing, jumping up and then launched herself off of the railing and up at the wall where she launched herself again, so she was able to grab at the
vent. AJ used all her upper strength and pulled herself up and into the vent, shimmying her way through the small space that would lead her to Peppers bedroom closet.

AJ was at the end of the vent, trying hard to push against the metal so she could get inside Pepper’s closet, but it wouldn’t budge. The man thing was as strong as vibranium and the pressure she used to try and push it open left her wrist aching.

“JARVIS, I can’t get in. Is there some sort of security system blocking me from being able to get through this son of a bitch?” She huffed, gripping onto her wrist.

“There should be no reason you cannot enter through the vent. And I am afraid that there are no security cameras permitted in Ms. Potts private quarters.”

Something had to be blocking her way in.

And upon hearing more loud noises coming from inside the penthouse, AJ knew she needed to act fast. So, she placed both of her palms against the metal and closed her eyes, feeling the air turning cold. When she opened her eyes, her obstacle was complete frozen, and with her elbow, AJ shattered the metal just as she heard the sound of glass shattering as well. AJ quickly but quietly got out of the vent and made her way through the penthouse, finding Loki being thrown back by one of the boosters in Tony’s Iron Man suit. She looked through the broken windows to see that the portal had just begun to open.

Tony left.

Not part of the plan.

He was supposed to be there to watch her back.

But other things were far more important. AJ just hoped Steve never found out.

“Loki!” AJ yelled, causing Loki to snap his head in her direction, a wide, downright creepy, grin formed on his lips.

“Ahhh, Agent Frost. Just in time to watch chaos ensue.” Loki walked over to her. AJ stood in place, watching as he held onto the scepter, head titling as he studied her. “And why, if you don’t mind my asking, did they send you up here all by yourself?”

She didn’t say anything. AJ just kept her expression unreadable.

Loki continued to grin. “Perhaps you have come here on your own. You’ve seen that you are on the losing side and want to join me in world domination. I’d gladly have you by my side.”

AJ rolled her eyes at that, knowing that it’d get under Loki’s skin.

“You and I are the same, Adelyn.” He used her name. “I am Loki, son of Laufey of Jotunheim-”

AJ interrupted him, “I am aware of your tragic,” She used the word sarcastically, “-story, Loki. Your brother told us everything.”

“Did he tell you of my race?” He asked, standing right in front of her now.

“Frost Giant.” She answered back, looking up at him, chin jutted out, showing no fear.

Loki chuckled as he looked down at her, “Which makes my previous statement a fact, Adelyn Frost.” He told her, “You and I are one in the same.”
AJ shrugged, “Here’s the thing; I was born right here in this city – not Jotunheim or whatever it’s called – I possess the ability to manipulate ice, if that’s where you think we are alike, but I am not a homicidal sociopath bent on ruling over the human race. Because I, am in fact, a human. I may be a bit…enhanced,” she chose the word carefully. “But I am not you. And you are nothing like me. Because, Loki Laufeyson, I don’t want to control people. I want to save them. And I want to stop every single person who thinks they can control the world – hell, that’s why I nearly died in 1945 and woke up sixty-some years in the future. Because I am willing to make the kind of sacrifice that you’d never make. Your vanity outweighs any good in you. You’d never lay down your life to save someone else. And, that, Loki Laufeyson, is why you are nothing like me. Because I am willing to die to protect this world and all the people I love in it.”

Loki simply smirked, raising the scepter and bringing it to her heart. “Perhaps you’ll have a change of heart.” But as the very tip of the scepter touched her skin, it began to freeze over. Loki glared down at her.

AJ smirked up at him, “Sorry, pal. You can’t manipulate a heart that’s already broken and made of stone cold ice.” She now grinned.

In a fit of rage, Loki backhanded her, sending her flying across the room, smacking her head against the wall and causing her to lose consciousness.

And even though she knew it wasn’t possible, she could have sworn she heard Bucky saying her name just as everything went black.

Steve had truly never witnessed something like this before. Destruction by an alien race? He supposed he could check that off his list of things he’d never think would ever happen.

He was focused, but AJ was in the back of his mind. She should have checked in by now. Tony was off trying to take out as many of the Chitauri who had come through the portal, but AJ was no where to be found. And she hadn’t answered through the comm system.
And now there was a damn giant space ship coming through the portal.

“We need to focus, Cap.” Natasha said as she and Clint looked up at the sky as well, but his eyes kept drifting over at Stark Tower where he knew AJ was, “She can handle herself.”

Steve looked over at Natasha and nodded his head. “That’s a,”

“Spaceship, yeah.” Natasha agreed, her focus solely on the problem at hand.

“Stark, are you seeing this?” Steve asked over comm.

“Seeing. Still working on believing…” He said back, “Where’s Banner? Has he shown up yet?”

“Banner?” Steve said back in confusion.

“Just keep me posted.”

As the Chitauri spaceship flew above them, Steve watched as many of the Chitauri jumped from the ship, jumping through the windows of the buildings they were near. “Follow me!” Steve yelled and they all ran forward only duck behind a cab for cover, just narrowly missing being thrown back by an explosion. Steve assessed the area and the civilians around him as listened as Barton began to speak.

“We’ve got civilians trapped.” The Archer said.

But Steve looked up just as Loki flew over them in one of the Chitauri crafts. “Loki.” He seethed. He pushed back his panic over the fact that AJ still hadn’t checked in, and Loki was very much away from Stark Tower now. He couldn’t start to panic over the thought that AJ may have not been able to get the upper hand with Loki, and that perhaps she was injured somewhere…or worse.

So, instead, he kept his eye trained on Loki and watched as a troop followed after him going down a busy street, blowing up cars and shooting at the civilians who were running for their lives.

He shook his head in frustration, “They’re fish in a barrel down there.” Steve said in anger.

Natasha stood up, firing both her guns at the same time at the incoming group of Chitauri, Clint ran forward and took cover behind a flipped over cab. Natasha ducked back down and looked to Steve, “We got this. It’s good. Go!”

Steve looked to Clint, hesitating leaving them. “You think you can hold them off?” He asked.

“Captain,” Clint grabbed at his bow, the arrows in his quiver ready to be taken out at any needed second, “It would be my genuine pleasure.” He was quick to take one out and spin on his heels, shooting at one of the aliens, hitting is square in its head only to have it quickly separate into two more arrows, killing all three of the Chitauri aliens.

Steve left them and jumped off an overpass and rolled onto a bush all the while the ships above him fired at him. He jumped off the bus and onto a car just as it was shot at and flipped off of it as it flew forward.

He continued to run, jumping over cars on the way, dodging incoming shots from above him and using his shield to block fire aimed at civilians, he jumped over one last car and landed on top of another where two cops were standing, yelling to one another. He gestured towards the buildings as he began to speak, “You need men in these buildings. There are more people inside and they can
be running right into the line of fire. You take them to the basement or through the subway, you need to keep them off the streets!” He stressed. “I need a perimeter as far back as 39th,”

“-Why the hell should I take orders from you?” The cop shouted at Steve.

An explosion behind him stopped Steve from answering, two Chitauri warriors jumped down and attacked Steve, who used his shield to block a blow and then slammed his shield into the warrior behind him, knocking him to the ground and swung back around to face the one in front of him ducked down missing a hit and then stood up and swung his fist at its face, knocking it down as well. The warrior from behind Steve got up and attacked, but he used his SHIELD again to hit it while the other warrior got up and he used his shield again, only this time to cut through the warrior’s arm that had a explosion device attached to it. He looked back at the two cops.

The men in uniform began to head towards the rest of the cops, giving the men the instructions Steve had given him.

“I need men in those buildings, lead the people down and away from the streets!” He then talked into his radio. “We’re gonna set up a perimeter all the way down to 39th street.

“AJ,” Steve said in the comm as he left the area, running towards more people in danger. “AJ, do you hear me?” He asked, “Jay!”

No answer.

Chapter End Notes

New chapter should be up by Saturday or earlier if you guys can persuade me enough ;) Kudos and comments are always appreciated! Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter!
Team

Chapter Notes

OC MASTERLIST

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Jay!

AJ blinked, her head pounding as something hovered over her. No, not something, someone. She closed her eyes tightly and opened them trying to better her vision and saw that it was Thor crouched over her, “Adelyn, can you hear me?”

She nodded, sitting up slowly with the help of Thor. “Where’s Loki?” She held onto the side of her head, feeling crust from blood. The wound had healed itself, just like they always did, but there was a lump of blood crusting into her hair now.

“He’s gone. He jumped onto one of the Chitauri crafts while I was wounded.” Thor touched his side.

“Are you okay?” She asked, looking to see that there was a tear in his clothes as well as a little blood.

“It’s not the first time Loki has stabbed me.” Thor answered, standing up and grabbing onto AJ’s hand to lift her up as well.

AJ would have to ask him about that later, but for now she let him lift her. “Have you seen my friends?”

Thor nodded, keeping his hand on her to keep her steady. “They’re on the ground.”

AJ nodded, blinking her eyes again to try and adjust to her surroundings. Loki was gone. The portal was open, and she was pretty sure she had just seen a giant ass space ship fly by. “I think I missed some things.”

Thor nodded his head in agreement, “Horror, destruction, death.” He listened.

“Yeah,” AJ drew out the word. “I’m gonna need to catch a ride with you down to the ground. Take me to Steve?” She asked.

Thor moved his arm to wrap around her waist and pulled her into his side. “Hold on tightly.” He told her. AJ did as she was told, gripping onto him and felt the air knock out of the after he began to swing his hammer in the air and they were picked up off the ground by the force of it.

AJ looked down at the ground and saw Steve, Natasha, and Clint, completely outnumbered by the Chitauri surrounding them. “If you do that lightening thing while holding onto me, am I gonna get shocked?” She asked.

Thor chuckled, “I don’t think so. If you do, it will only be slightly.”

“I’m willing to take the risk. Take those bastards out!” She told Thor who listening to her, sending lighting to strike the Chitauri. She wasn’t shocked, there was just a little tickle against her skin and her hair was affected by the static. But that was it. Thor dropped down onto the ground, arm still wrapped around her as they landed.

“Jay!” Steve shouted when he saw her.

She held out her hand, “I’m good.” AJ said as she helped Thor stand. The pain from Loki stabbing him was either bothering him, or when he summoned lightening, it took more out of him than he had thought, either way, AJ moved her arm around his waist while he moved his own arm around her shoulder now. “You got it?” AJ asked Thor once he was steady.
He nodded, able to stand on his own now.

“What’s the story upstairs?” Steve asked Thor and AJ.

“The power surrounding the cube is impenetrable.” Thor began to explain to Steve.

AJ heard Tony over the comm system, “Thor is right, we gotta deal with these guys.”

Natasha and Clint made their way over to them, both looking tired but relieved to see AJ. “How do we do this?” Natasha asked.

“As a team.” Steve said, looking up at the tower.

“I have unfinished business with Loki.” Thor said in a grim tone.

“Yeah?” AJ turned to see Clint adjusting his arrow heads to ready them for more. “Get in line.”

“What!?” Steve scolded Clint, “Loki is gonna keep this fight focused on us and that’s what we need. Without him, these things could run wild. We got Stark up top, he’s gonna need us to-” He stopped when they all heard the sound of a bike’s engine pulling up, their eyes going to where they now saw Banner arriving. AJ shook her head in disbelief. She had thought for sure that Banner would run as far away from this as possible, not wanting to put himself in that kind of environment ever again. The group walked over to where Bruce was getting off the bike.

“So,” Bruce said, looking around as he walked forward to meet them. “This all seems…horrible.”

“I’ve seen worse.” Natasha said, looking at Bruce.

He swallowed hard, focusing on Natasha. “I’m sorry.”

“No, we could-” she smiled a bit, “-use a little worse.” Bruce nodded his hand, understanding what Natasha meant.

“Stark, we got him.” Steve said over comm.

“Banner?”

“Just like you said.”

“Then tell him to suit up. I’m bringing the party to you.”

AJ looked up to see Tony flying towards them, the giant space ship she had seen earlier following close behind him, knocking into a building when Tony rounded a corner.

“I don’t see how that’s a party.” Natasha said, looking up at the ship.

AJ looked over to Bruce as the ship began to skim the road as Tony flew lower. “You ready?” AJ asked him when it began to head their way.

He took in a breath and began to walk away from them and towards the ship.

“Dr. Banner,” Steve said as he took a step forward, watching him leave. “Now might be a really good time for you to get angry.”

Bruce looked back, clearly amused by Steve’s words. “That’s my secret, Cap.” He stopped and looked to them all. “I’m always angry.” His shirt ripped off as he began to transform into the Hulk,
his large fist flying at the nose of the ship (which now looked more like a creature than ship,) and smashed it onto the ground, stopping it from moving forward. The Hulk pressed down hard into the ground to keep it from moving, the street breaking beneath causing the ship/creature/thing’s body to lunge forward from the back, crashing right towards them.

“*Hold on!*” Tony said over comm.

He blasted a few missiles at it causing it to explode. AJ ran backwards and towards Clint, raising her hands up in the air to create a shield of ice to keep them from getting burnt. She could see through it that Steve was using his SHIELD to protect both himself and Natasha. Thor on the other hand simply took the hit.

The Chitauri all screamed as it died.

“I think that was their mother.” AJ said as the ice thawed. She and Clint walked over to where Steve, Banner, Natasha, and Thor were just as Tony flew over to them. She stood in the middle of Thor and Clint and listened as Hulk roared. She could hear Thor readying his hammer while Clint brought out his bow and took out an arrow. AJ moved her hand to her gun holster and pulled it out, aiming it at the Chitauri who continued to scream out.

Both AJ and Natasha looked up at the sky watching as more of those creatures, and hundreds more Chitauri came out of the portal.

“Guys,” Natasha said,

“Maybe it wasn’t the mom.” AJ said, eyes trained on the sky. “Those things sure look nasty.”

“*Call it, Captain.*” Tony said.

“Alright, listen up. Until we can close that portal up there, we’re gonna use containment. Barton, I want you on that roof,” He pointed up to a surrounding skyscraper. “-Eyes on everything. Call out patterns and strays. Stark, you got the perimeter. Anything gets more than three blocks out, you turn it back or you turn it to ash.”

“Wanna give me a lift?” Clint looked to Tony in his Iron Man suit. “

“Right.” Tony grabbed him by the back of his shirt. “Better clench up, Legolas.” And the two of them disappeared into the sky.

“Thor, you gotta try and bottleneck that portal, slow ‘em down. You got that lightening, light the bastards up.” Steve said to the God of Thunder.

Thor began to swing the hammer and took off as well.

Steve looked over to AJ and Natasha. “We stay on the ground, keep the fighting here.” He then looked to Banner. “And Hulk,” He called out, “Smash.”

Hulk gave a downright terrifying grin right before he jumped, taking out dozens of Chitauri warriors in the process that had been on the sides of the building he crashed into. From the ground, AJ could see Hulk grabbing onto them, either smashing or throwing them.

AJ looked around, seeing all the damage. “If we actually survive this,” She said, causing Steve and Natasha to look over at her. “-Clean up crew is gonna be pissed.”

“Oh, *please,* you made a bigger mess on your first solo mission.” Natasha scoffed.
“I resent that.” AJ replied with a smirk.

“Let’s finish the banter later, ladies.” Steve said, but AJ could see the corners of his lips twitching up a bit, trying to fight a smile from forming.

AJ looked up when she heard thunder, seeing the bolts of lightning were coming from the very top of the Chrysler building. It struck towards the portal, taking out all of the Chitauri that tried to go through it.

The Chitauri jumped at AJ, Natasha, and Steve, knocking them down onto the ground. AJ grunted as one of the aliens held her down, forcing her to stay on the ground. But she was able to get her hand out from under the creature and grabbed onto its neck and watched as the creature turned into an ice sculpture as she kicked it off her, causing it shatter when it hit the ground. Steve was running over to her and helped her up, they both looked over to see Natasha grab one of the Chitauri guns, shooting at it. Steve ran over, jumping over a car to get to her and the red head quickly swung around and aimed the gun at Steve.

Natasha quickly stood down and began to lean against a car. “Captain, none of this is gonna mean a damn thing if we don’t close that portal.”

AJ walked over to them, “Tony’s missiles couldn’t even penetrate that thing.” She reminded Natasha.

“Our biggest guns couldn’t touch it.” Steve agreed.

“Well,” Natasha looked up at Stark Tower, “Maybe it’s not about guns and missiles.”

They both followed her gaze. “You wanna get up there, you’re gonna need a ride.”

Natasha made her way over to the other side of the overpass. “I got a ride.” She saw an incoming ship heading her way. She then looked to Steve. “I could use a boost though.”

Steve took a step back, understanding what she meant. “You sure about this?” He asked, holding his shield steady for when she would jump off of it.

“Yeah,” Natasha said as if it were no big deal. “It’s gonna be fun.”

AJ chuckled, shaking her head. Natasha ran at Steve, kicking off of a car to land on his shield and AJ watched as her superior officer was boosted into the air just as one of the ships flew by, grabbing onto the belly of it as it flew away. AJ looked to Steve who looked absolutely impressed, only to fall back a bit from the blast of explosion near them. She looked over to her right to see that more of the Chitauri warriors were coming towards them and trust out her hand, sending a cold wind to knock them back.

She looked back to Steve who look equally impressed by what she had just done. He smiled, opening his mouth to speak but AJ stopped him.

“Yes, I know. I’m very impressive. We can discuss it after we kick some ass.”

Steve laughed and nodded his head in agreement and followed after AJ who ran towards more of the Chitauri warriors on the street.

AJ had managed to grab one of the guns they Chitauri used and fired at them while Steve fought with her, back to back. Tony landed by them and reflected a repulse blast off of Steve’s shield, taking out the surrounding warriors and then flew away.
AJ and Steve ran forward towards more incoming warriors and AJ fired at them, sending a few of them to the ground only to be tossed back hard by one of them shooting at the gun. “Jay!” Steve shouted, when she managed to sit up, she saw that Steve was on the ground, knocked down by one of the warriors. She ran over and jumped on its back, moving her hands to the sides of its face and turned it to ice, yanking up hard and decapitating it. Steve looked up at her with wide eyes she got off the warrior just as it fell. AJ held out her hand for him to grab and he took it, letting her help him stand.

“Captain, the bank on 42\textsuperscript{nd}, past Madison. They cornered a lot of civilians in there.” Clint said over comm.

Steve looked to AJ who nodded her head. They’d go together. “On it.” Steve said and they both made their way to 42\textsuperscript{nd} street.

AJ stayed outside, keeping more Chitauri from entering the place while Steve dealt with the ones inside. She used her ability to shoot cold winds at them to keep them from entering, sending them flying into the surrounding buildings.

“Nat?” AJ said over comm, “You good?”

“Just going for a leisurely drive, Frost.”

AJ chuckled but quickly stopped when she heard an explosion and watched Steve fly out of a window, landing belly first onto the car right in front of her.

“Steve!” She shouted, running over to him. “Oh my god,” AJ watched as he slowly tried to push himself up, “Can you stand?”

He nodded, but AJ still helped him down, letting him lean against her for support. They both stood and watched as the people left the bank, firemen rushing the place to help anyone still inside. AJ looked up at Steve and he looked down at her, “Are you okay?” He asked her.

She nodded. “Can you stand on your own?” She asked him. He nodded but didn’t move to let go of her. She let him lean against her with his arm draped over her shoulder and his head hung low.

“You did good, Steve.” Her voice was soft, but she knew he could hear her over all the chaos. “You saved those people. You did good.” She said again, wanting him to really hear it.

Steve breathed in deeply as he looked down at her and then stood up straight, dropping his arm from her shoulder. “Let’s go.” He told her.

AJ followed closely after him, a Chitauri warrior shot at them and Steve shielded them both from getting hit, sending the blast flying back at the warrior. Thor landed behind them and they all began to fight off the Chitauri that now surrounding them. When they were close enough, AJ was able to physically touch them and turn them into ice, swinging her leg around to kick the creatures, shattering them. AJ turned and saw Steve get blasted in his chest, knocking him down on his stomach. She ran over to him just as Thor helped Steve to his feet.

“You ready for another bout?” Thor asked just as AJ made it to them.

Steve was breathing hard, sweat pouring off his face. He was using too much of his energy, too much strength, if he kept going this way – he’d get himself killed.

“What,” Steve breathed out, “You getting’ sleepy?”
“Steve, please, pace yourself a bit. Thor and I can handle most of them.”

He shook his head. “I’m good.” He assured her, standing up straight.

Thor held out his hand and his hammer returned to him.

“I can close it!” Steve and AJ heard Natasha say over comm. “Can anybody copy? I can shut the portal down!”

“Do it!” Steve ordered Natasha.

“No, wait.” Tony cut in.

“Stark, these things are still coming!”

“I got a nuke coming in, it’s gonna blow in less than a minute.” Tony told them. AJ looked to Steve in shock. Dammit, Fury. How could he let this happen? But…he wouldn’t let something like that ever happen – he’d never nuke an entire city even with the danger everyone was in. He believed in the Avengers Initiative, he believed that they could save the human race from Loki. No, Fury wouldn’t do this.

That left the counsel. AJ squared her jaw. “Can you put it in the water, Stark?” AJ asked.

“Oh, Ice Queen, I got the perfect place to put it.”

The portal. He was going to fly it through the portal. “Tony, no!” AJ began to argue.

“Stark, you know that’s a one-way trip.”

“Save the rest for the turn, J.”

“Tony, please! We can find another way!” AJ begged. But he didn’t respond. Tony flew above them, holding onto the nuke and headed towards the portal up in the sky. AJ look to Steve, grabbing his arm. “Stop him!”

He looked at her way sad eyes, “I’m sorry, Jay.”

AJ covered her mouth with her hand as Tony disappeared into the portal.

Howard Stark kept her alive, he preserved her body to keep her from dying back in the forties and now she was awake and couldn’t save his only son. Something she had sworn to do. AJ had picked Tony for the Avengers Initiative. She said his name – she was the whole reason he was even a part of this thing and now because of that, he was going to die. Howard saved AJ just so she could be the reason his son was going to die.

The Chitauri around them began to collapse, the creatures in the sky falling to the ground as well. AJ looked around and saw that they were all dying. Tony had saved them.

She looked up at the portal, praying, no, begging some higher power that Tony would be flying down through it. That he’d fly down to where they were on the ground and make some snarky remark about anything and everything. He’d make fun of Steve and his outfit or call AJ Ice Queen and she wouldn’t even be irritated! Because he’d be here.

But he was nowhere to be seen.

AJ looked over to Steve, feeling his eyes on her. She looked away and closed her eyes, knowing
what he was going to say next.

“Close it.” Steve told Natasha over comm.

The portal began to close.

*I’m sorry, Howard,* AJ said in her head, eyes closed.

And then she heard Steve say something I disbelief. “Son of a gun!”

AJ opened her eyes and looked up at the sky, seeing Tony falling in the air. “Oh my god”! She breathed out. He had made it! He was…falling very fast. “Why isn’t he stopping?” AJ asked.

“He’s not slowing down!” Thor said as Tony fell through the air, he began to ready his hammer to fly up to catch him, but Hulk appeared, jumping in the air to grab Tony, gripping onto one of the skyscrapers and then slid down the side of the building before he crashed on the ground Thor, AJ, and Steve.

The three of them ran forward just as Hulk tossed Tony off of him. Thor got to Tony first, ripping off Tony’s Iron Man face plate.

Steve got down on his knees, pressing his ear to Tony’s chest, still covered with Iron Mans gear. But Steve was enhanced, he’d be able to detect a heartbeat better than any of them. When Steve moved back up, AJ saw that the arc reactor on Tony’s chest was not glowing.

His heart had stopped. “No,” She whispered, getting on her knees as well, slumping down next to Steve.

And then Hulk began to roar loudly at Tony, the sound causing the ground to shake violently. Tony jerked away, somehow Hulk had scared him awake. He looked up at all of them, shocked. He gasped, opening and closing his eyes while looking around. Tony looked back at them. Hulk roared again, pounding his chest.

“What the hell?” Tony said. “What happened?” He looked to Hulk, Thor, and Steve. “Please tell me nobody kissed me.”

AJ laughed, shaking her head. This is exactly the kind of thing she wanted to hear from him. Hell, she’d listen to him recite the whole damn dictionary because it would be a reminder that he was alive.

“We won.” Steve told Tony.

“Alright.” Tony said, “Hey!” His voice raised slightly as if he was celebrating, “Alright. Good job, guys. Let’s just not come in tomorrow. Let’s just take a day. You ever tried Shawarma? There’s a shawarma joint about two blocks from here. I don’t know what it is, but I wanna try it.”

“We’re not finished yet.” Thor reminded them.

Ugh. Loki.

“…And then Shawarma after?” Tony asked.

AJ laughed again, looking down at Tony. “Yes. And I’ll even put in on SHIELD’s tab.” She sat up, as did Steve, he helped Tony stand as well.

“SHIELD has a tab at Shawarma?”
“You’d be surprised at how many agents eat there, Tony.” AJ said, patting the back of his Iron Man suit once he was standing.

Tony nodded, looking to Stark Tower. He made a face. “You mind if we uh, take the elevator up to the penthouse?”

Steve and AJ laughed, Thor even smiled. Hulk on the other hand just stood there breathing hard. AJ wondered how long until he’d turn back into Bruce.

They took the elevator up the penthouse, Clint meeting them on the way and Natasha already waiting for them upstairs, a gun pointed at Loki who was unconscious, smashed into the ground.

AJ looked to Hulk and raised her brow in amusement, “Smashed.” He told her.

She chuckled, “I see that.”

In the situation they were in, AJ probably shouldn’t feel so giddy. But they had just saved the world and Tony was alive! Yes, buildings were destroyed, probably man homes too, and there would be a death count – but they would never become slaves to Loki. Wasn’t that reason enough to celebrate a little?

AJ had gone to care for Dr. Selvig by the time Loki woke up. When she came back into the penthouse, Thor was putting some sort of device on his wrist so he could escape. Loki watched as she walked into the room, his eyes never leaving her as she walked past him and over to Steve.

“What’s the plan to deal with him?” She asked quietly.

“Thor wants to take him back to Asgard. Make him pay for his punishments.”

Clint took a side step and was next to AJ. “I could put an arrow right between his eyes in a second and we’d never have to worry about him again.”

“No,” Steve said with a sigh, “Loki didn’t only cause problems in our world. He has to pay for what he did on Asgard as well.”

“Yeah,” Clint reluctantly agreed. “I’m just saying it’d be easy.”

“And it is tempting, Steve.” AJ added, smiling up at him. Steve shook his head in amusement, chuckling softly.

They took Loki to SHIELD’s headquarters in New York and kept him contained for a week, Fury fighting tooth and nail with the council to let Thor take Loki back to Asgard.

They didn’t agree.

Fury would let Thor take Loki anyway.

Something felt off about SHIELD to AJ now.

A place that had been her home since waking up in the future now seemed like a complete stranger. Fury gave her credentials back, telling her that she wasn’t allowed to quit. That had made her smile, that man had become family to her.

And with the only living family member alive that she knew of absolutely hating her, AJ could use all the family she could get. Even if it was just her friends.
Natasha, Clint, Steve, and now Tony, Thor and Bruce had become her family. Going through all they went through bonded them for life. Even if they went on their separate ways…it didn’t matter. Because AJ knew that when one of them needed something; they’d all come running to help. Because, as said before, they were a family now.

ONE WEEK LATER

CENTRAL PARK, New York

Thor was taking Loki and the Tesseract back to Asgard where they both belonged, locked away where no one could ever get to them.

AJ watched as Thor brought Loki, the God of Mischief bound and gagged. He looked furious, his vanity and ego easily bruised having everyone see him this way. AJ stood next to Steve, watching as Bruce carefully placed the tesseract in a protective cylinder. Her eyes drifted over to see Natasha whispering something to Clint, the Archer wore sunglasses, but his eyes were on Loki. Whatever she had said to him causing him to give into a smile, more cocky than friendly. It made AJ smile as well.

But then she looked at Steve, who was glaring daggers at the Tesseract.

He had died trying to protect the world from it. Or, protect the world from anyone ever getting their hands on it. AJ knew he felt anger towards Howard for taking it out of the water – but Howard saw a future so advanced that it would make a better world. AJ wondered if the reason why he kept the Tesseract was out of selfish reasons. Howard wanted desperately for AJ to wake up and because of the advanced technology (though it took a couple decades) she finally woke up and survived. Maybe he kept it to save her? Or maybe he really did just want a better tomorrow.

Either way, it was gone now.

And they would never have to deal with it again (hopefully.)

AJ placed her hand on Steve’s forearm, giving it a gentle squeeze. He closed his eyes and took in a
deep breath before he could muster up a smile. She smiled back at him and his smile became more
genuine. He wrapped his arm around AJ’s shoulder and lead her near Thor and Loki so they could
watch them leave.

AJ gave Thor a soft smile that he returned before the sky opened and he and Loki disappeared. The
group all began to say their goodbyes, Steve and AJ walking over to Tony, who shook Steve’s hand
but hugged AJ tightly.

“I get it.” Tony told her as he let go of her.

“Get what?” She raised her brows.

Tony simply shrugged, “Why my Dad went to the extremes he did to save you. I mean, you’re not
that bad, Ice queen.” He winked and then walked over to the driver’s side of the convertible, Bruce
got in the passenger’s side.

“Call me that one more time, Tony, and I will turn you into a popsicle!” She playfully threatened
causing Tony to laugh before he revved the engine and sped away.

AJ waved goodbye to Bruce as they past them, he smiled and waved back as well.

She looked over to Clint and Natasha who were leaning against their own car and bit down on her
lower lip.

“You wanna ride back to the apartment?” Steve asked, causing AJ to turn and face him.

She frowned, dreading what she had to tell him. “I uh,” She cleared her throat, “I’m actually not
going back to the apartment.” She told him.

“Oh.” Steve looked down at his feet, shuffling them a bit. “When will you be coming home?”

AJ took a moment before she spoke again, “I’m not.”

Steve’s eyes snapped back to look at her. “What do you mean?”

“SHIELD’s council has some concerns about me not being able to stay calm under pressure – after
what happened on the Helicarrier…there’s no hiding that I have powers anymore.” She shrugged,
“They want me stationed in DC at a SHIELD compound where I can retrain and be observed.”

Steve shook his head, “They can’t do that!”

“Fury already lost that battle, Steve. And after letting Thor leave with Loki and the Tesseract, he
doesn’t need them gunning for him anymore than they already are.”

He crossed his arms over his chest. “Well, then I’m coming with you.”

AJ closed her eyes, please, Steve, don’t make this any harder than it already is, “-You can’t.” She
smiled, her eyes watering. “I can’t have contact with anyone except for those helping me train for
the next few months…but I’ll see you again, Steve.”

He shook his head, “Jay, I’m coming with you. They can keep me out of the compound, but they
can’t keep me out of D.C. I’m going whether you like it or not.”

“Steve,” She tried to argue.

“-I don’t want to be in Brooklyn if it doesn’t have you in it. I’m with you, Jay.”
AJ closed her eyes, nose flaring as she tried to hold back her tears, “Till the end of the line.” She whispered. It was something Steve and Bucky always said to each other.

She lost Bucky.

But she still had Steve.

“It’s going to be a while until you can visit, Steve.” AJ told him, opening her eyes and looking up at him.

Steve smiled, glad that she was no longer arguing with him on this. “I’m a pretty patient guy,” He reminded her.

AJ playfully punched Steve in his arm and shook her head. “Go back to the apartment and pack your things up – and some of my stuff too. When Natasha and Clint get back from taking me to D.C, they’ll help set you up with a place in the city.” She told him. Steve smiled, looking down at AJ. God, she was gonna miss him. She moved forward and wrapped her arms around his shoulders, standing on her tip toes as she hugged him, “-Don’t be too much of a pain for Fury while I’m gone, okay?”

Steve laughed, hugging her back, arms wrapped tightly around her middle.

They said their goodbyes and AJ left with Clint and Natasha, watching as Steve became just a dot behind them.

They arrived in D.C a few hours later where AJ was brought to one of the secure compounds.

A woman in a white medical coat who had long blonde hair, thick dark brows and intense blue eyes was waiting for AJ when they walked into where she’d be staying.

“Agent Frost,” The woman greeted her, “Did you have any trouble locating the place?”

AJ shook her head, “No.”

“Yeah, we just put the address into google maps.” Natasha said sarcastically from AJ’s side causing the woman to look over at her with a smirk, raising her brow.

“Hmm,” She looked over Natasha, “At least that means you will have the address saved for the next time you stop by.” She continued to smirk. “I assume you’ll be coming back, yes? Or perhaps I’m just hoping.”

Oh, the blonde was flirting with Natasha. This would be amusing.

“Eventually.” Natasha said slowly, almost sounding flustered.

Both Clint and AJ looked at Natasha, both shocked and amused with the blush forming on the woman know as ‘Black Widow’s cheeks.

“Oh, the blonde was flirting with Natasha. This would be amusing.

“Eventually.” Natasha said slowly, almost sounding flustered.

Both Clint and AJ looked at Natasha, both shocked and amused with the blush forming on the woman know as ‘Black Widow’s cheeks.

“Good.” She winked at Natasha before looking back to AJ. “My name is Dr. Connor.” She introduced herself, holding out her hand for AJ to shake. “But you can call me Jordan.”

AJ left with Dr. Jordan Connor, looking over her shoulder at Natasha who was glaring at Clint, him, Clint probably said something to tease the redhead because the scowl on Natasha’s face was enough to make AJ chuckle. This woman had hardly said anything to Natasha and she was already so flustered. Since she’s known Natasha, AJ had never seen her like that. Men, women, anyone
Natasha had shown interest in – it was all so easy for her. She’d bat her eyelashes or run her fingers through her hair while flirting to get what she wanted and *they* would be the ones stammering and blushing.

It seemed like Natasha finally met her match.

Oh, yeah, this *would* be very amusing.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, so that's the end of PART A of this story (Avengers), now to move on to PART B (The Winter Soldier) you guys are in for a Hell of a ride.
Please excuse any mistakes, typos, or errors. I'll go through it all again and try and fix anything I didn't spot on the re-read.

OC MASTERLIST

See the end of the chapter for more notes
At first it had been a month.

But once that month was over, the council agreed that she should stay six months for observation. It had angered AJ, but they were allowing her friends to visit her, so that she wasn’t completely secluded. Steve, Natasha, and Clint had visited whenever they weren’t on a mission. Natasha and Steve more than Clint. Fury and Hill had even come and visited her on multiple occasions. On that sixth month mark, Steve, Natasha, and Clint came to pick her up.

Jordan had been told to take another blood sample.

“I just took a blood sample yesterday – why would we need another when she’s going home?” The female doctor asked.

Alexander Pierce told Dr. Jordan Connor that AJ would have to stay for the entire year, another six months stuck in the compound where they took her blood, monitored her, and made her work on her powers, testing the temperature of the ice that she would produce at her angriest state. Jordan didn’t like it. It wasn’t sitting well with her. And she really didn’t like having to break the news to AJ’s friends that she would not be released, that they were keeping her under monitoring for another six months.

Steve had been angry, Natasha didn’t show emotion. It was rare Jordan ever saw any from her other than flirtation. But she wasn’t sure if that was even an emotion to Natasha Romanoff, just second nature. But Jordan was able to give as good as she got and Natasha’s face would flush, causing them all to laugh.

AJ and Jordan spoke about it whenever Steve and Natasha would leave, about how AJ had never once seen Natasha get as flustered as she did whenever Jordan said something suggestive to the redhead. The woman in time would urge Jordan to ask out Natasha, and the blonde had laughed.

“You do realize that you are a hot badass doctor, right? You’re intelligent, you’re funny, and you are able to do what no man or woman has ever been able to do to Natasha – fluster her. She likes you.”

Jordan played confident, flirted with Natasha whenever she saw her, but never would she think that Natasha would ever be interested. Jordan, though she portrayed being overly confident, was just as insecure as the next person. Growing up in a small town in Kansas where the boys made fun of her for dressing like them and the girls laughed at her thick eyebrows and her skin covered in freckles wasn’t exactly helpful for Jordan. Not to mention that in her teens, the only other gay person in town moved away. Which left her with the reputation of being the lesbian of the town.

That, she didn’t mind. Because it was her, that’s who she was, it was part of her identity. That’s when she started to show confidence to others that she didn’t exactly feel herself. It wasn’t until she left Kansas and moved to Boston for college that Jordan was accepted by people. And it felt great, she felt free, she felt like she could take the world on. But her insecurities never went away.

Sex was a good way to forget her insecurities. But honestly, Jordan wanted more. She wanted
someone she could come home to every night and wake up next to in the morning. But Natasha Romanoff? She didn’t see the woman known as Black Widow ever wanting to settle down. Especially with someone like Jordan. It was just something the doctor never thought would be remotely possible.

On the year mark of AJ being kept in the compound, Alexander Pierce had showed up to the compound to see the progress that his Agent had made in the last year. She gave it her all but he had looked at Jordan and told her, “Another six months and then she can go home.”

“No!” Jordan had put her foot down. “We’ve done all the test we possibly can on her – why does she need to stay? Don’t you want to use her as an asset? She belongs in the field, not trapped in this compound!” She had argued with Pierce.

“You do not have a say in how long Agent Frost will stay here – the counsel does. And unless you’d like to be replaced on this project, I’d suggest you follow order.”

Project.

He had called AJ a project.

And then he told Jordan that for the last six months of AJ’s stay, she would not be allowed visitors, that it was a distraction to Agent Frost to have her friends visit as much as they were.

That was when Jordan called both Natasha and Steve to meet up and come up with a plan to get AJ out. Jordan could see it in her eyes when she had to tell the agent that she’d be staying another six months, watching the light go out in her eyes, all hope lost. A week went by and AJ started to grow tired, not giving her full strength when training. She’d sleep whenever they weren’t running tests on her or making her train. She didn’t even ask about Steve, Clint, or Natasha.

She just slept.

It scared Jordan.

AJ had become a friend.

And Jordan was scared that if her friend was kept locked away any longer, she’d lose all her will to fight against it. Hell, she argued, but she was so tired that she’d give up and follow orders.

No, this had to stop. She had to get out.

A year and three months.

That was all Jordan would allow AJ to stay. And on the last week of the second month of AJ’s extended stay, Jordan met up with Steve and Natasha and told them her concerns, all of her worries about Agent Frost. Steve was furious, his rocky relationship with Fury had become even worse. Steve was angry that Fury wasn’t going against orders to get AJ out, that he was allowing all of this to happen. Natasha wasn’t happy about it either. And the day Jordan had told Steve, Natasha, and Clint that they were keeping AJ another six months, and would be allowed no visitors, the woman had begun to curse loudly in Russian, that being the only way she could get her anger out.

But after nearly three months of watching AJ sleep her days away, Jordan had enough.

Natasha and Steve had looked to one another, seemingly having a conversation with no words, just a few nods to the other, they looked to Jordan. “We have a plan.” Natasha told her.
“I want in.”

Steve, and Natasha had called the other Avengers, minus Thor who was had returned to Asgard, and they all showed up to the compound with Nick Fury and Maria Hill, demanding to speak with the council. Alexander Pierce had showed up and asked them how he might be of assistance.

Tony had walked over to him, placing his hand on his shoulder, “Here’s the deal. Frost is leaving this compound today with us.”

Pierce had raised his brows in amusement, “Oh, is that so, Mr. Stark?” He chuckled.

Tony grinned, “It is.”

“That’s not up to you. It’s up to the council.” Pierce replied.

“Well, I suggest calling up the council right now because let’s have a head count here,” Tony said, pointing to himself, Banner, Romanoff, Rogers, and Barton. “You have, one, two, three, four, five – five of the avengers and I’m sure if Thor were here to, he would agree with what I’m about to say-” Tony moved closer to Pierce, invading his space. “If you do not let Adelyn Frost out of this compound today, the Avengers...well, we’ll be no more.”

Pierce had glared at Tony who simply smiled in response. “And you all agreed to this?” He asked, looking at Steve, Dr. Banner, Natasha, and Clint who all nodded their head.

Pierce looked to Director Fury and Agent Hill who stood behind the Avengers, who were threatening to quit their jobs as the protectors of earth, “And you agree to this, Nick? You’d allow them to walk away?” He asked.

“Who am I to go over the council’s head again?” Fury said sarcastically causing Agent Hill to smirk.

“You have a woman in there who has risked her life numerous times by working for SHIELD. Who walked into a war with an alien race with stunning grace and helped stop them. She’s just as much of an Avenger as we all are.” Tony said, motioning to them. “So, as long as she’s locked up – I guess the Avengers are on strike, right guys?” He looked back to the group who all smiled as they nodded their head.

Pierce had left to speak with the council, relaying the message Tony had given them, and when he came back, he was not alone. AJ was with him. Jordan smiled in relief when she saw AJ and watched the look of happiness sweep over her face when she saw all her friends waiting for her. But Piece stopped AJ by grabbing her by her arm. He then looked to Jordan. “One more blood sample.” He ordered.

Steve stepped forward, putting himself in-between AJ and Pierce, looking down at the man. “No more blood samples. She’s given enough.”

Jordan watched as AJ placed her hand on Steve’s back, causing him to turn and face her. “As long as I walk out those doors after the blood is taken – I don’t mind getting pricked one more time.”

Jordan took one more blood sample from AJ and hugged her tightly before she left, AJ whispered to the doctor her thanks and Jordan had smiled, pressing her hand to the woman’s face and nodded her head, letting her no that it wasn’t a big deal. AJ hugged her one more time before Steve came and got her while Natasha and Clint helped back up her belongings while Dr. Banner and Stark questioned Pierce as to why they needed so many samples of AJ’s blood.
But Jordan had never heard Alexander Pierce’s answer. He had yet to even tell Jordan what they were testing AJ’s blood for. She didn’t have the clearance level to know that information.

As AJ walked out, her small frame between Tony and Steve’s, as if they were still protecting her from being kept in the compound, Jordan watched as Clint and Natasha made their way over to her.

“Where’d Banner go?” Jordan asked, she hadn’t seen him leave.

“He left after Piece blue-balled him and Stark when they wanted to know what they’re testing AJ’s blood for. Anger issues and all, Banner thought it might be better if he excused himself from the area.” Natasha replied.

Jordan couldn’t help but gulp.

“You wouldn’t happen to know why they’re testing AJ’s blood, would you?” Natasha asked.

“Above my clearance level.” Jordan spoke honestly. Clint didn’t buy it. But Natasha believed her. “I want to know just as badly as you guys do. I’ll work my hardest to find out.” She promised.

Clint walked away but Natasha stayed. “The boys and I decided that we’re throwing AJ a welcome back party slash late birthday celebration.” The red head told Jordan. “You should come. AJ’s a blast once she’s had a few drinks.”

Jordan laughed, “I’d like that.”

Natasha smiled softly, pushing her hair behind her right ear. “I’ll text you the information.”

Jordan smirked, “I look forward to it.”

Natasha looked away from Jordan as she shook her head and smiled.

As Jordan watched Natasha leave, she couldn’t help but wonder if she should take AJ’s advice – what harm could come of asking out a former KBG assassin?
It had been six days since AJ had left the compound.

Steve had taken her to her new apartment and when he told her he’d let her rest, she asked him to stay. “Seclusion isn’t as charming as it might sound to some people.” AJ had said, her voice small. Steve frowned, but agreed to stay. He’d been sleeping on her couch every night since she was brought back from the compound. He would hear her rolling around in her bed but never once felt the temperature drop. He would also wake up earlier than AJ and check the weather patterns while she slept, just in case she only dropped it slightly. Nothing. Even during the nightmares, AJ now had it under control.

It didn’t mean Steve liked the fact that she was still even having nightmares. What all had they done in the compound to her? She wouldn’t talk about it other than saying the tested her strength and the power of her wind gusts and just how cold she could make something when angry. Nothing like the experiments that Dr. Reinhardt performed on her, which Steve read about while she was gone. He was appalled, with each page he read he grew angrier. He would think about the white lines he would sometimes see on AJ’s skin and look through the logging of each time they sliced her open.

Steve had known that Hydra had experimented on AJ. She just never told him the extent of it. He didn’t ask her to talk to him about it – she kept it from him for a reason.

The only thing that truly mattered to Steve was that AJ was home. And she was smiling and laughing and having fun with the group of friends. Banner had gone back to NYC, but Tony stayed long enough to get AJ nice and drunk and then flew back to NYC in his Iron Man suit. Clint left early as well, saying it was past his bed time and Natasha and AJ began to ‘boo’ him, calling him a grandpa. Clint laughed, reminding AJ that they were celebrating her 96th birthday, to which AJ yelled back at him that she still looked better than him. Clint had laughed, kissing the top of her head and left the bar.

Dr. Jordan Connor came to celebrate AJ as well, talking to Natasha for most of the night. Steve, at first, had found it shocking that anyone could make Natasha crack a real smile. But now? He was used to the smile Natasha wore whenever she was in Dr. Connor’s presence. It was the same smile AJ had back in the 40’s whenever she was with Bucky.

There were times during the night where he’d see AJ lost in thought, the others did as well. Clint and Natasha would engage her in conversation while Tony did what he did best – serve up drinks. He tried, that’s what mattered. Howard Starks son had become just as protective of AJ as his father had been. Tony had proven that when he went up against Pierce and the counsel to get AJ out of the compound. This past year had been difficult for Tony – Pepper kept them all updated. He had been out of the country on a mission with Barton and Romanoff when everything happened with Tony, but he did go and see him when he arrived, making sure he was okay. His Malibu home had been destroyed so he and Pepper had moved in to The Avengers Tower (no longer Stark). It was a home away from home whenever any of them were stationed in NYC.
Steve watched as Jordan and Natasha left together, the red head pressing a kiss to AJ’s cheek before she left, wishing her a happy birthday. Jordan had waved goodbye to AJ and the two left together and AJ looked over to Steve with a smirk.

“I did that.” She said proudly.

He chuckled, putting his hand down on her shoulder as she began to wobble on the bar stool, steadying her. “Did what?”

“Fall in love!” AJ laughed, her head falling back a bit causing her to lean backwards and Steve quickly got up from his seat and pulled her back to him so she wouldn’t fall off the stool. It wasn’t surprising that he had gotten selected as AJ’s caretaker for the rest of the evening – he had been living at her apartment since she had gotten home. “I made them fall in love!”

Steve smiled down at AJ in amusement, pushing the hair that had fallen in her face back as AJ tried desperately to blow it away. “You’re next!” She grinned cheekily.

Steve made a face, “I’m going to have to pass on that.”

“I’m happy.” She pouted.

Steve chuckled, “I am. You’re home now, so I’m happy.”

AJ’s brows knit together and she frowned. “I want to be happy.” She told him.

“You seem pretty happy to me.” Steve teased and AJ laughed, covering her face with both of her hands.

“No!” She giggled. “I’m drunk.” She moved her hands away from her face and was smiling at Steve. “I am incredibly drunk.” AJ whispered. But then she let out a long sigh. “I wanna go home, Steve.”

He smiled sadly at her, hearing the sadness in her voice. “Okay.” He said, getting off the stool and helping her off her own only to have her legs buckle a bit. Steve was quick to grab her though, legs swooping behind her knees to lift her.

“No!” AJ complained. “No. I want to ride on your back.”

She began to wiggle, trying to get out of his hold. “Jay, stop. Dammit, you’re going to make me drop you.” He huffed as he carried her out of the bar.

Steve set AJ down on the ground, having her lean up against him so she wouldn’t fall and waved over a taxi to take them back to AJ’s apartment.

“Why do you still take cabs?” AJ asked. “You should get a car –oh! You should get a motorcycle!
Steve! Go get a motorcycle, I’m sure SHIELD will pay for it!” She said in excitement as he lifted her again, carefully placing in her in the back of the cab. He shut her door and walked over to his side and got in.

AJ was quiet the rest of the ride back to her apartment, just looking out her window at the city. And when they arrived, Steve helped her out of the cab and carried her up to her floor.

When they were inside, AJ laid down on the couch, kicking her legs up in the air and pointing to the boots she had worn tonight. Steve shook his head. “It’s like caring for a toddler.” He joked as he pulled off AJ’s boots for her. When she started to unbutton her jeans Steve quickly stopped her. “-How about you sleep in your clothes tonight, Jay?”

She reached up for Steve with the most pathetic pout he had ever seen her give before. “Tired.”

He chuckled and helped lift her off the couch and to her feet. AJ wobbled a bit but eventually became still. She looked up at Steve and blinked before her eyes went wide as tears filled them. He frowned, thumb brushing away a tear that had rolled down her cheek. “Hey, what’s going on?” He asked.

But she smiled, “I missed you.” She said in a cry.

Steve frowned. “I missed you too,”

He went to tell her that he needed to take her to her room but AJ had slowly moved up on her tip toes and pressed her lips to Steve’s. He stood there, completely frozen until she pulled away. “I missed you so much.” She said again, wrapping her arms around his shoulders and kissing him again. Steve was a gentleman, he would never take advantage of a woman while she was drunk. But her kisses were so needy and desperate that he couldn’t help but kiss her back. And then suddenly the guilt went away and he pulled her to his body. “You came back to me,” AJ said in a pant between kisses. “I knew you would. I missed you so much, Bucky.”

Steve went stiff and pulled away.

“No, Bucky – don’t go.” AJ grabbed at Steve’s shirt, trying to tug him back to her. No, she was trying to tug Bucky back to her. She wasn’t seeing him, she was seeing Bucky. His dead best friend. And the love of AJ’s life.

Steve licked at her lower lip and closed her eyes, inhaling deeply. He shouldn’t have done that. He should have stopped it – why would AJ ever want to kiss him? He was sure she still saw him as the Steve she met at the recruitment center with Bucky. Small, fragile, weak.

“I’m tired.” AJ whispered, moving forward to rest her head against Steve’s chest. “I wanna go to bed.” She mumbled, slumping a bit against him. Steve sighed but picked her up and brought her to her bedroom.

He placed her down on her bed and pulled the covers over her still fully clothed body and left to go get her a glass of water for when she woke up. He set the glass down on the nightstand next to her bed and looked down at AJ who was asleep, clutching onto Bucky’s dog tags. Steve closed his eyes as he shook his head. “I’m sorry.” He apologized.

To who?

AJ for kissing her while she was drunk and thought he was Bucky? Or to his dead best friend – who probably wouldn’t like the idea of Steve kissing his girl.
Both.

He shouldn’t have kissed her back.

Steve gathered his stuff he had brought over to AJ’s house and left her a note telling her that he was heading back to his apartment. He hoped to God that AJ would wake up tomorrow and not remember what had happened. But he doubted that would happen.

*Shouldn’t have let her kiss you.*

*Shouldn’t have kissed her back.*

But somehow, to Steve, it had felt right.

January 8th, 2014
Washington, D.C

In the last few months, AJ had barely seen Steve.

She wasn’t angry at him – she completely understood. The problem with AJ being a powered person who that her body was always trying to heal her – even when she wasn’t physically wounded. It helped since she never got hungover or sick, really. But what she did not like about her body quickly healing itself after a night of drinking was that she would always remembered what had happened during that time.

AJ remembered seeing Steve…but then it was Bucky. And she was drunk enough to not question
it. So, she kissed him. Because she missed Bucky so much that it left a physical ache in her heart whenever she thought about him. But, in her drunken state, he was there standing right in front of her and how could she not kiss him? How could she not hold onto him and refuse to let go.

But it had been Steve.

And Steve had kissed her back.

Only stopping when she called him by Bucky’s name and he realized that it wasn’t him that she thought she was kissing – but Steve. She remembered the absolute guilt in his eyes and the way his brows had knitted together as he looked away from her.

That’s when he went back to being Steve.

That was when Bucky faded away and AJ had realized that she had just been kissing her best friend. Bucky’s best friend.

AJ had gone to Clint. If she had gone to Natasha she would have never heard the end of it – Natasha constantly teasing her about it, and probably Steve as well. Not to mention that she would want to play matchmaker and get AJ and Steve together.

“Do you like him?” Clint asked her.

“Of course, I like him. He’s my best friend.”

Clint had given her a look, “Adge, that’s not what I meant. Do you have feelings for Steve?”

She had clutched Bucky’s dog tags. “I don’t know.” It was honest. She cared about Steve so much but that night they kissed – she hadn’t been kissing him. But Steve was kind, and funny, and polite. Not to mention he was handsome. But AJ had always seen him as handsome, even when she first met him. But it never been anything other than friendship between them. Because Bucky.

Because she was in love with Bucky and Steve was simply her friend.

“Adge…” Clint said softly, not wanting to upset her. AJ already knew where he was going. “Bucky’s gone.”

But there were days it didn’t feel like he was gone.

Clint tried to help her as best as he could, offering her advice. But he told her that ultimately, it was up to her about how she was going to deal with the aftermath of the kiss. (kisses)

Steve stopped coming around, only talking to her at SHIELD briefings or when they went on a mission together. But it was never just the two of them. It was either Natasha or Clint with them, along with a whole team to help them. He tried to act normal around her, asking her how she’d been lately.

But it wasn’t how they were.

And there were times AJ would be across the room from him and would feel his eyes on her, but when she looked over at him, he’d quickly look away. No soft smile that he usually reserved for her. He’d just avoid her eyes.

Natasha picked up on it. Asked what was going on and AJ finally told her what had happened. Surprisingly, Natasha didn’t tease her. She just grabbed AJ’s hand and gave it a squeeze.
AJ sat in the couch of her apartment, an old record playing softly in the background as she held the picture Tony had given her two years prior. It was of her, Howard, and Dr. Erskine, taken right after they had perfect Project Rebirth. He had framed it for her and had it sent to the compound she had been kept at.

That damn place.

They may not have sliced her open and tested her organs – but AJ was sure if Dr. Connor hadn’t been the doctor assigned to her case; they would have found one that would. AJ was incredibly thankful for Jordan. If it hadn’t been for her, she probably would still be in that damn place.

She had gone to Steve and Natasha, told them about how AJ was struggling, and that enough was enough. They needed to find a way to get her out of there before she turned into a shell of a person. AJ remembered her last few months at the compound, she only ever got out of bed when she was supposed to. They had taken everything out of her room that belonged to her other than her change of clothes. Jordan had been the one to gather her things, telling AJ that she would keep them safe and not let anyone touch them. That if she wanted, she’d take them out of the compound completely and give them to Steve to set up in her apartment.

AJ wouldn’t have survived as long as she it hadn’t been for Jordan.

And now she was out. Back to work under Fury (not Alexander Pierce and the counsel) and getting back into the swing of things. It had taken a few months, but AJ was back to her normal self (mission wise). But during her downtime, she stayed in her apartment, or went out with Nat and Jordan, or went and visited Clint. She missed Steve. AJ wondered if he missed her too – or had she screwed everything up so badly that he wouldn’t ever miss her?

AJ got up from the couch and walked back over to the small table against the wall that she used as a desk (occasionally going over her old work and trying to rewrite the equations herself without the help of Erskine or Howard.)

She wondered what it might have been like if Howard were still alive – Tony spoke about him in distain, calling him an absent parent. And AJ just couldn’t understand what had changed that made Howard so cold. Would he have gone back to the man she once knew? Or stay the hardened man he had become?

Her phone went off in her pocket and AJ took it out, seeing an incoming call from Brock Rumlow.

“Frost.” She answered.

“Fury wants us in sooner. I’m near your place – do you need a lift?”

AJ rolled her eyes. Rumlow had been trying to get in her pants since she first met him back in 2011. “I think I can find my own way, Rumlow.”

“I don’t know, Frost. It’s a different world now – women aren’t safe by themselves. And you in that apartment of yours – I worry about ya.”

“The world has never been safe for women because of men like you, Rumlow.” She countered back, her words coming out cold and sharp, “-You know, men who can’t take a hint that a woman is not interested or respect the word ‘no’, those kinds of men.”

Rumlow laughed and it made AJ knit her brows together in frustration. “This back and forth thing we’ve got going on will have you falling for me in no time.”
“I wouldn’t hold your breath. Actually, please do. That way I won’t have to deal with you ever again.” She sassed him. “Tell Fury I’m on my way.” AJ hung up and took in a deep breath to try and let the anger roll off of her. But there was something about Brock Rumlow that did not sit right with her.

AJ already had her bag set out next to her front door ready to go. She did one last sweep through of her apartment making sure that everything had been turned off, stopping at the record player that had been playing in the background. The song was the one that had been playing in the car when Howard took AJ and Bucky to the docks when he shipped out to England. She stopped the music, hand going to Bucky’s dog tags around her neck, and then headed to the front door, grabbing her bag and locked up her apartment. The mission wouldn’t be long.

The mission would take them to the Indian Ocean where one of SHIELD’s ships, *The Lemurian Star*, had been hijacked by a known Algerian pirate; Georges Batroc. It would be AJ, Steve, Natasha, and Rumlow along with the other members of the Strike team. Jasper Sitwell was one of the agents taken hostage by Batroc. The Algerian pirate demanded a ransom for the people on board the ship, as well as the carrier. AJ hadn’t understood why he would want to ransom the carrier as well, but it wasn’t her job to question Nick. He was one of the few people she still trusted in SHIELD.

The point was; the mission would be simple and AJ would be home before the sunrise tomorrow morning.

Natasha and Steve were already one the quinjet when she arrived, and Steve, as he had been doing for the last few months, avoided her eyes. And again, AJ didn’t blame him. So instead of sitting up front with Steve and Natasha, she stayed back with most of the Strike team while Rumlow, Steve, and Natasha went over plans.

But once they were flying over the Indian Ocean – Rumlow called for her to join them.

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**The Lemurian Star**

**INDIAN OCEAN**

“The target is a mobile satellite launch platform: The Lemurian Star. They were sending their last payload when the pirates took them ninety-three minutes ago.”
“Any demands?” Steve asked, and AJ’s eyes automatically went to his.

“A billion?” She looked to Rumlow for confirmation.

“A billion and a half.” Rumlow corrected. Apparently, it had gone up since AJ was last briefed.

“Why so steep?” Steve asked, his questioned directed at Rumlow, not AJ.

“Because it’s SHIELD’s.” He answered.

Steve took in the information, realizing something. “So, it’s not off-course, it’s trespassing.” He looked down at Natasha who kept her eyes trained on the screen in front of them.

“I’m sure they have a good reason.”

“You know, I’m getting a little tired of being Fury’s janitor.” Steve complained and AJ had to smile when Natasha cut him off.

“Relax,” she drew out the word, having enough of his dramatics. “It’s not that complicated.” She looked at him and smirked.

AJ frowned, feeling a twinge of jealousy in her stomach. That used to be her and Steve. The back and forth, the teasing – and now it was Natasha and Steve.

AJ began to tie up her hair and turned her attention to Rumlow. “How many pirates?” She asked.

He smirked at her but turned his attention back to the screen. “Twenty-five. Top mercs. Led by this guy.” He swiped the screen and showed them the picture of the man holding SHIELD’s ship hostage. “Georges Batroc.” AJ looked at the mans picture as Rumlow continued on, “Ex-DGSE, Action Division. He’s at the top of Interpol’s Red Notice. Before the French demobilized him, he had thirty-six kill missions. The guy’s got a rep for maximum casualties.”

“Charming.” AJ mumbled, her hair now pulled back and out of her face. AJ motioned for Natasha to help her with her vest and the red head moved away from Steve, helping AJ with the parts she couldn’t reach. Steve looked over at them briefly, almost as if he were making sure that Natasha was doing everything correctly. But soon turned his attention back to Rumlow.

“Hostages?” He asked.

“Uh…mostly techs.” Rumlow answered as he went through the list of people on board, “One office: Jasper Sitwell.” He pulled up his photo. “They’re in the gallery.”

“What’s Sitwell doing on a launch ship?” Steve said to himself, putting on his gloves. “Alright, I’m gonna sweep the deck and find Batroc. Nat, you’ll kill the engines and wait for instructions.” He gave his orders. “Rumlow, you sweep aft, find hostages, get them to the life-pods. Get ‘em out.” He looked to AJ, finally making eye contact. “I want you to be our eyes in the sky, Frost.”

She opened her mouth to object when Rumlow butt-in, “STRIKE, you heard the Cap. Gear up.”

Everyone went to gear up and AJ followed after Steve, calling out his name. But he didn’t answer. So, she grabbed him harshly by the arm and forced him to turn around. “I am not a god damn pilot for SHIELD, Steve. I’m an Agent.”

“And as an Agent of SHIELD, I need you up here as our eyes.” AJ opened her mouth again to fight him but he stopped her. “I need someone up here that I trust – that won’t miss anything and that
will keep everyone alive."

_Trust?_

Steve didn’t trust anyone? It looked like he trusted Natasha pretty well.

She shook her head at him and started to walk away but he grabbed her arm, stopping her. “Jay,” He said her name causing her to look over her shoulder at him. He looked at her for a long moment before he let go of her arm and walked away. “Keep your eyes sharp.” He ordered her.

AJ did as she was told.

_Captains Orders._

_Even if it pissed her off._

Steve had been making it a habit that each mission they were on together he would give her the simplest task. One that a rookie could manage – and now he wasn’t even allowing her to get on board the container.

AJ _did_ do as Steve had told her to. She kept her eyes sharp. Those eyes just happened to be a camera on her arm that let her see the sky view of the container and once Steve had jumped, she geared up with the Strike team. “Disobeying direct orders from Cap. Pretty ballsy, Frost.”

“That’s why I’m aiming for the other side of the container.” AJ said before walking to the back of the plane, looking down at the container so she would know the exact moment to jump.

“-Adge, you really think this is a good idea?” Natasha asked, joining her.

AJ simply shrugged before she stepped off the ledge and fell down to the container, releasing her chute and directed it to land where she knew Steve wouldn’t be. She’d meet up with Rumlows and the rest of the Strike team to free the hostages – Steve would just have to deal with it. Once she was on the container, AJ headed in the direction of the Gallery, looking down at her wrist occasionally to see their view from above. She stopped, seeing on her screen that Steve was headed in the direction of three armed men.

“Steve, you got three pirates on your next turn.” AJ let Steve know. He didn’t reply, but she watched him take them out via the eye in the sky.

AJ was just about to warn him again when she felt someone yank her back by her hair, throwing her down onto the ground and pointing their gun at her. She moved her head, the bullet missing her while she swept her legs under the man who had tried to shoot her causing him to fall down. AJ snatched the gun, throwing it overboard while reaching for her own gun with the silencer and shot him in both of his kneecaps.

“AJ, who else is on the container? I heard gunfire.”

Steve said over comm.

She sighed, trying to come up with an excuse. Strike team was still in the sky, Steve would know that. But Rumlows came in through the comm, “One of us, Sir. Hit a gust of wind and some of us landed off course. One of the pirates started to shoot at us – we took him out. Headed your way now.” He lied, for some reason unknown to her, covering for AJ. Well, he probably did it in hopes that AJ may change her mind about him. She wouldn’t.

AJ looked around to see where she was and then spoke over comms, “Rumlows, you have a clear path to the gallery on the east side – it’ll lead you to a stairwell.”
“Be right there, sugar.”

AJ repressed a gag and waited for Rumlow and some of the Strike team to join her. They arrived and Rumlow looked down at the man who had past out when AJ shot his kneecaps. He looked back up at her, brows raised.

“That’s cold, Frost. But you never cease to impress me.” He smirked.

“He’ll live.” She said in annoyance. “He just can’t handle pain, apparently.” AJ said, stepping over the man and lead them down the stairwell. They split up, AJ going with Rumlow and Rollins while the others swept the floors.

“You could have blown this entire mission, ya know.” Rumlow said quietly.

AJ ignored him, but Rumlow went on.

“If these pirated had heard the gunfire – you’d be dead.”

“Well, I’m alive. So why don’t you shut the hell up and follow me.” AJ hissed at him. She could hear Rollins chuckling quietly but after that, it was quiet.

Rumlow and Rollins went ahead of her when they saw someone shouting through a closed door. Okay, I’ll fine him, he had yelled and turned around only to see Rumlow standing behind him, pressing a stun gun stick to his forehead, grabbing him by his vest before he could hit the ground.

It was quiet on the other side of the door. And it wasn’t until they heard someone say from the other side of the door as they walked away; two minutes, in French. Rumlow gently put him down on the ground, not making a sound and Rollins set down his weapon and went to get the bomb in his pack. AJ stood behind him, pistol pointed at the stairwell to shoot anyone who might come that way while Rumlow kept his gun pointed at the door where the other pirates were behind.

SHIELD wanted her to refrain from using her powers unless it was absolutely necessary. AJ figured with how hard they had trained her in combat while she used her powers, that they’d want her to use them while on the field.

Nope.

Weapons only.

And of course, she could physically take someone out.

Just not with her powers.

AJ heard the bomb latch onto the door while a strike agent spoke through comms, “Target acquired.”

“Strike in position.” Rumlow said quietly.

“How’s it looking from above, Jay?” Steve asked and AJ quickly looked to her wrist, making sure they were clear.

“You’re clear.” She said, moving to hold her weapon with both of her hands again.

“Natasha, what’s your status?” Steve said.

Silence.
“Status, Natasha?” He said again.

“Hang on!” AJ heard Natasha yell. She was annoyed. It took a moment but soon she was back on comms. “Engine room secure.”


Gunfire echoed through the room next to them and Rumlow shot at the bomb, causing it to go off and rip the door off its hinges, allowing them inside. There was only one man still standing and when he spun around upon hearing the explosion, Rumlow shot him in the chest.

They walked in, “I told you.” Sitwell said to the dead man, sitting on the ground with his hands bound, “SHIELD doesn’t negotiate.”

AJ began to free all the hostages while Rollins and Rumlow watched her back, making sure she wouldn’t get hit by any incoming fire from one of the pirates still on board the ship. Once each hostage was free, Rumlow, AJ, and Rollins lead them to safety.

“Where the hell is Nat?” She whispered to Rumlow. “She should have been here by now.”

“Hostages en route to extraction.” Rumlow said over comm. “Romanoff missed the rendezvous point, Cap. Hostiles are still in play.”

“Natasha, Batroc’s on the move. Circle back to Rumlow and protect the hostages.” But Natasha didn’t reply. “Jay – do you have eyes on Romanoff?”

Rollins chuckled from behind AJ and she glared at him. “Uh, no. I can’t locate her.” She told Steve. It wasn’t a lie – she had check her wrist and Natasha was no longer on deck. “She must be inside.”

“Natasha!” AJ heard Steve say in anger over comms only to hear the clang of something hitting his shield. She quickly looked down at her wrist, zooming in on Steve’s location to see him now fighting against Batroc.

“Romanoff, Rogers is on the north side of the container fighting Batroc – are you near?” AJ asked.

And yet again, Natasha didn’t reply. And when AJ checked her wrist again, Steve was still alone.

“We need to get the hostages off this container, Frost. Cap can handle Batroc himself.” Rumlow said, probably seeing the look in AJ’s eyes. The one that said she was about to go off on her own to help Steve. She looked back down to see Steve and Batroc standing a bit away from each other while Steve placed his shield on his back and took off his helmet.

Seriously?

“Frost. We’re leaving now. Are you with us?” Rumlow asked. AJ nodded her head and went with them. Steve may be a complete and total moron for taking on Batroc without protection – but Steve had yet to lose a fight. She believed in him enough to trust that he’d be fine on his own.

They made it to where the life-pods were located. Rumlow and Rollins safely got the hostages on to them while AJ did one last sweep.

It was all clear. But on her way back, something hard and metal was swung at her knee, kicking her legs out from under her and AJ fell fast first onto the ground, turning her face to the side last moment causing her cheek to split open from the impact. Someone crawled on top of her, roughly
rolling her so she was on her back.

It was the man she had shot in the kneecaps earlier. He reached for AJ’s gun and she knocked it out of his hands, her weapon flying out of reach. AJ reached for her knife only to have the man rip it out of her holster, stabbing down at her but AJ moved and the knife missed her neck and instead plunged into her shoulder. She yelled out in pain, distracted by it and then felt hands wrap around her throat tightly. He had both of her hands now pinned under his legs and AJ struggled under him, trying to get them free as he continued to choke her, her head feeling light and her vision making her see double. She kneed him and was able to get one hand free and grabbed at his hands, trying to pulled them off of her neck, but he knocked his body down hard into her and her hand dropped.

“Rumlow!” She managed to shout, voice literally strangled. There was no way he would be been able to hear her and as black dots started to appear in her eyes and her lungs begin to feel a burning sensation, AJ knew there was only one way she’d survive this. She moved her hand to the mans face and watched as his body turned to ice.

“Frost!” AJ heard Rumlow shout, running in her direction. She was too weak to toss the rock of ice that was a man seconds earlier off her and shatter him, so she was thankful that Rumlow had showed up when he did. With his stun gun stick, Rumlow smashed the man, knocking him off AJ, the ice hands wrapped around her neck crumbling too.

AJ gasped, scratching at her neck out of instinct to help her breathe, thinking that she still needed to fight for air. Rumlow kneeled down so he was eye level.

“Hey, I got you.” He told her, grabbing her face his hands and forcing her to look him in the eyes. “I got you. You can breathe now.”

She did as she was told, taking in shallow breaths that eventually started to even out.

“I got you.” He repeated until she was breathing normally.

AJ may not trust Brock Rumlow or like him that much – but he had just saved her life. So, she’d be nice to him until they reached D.C. Even went as far as to thank him when he helped her stand.

He smirked.

And AJ decided that being nice to him until they were back in D.C was far too long.
Fury had lied.

Natasha had lied.

And AJ had disobeyed his orders.

He asked her to stay because he trusted her more than anyone and she didn’t listen to him. How could she not understand that he didn’t trust SHIELD? That the only reason he was actively working with them was because of her. So, he would be there to watch her back when she was released. And after AJ not being released for a year and three months – his distrust of SHIELD grew. But she was back now and yes, things had been different between them for the last few months but he knew that he could still trust her.

Maybe he shouldn’t have thought that.

Maybe he couldn’t.

Steve stood across the room in the medical unit of one of SHIELD’s headquarters while Dr. Connor patched up AJ and Natasha. He had come because even thought he didn’t know if AJ was someone he could trust anymore, it didn’t mean Steve stopped caring for her. And the fact that her wounds had yet to heal themselves troubled him.

“Why hasn’t she healed yet? Why hasn’t the cold helped her?” He asked Jordan. His eyes went to AJ briefly who wouldn’t look at him. She was mad at him.

He had yelled at her in front of everyone, even vocalized that he couldn’t count on her anymore. She didn’t say anything, she just took it. When he was done yelled, she looked him dead in the eye and asked, *May I be dismissed?*

He didn’t know what to say. Steve had never seen her look at him with such cold eyes. Not even after he called off the search and rescue for Bucky. Steve had thought back then that nothing could ever be as cold and cruel as they look AJ had given him when she told him that she would never forgive him for giving up on Bucky.

The look she gave him back in the quinjet? It was worse.

“Adelyn’s healing isn’t as enhanced as yours is, but…by now her wounds should have closed from her body trying healing itself with the cold.” It had been five hours. And AJ was still not healed.
“Why aren’t her powers working right now?” Steve asked Jordan but before she could answer Natasha cut in.

“Maybe it’s the hostile environment?” She suggested, her eyes narrowing at Steve.

“It’ll heal eventually, though?” AJ finally spoke up. “I’ve been hurt on missions before – you know, you’ve been there to assess them.”

Jordan frowned. The blonde doctor walked over to her computer and went over every detail of what had happened on her previous missions that she had gotten injured on. Steve watched as her brows raised and there was a slight twitch of her jaw.

“What?” He said, walking over to her.

“Nothing.” Jordan said, “There should be no reason why she hasn’t healed yet.” She walked over to AJ and Natasha, “You guys are all set. AJ, your wounds should heal by the end of the day, but for pain, here.” She pulled a bottle of pills out of her lab coat. “One.” She stressed. “No more.”

AJ nodded, slowly getting off of the bench with the help of Natasha.

“You should go home and rest. I’ll tell Fury that you are off duty for the next few days.” Jordan said and AJ didn’t even argue with her on that.

Steve watched AJ and Natasha walk out, Rumlow was on the other side of the door waiting to be examined next. “Had a care package sent to your apartment, Frost. I think it should be there by now.”

“It’s never gonna happen, Rumlow.” AJ said, not bothering to look back at him as she and Natasha walked away.

Once they were out of ear shot, Steve walked over to Jordan who had pulled up AJ’s records on the computer again, “Steve?” She said, “Do you mind going over your record of the event with me one more time? I’m just going to fill out AJ’s new information,” Steve was standing next to her now, confused as she began to ask him if he had suffered any injuries. She raised her hand and to anyone else, it would have looked like she had simply swiped out of AJ’s records. But she didn’t. In fact, she had highlighted only one thing.

It was the only difference from this mission compared to all the others she had been on in the last few months.

This mission, AJ had used her powers.

“Let’s meet up for drinks tonight. I’ve been trying to find another excuse to ask out Natasha. You can bring AJ along, too. I’m positive she’ll be healed by then.”

He nodded, understanding what she was trying to get at.

She had a theory and wanted to talk about it with him later on outside of SHIELD.

“I’ll see if I can convince them. They’re both pretty pissed at me.” He said in a light tone for anyone who might be listening.

“Good, we’ll meet up at the bar we went to for AJ’s birthday – I forget the name.”

“It’s uh,” He groaned, pretending to be frustrated. “It’s on the tip of my tongue.”
“I hate when that happens!” Jordan laughed. “I’ll see you tonight.”

He nodded and told her goodbye and walked out of the medical unit. “-Hey Cap, is Frost gonna be okay?” He asked.

Steve smiled, “Her injuries? Yes. Her attitude? I don’t see that changing.” He said, still trying to put on a show for whoever was watching.

“Don’t I know that!” Rumlow said and the men around them began to laugh.

Steve left and went to go debrief Fury. Hoping to maybe get some answers out of him as to why he had lied. He wouldn’t bring up AJ unless Fury asked – because it seemed like only Jordan understood why AJ’s powers weren’t helping her heal.

Natasha had taken AJ home, first stopping by the market so AJ could grab a few things she needed, and then to grab a bite to eat since Natasha said AJ wasn’t allowed to cook for herself until her injuries were healed. AJ didn’t protest because the pain from being stabbed in the shoulder hurt too badly for her to pretend it didn’t. So, they stopped for food and then Natasha helped AJ bring her things upstairs.

“Oh, would you look at that.” Natasha said with a chuckle once they were upstairs, “Rumlow really did send a care package.” She mocked, seeing the bouquet of flowers and a heart shaped candy box left by the door. “How sweet.”

AJ rolled her eyes and walked over to her door and unlocked it before she carefully picked up the flowers and candy box without putting too much strain on her shoulder.

“What are you finally going to take him up on his date offer?” Natasha asked, following behind AJ, carrying her food and bag from the market.

AJ let out a bark of a laugh, “God, no!” She replied. “And Rumlow doesn’t want a date – he wants sex.”
Natasha snorted. “Maybe you should take him up on it – when’s the last time you got laid?”

AJ set the flowers down on her kitchen counter and frowned for a second, “Theo.” She answered.

She looked back over to Natasha who gave her a soft smile, but continued on with her suggestion, “So, it’s been a while…maybe call Rumlow up? You deserve to get laid.”

AJ rolled her eyes, “I do.” She agreed. “I’m just not desperate enough to sleep with Rumlow.”

Natasha smirked, “Stev-”

“-Don’t.” AJ cut Natasha off, pointing her finger at her. “Finish that sentence.”

Natasha simply shrugged and walked over to AJ, pressing a kiss to her forehead. “Stay in bed.” She ordered her, now heading to AJ’s front door. “-I mean it. And throw out those chocolates – Rumlow probably ruffied them and is going to sneak back in here later.” She said in a dry tone.

AJ laughed, watching as Natasha left, the door shutting behind her. She walked over to the heart box that Rumlow had sent to her. She grabbed it and tossed it in the garbage.

The flowers? She would keep. It would be a nice touch to her apartment. AJ set them down on the coffee table and headed towards her bedroom, only to stop. She looked around…something felt off. Her phone started ringing from her bag and AJ went over to get it and saw that it was Rumlow calling.

She would love to send him to voicemail – but Rumlow only called for work related reasons. He left texting to harass AJ.

“Frost,” She answered, bringing grabbing her purse and walked to her bedroom.

“You’re supposed to be on bedrest.” Rumlow said from the other line.

“Why did you call me than?” She fired back causing Rumlow to laugh.

“Just wanted to make sure you’re in bed.”

“I’m going to clean up and then I’ll be on bedrest for the next few days – you happy?”

“Only if you think about me while you’re in the shower.”

“.Hanging up now.” AJ said and powered off her phone. She was tired. And after she cleaned up – she had every intention to sleep for at least a full day and a half.
Steve had gone about like it was any other day.

He went to the museum, visited Peggy, and had even done something new and stopped by the VA building where the man he had met earlier, Sam Wilson, worked. He went on with his day like it was any other. He didn’t call Natasha, didn’t call AJ either.

Just went to the bar that AJ had had her birthday celebration and waited for Dr. Connor.

She came in, hurrying over to Steve, “-Hey, I’m sorry I’m late. I couldn’t get a hold of you and I totally forgot that I a supposed to be downtown in fifteen minutes.” She said, breathing hard as she pressed her hand down on the bar, lifting it a little to reveal to Steve that there was a folded-up piece of paper under her palm.

“Oh, it’s no problem. Natasha and Jay bailed on me anyway.” He smiled at Jordan. He patted her hand that was on the bar, “Go ahead and go – we can have drinks tomorrow night. Maybe you can convince Jay and Natasha this time.”

Jordan smiled, slipping her hand out from under Steve’s and laughed, “It’s a date. Sorry again.” The blonde said before leaving Steve at the bar, waving goodbye to him before she walked out the doors. Steve set his drink down where his hand had been and check moved a bit like he was checking his phone. He set the phone down on the bar and slid the drink back over to him, letting the paper fall out from under it onto his lap when he lifted it to take a drink.

He set some pulled money out of his pocket, counting it before he set a few bills down on the bar and moved to put his money back in his pocket, grabbing the note Jordan had given him in his pocket as well.

He’d wait until he was home to read it.

Steve left the bar, looking up at the nights sky.

He got on his motorcycle and drove back to his apartment where he knew he wouldn’t be watched or disturbed. But Director Fury was there, chaos ensued, and Steve completely forgot about the note Jordan had written him.

Chapter End Notes

Part B of this story has begun! What did you guys think? Love it? Hate it? Hate me? I’d love to hear feedback! And of course, kudos are always appreciated!
Time of Death

Chapter Notes

please forgive any mistakes/typos/errors. I wanted to get this posted so I was rushing while doing the read-through. I'll go over it again and check for anything I might have messed up.

OC MASTERLIST

See the end of the chapter for more notes
January 10th, 2014
WASHINGTON, D.C

Time of Death: 1:03 AM
He was gone.

Fury had died.

He was dead.

Steve thought of the last thing Fury had said to him, *Don’t trust anyone.* Those were Nick Fury’s dying words to Steve. A warning. Trust no one. The hospital had been shut down, only SHIELD allowed inside and their team of doctors who had taken over Fury’s care.

Steve stood in the hallway, holding the flash drive in his hand. He shoved it in his pocket when he watched as Maria Hill and Natasha followed after the doctors who had worked on Fury, taking him to a private area where they could say their goodbyes.

He stayed in the room with Natasha for however long she needed. He understood that Fury meant a lot to her. She just stood there, arms folded over her chest, tears in her eyes as she looked down at Fury. She hadn’t moved for a whole five minutes. Natasha was frozen.

Maria came in and stood next to Steve, watching Natasha before she cleared her throat to let Natasha know she was in the room. But of course, Natasha already knew.

“I need to take him.” Maria told Natasha. Steve looked to Maria and then back to Natasha, before he headed in her direction, wanting to show her some comfort.

“Natasha,” He said her name in a whisper, But, Natasha didn’t respond to Maria or Steve. Instead, she moved her hand over Fury’s head, tenderly, and made her way to the exit with Steve hurrying after her. “Natasha!” He called out her name again.

She stopped this time, eyes puffy and red but an emotionless mask on her face. “Why was Fury in your apartment?” Natasha asked once she faced Steve.

*Don’t trust anybody.*

Natasha was a friend…right? He could trust her.

*Don’t trust anybody.*

Steve shrugged. “I don’t know.” He lied.

“Cap,” Rumlow said from behind him, making his way over to them. Steve turned and face him, “They want you back at SHIELD.”

“Yeah,” Steve told Rumlow, “Give me a second,” He turned back to Natasha but looked back to Rumlow when he spoke again.

“They want you now.” His voice was stern.

Steve looked to Brock, slightly annoyed. “Okay.” He said and Rumlow turned and walked in the other direction.

He looked back at Natasha. She shook her head at him, “AJ was right…you’re a terrible liar.” She said and then walked away from Steve too.

He stood in the hallway for a long moment, hands on his hips as he looked around – the flash drive
needed to be somewhere safe. That’s when something caught his eye. A vending machine that was currently being re-stocked.

Steve hid the flash drive behind a row of bubble gum and headed over to Rumlow.

_AJ was right, you're a terrible liar._

He stopped dead in his tracks.

AJ.

She should be here – why wasn’t she here? Steve turned around and started heading towards the door only to have Rumlow follow after him. “Rogers – we gotta go!” He told him, “They’re waiting for you at the Triskelion.”

He shook his head, “AJ isn’t here – I left her a message earlier but she’s not here.” Rumlow cut Steve off.

“I already sent some men over there to check on her when she didn’t pick up my call either. I would have gone myself if I wasn’t needed elsewhere – my guys are bringing her to the Triskelion as we speak. She’s good. Just turned her phone off.”

_Don’t trust anybody._

“We gotta get going, come on – you’ll see her there.” Brock said, ushering Steve back to where they were supposed to be heading.

He didn’t know if he could trust Rumlow.

He didn’t know if he could trust Natasha.

But Steve did know one thing: AJ was the one person he truly trusted.

And if she was headed to the Triskelion, he would go there too.

Steve looked at his watch.

_5:30 AM._

Had that many hours passed already?
AJ woke up earlier than she had planned – earlier than she would have liked to be awake. But her body was telling her to get up and start her morning routines. It was instinct. A way to keep AJ busy before she went into work. But today she wouldn’t be going to the Triskelion because Fury had told her stay on bed rest for the next few days. So, AJ got out of bed and got in the shower.

She winced when the water hit her skin, the stab wound not fully healed yet causing the hot water to sting against the vulnerable skin. AJ pressed her fingers to her cheek, still feeling the cut when she had fallen to the ground, slicing open her cheek.

Those wounds should be fully healed now – why were they still there?

AJ finished her shower and got dressed, her phone still powered off on her dresser. Rumlow had ordered her to go offline for the next few days and that if someone truly needed to get in touch with her, they knew where to find her.

She would have argued if she wasn’t so damn tired. AJ had turned her phone off and had been unreachable to anyone who tried to call her. Though, she doubted she had any missed calls. Maybe Jordan called to check in, or Natasha – but she didn’t think anyone else would call.

Maybe Fury. He had seemed worried when he last saw her.

AJ walked into her kitchen and made a fresh pot of coffee, while she waited, AJ walked into her living room and sat down on her couch. She ran her hands down her face and then through her hair. How was she still tired? AJ blinked, trying to wake herself up as her fingers played with the chain around her neck and Bucky’s dog tags rested right above her heart. And that’s when she saw it.

Getting up slowly, AJ walked over to the table that was pressed against the wall that she used as a desk. The picture of herself, Erskine, and Howard – the picture she always placed on the table in the exact same spot was facing the wrong way, the frames backside facing her. AJ walked over to the table and grabbed the picture, turning it over and saw that the picture inside the frame was gone.

The frame was empty.

Someone had taken her picture.

Which meant someone had been in her apartment.

There was a beeping noise coming from the kitchen behind her but AJ continued to look at the frame in confusion. Why would someone come into her apartment and take that picture? AJ listened as the beeping continued and realized that it was now her coffee maker telling her that her drink was ready – no, it sounded like an alarm.
No…not an alarm.

A countdown.

AJ spun around, raising her hands up just in time to create an ice wall to protect her from the explosion that came from her kitchen. But the wall didn’t hold and the explosion knocked AJ against the farther wall while the windows in her apartment blew out, glass shattering onto the ground below causing people to scream in a panic.

AJ groaned, holding onto her head, feeling a warmth coming from the back of her head. She moved her hand away from her head and looked down to see her fingers were bloody. There was a ringing in her ears and all AJ could really hear was her own pulse. She blinked, trying to see through the smoke as she moved herself up with the help of the wall she had been thrown into. That’s when she saw STRIKE team run into her apartment, their guns raised at her and began to fire. She dodged to bullets by ducking behind the nearest piece of furniture still left standing. She rolled on her side and kicked the back of the couch with as much strength she could muster and watched it slide across the floor, hitting STRIKE team’s legs, making them fall backwards.

She got up and went after them just as two of them began to stand. The other two were passed out on the ground. AJ was able to disarm the ones who were standing of their weapons and fought them, hand to hand combat. Though, they did try to pull out the occasional knife which AJ was always able to avoid. She really didn’t feel like getting stabbed again. Especially since her first stab wound hadn’t healed yet. The other two agents woke up, joining the rest of STRIKE team to go after her. She was outnumbered – she could fight them all.

As they ran at her, guns pointed in her direction, AJ knocked them back with a gush of cold air, sending them flying to the other side of her apartment. She managed to escape, dodging the other STRIKE team members who were coming up the stairs. She couldn’t just walk out the front door – and SHIELD agents were headed her way. So, AJ headed to the roof and climbed down the fire escape and ran down the alley until she was at least seven blocks away from her building.

Someone had just tried to kill her.

And it wasn’t even 6 AM.
Natasha had wanted time to process, time to herself where she didn’t have to talk to anyone about what she was feeling or show any emotions that she didn’t want them to see. A part of her had urged herself to go to Jordan’s apartment. The other part had told her to go to AJ’s.

She had made up her mind when she got an alert on her phone from SHIELD saying that Steve Rogers was now a wanted fugitive and needed to be hunted down. They called her in to locate him. Natasha ditched her phone and headed to AJ’s apartment.

Natasha had the flash drive Steve had thought he had hidden, probably proud of how clever he thought it was – it wasn’t. People were all around him when he had the flash drive in the vending machine. And he owed her twenty bucks that she wasted trying to get the flash drive out without smashing the glass and simply taking it out. No, that’d draw too much attention. So, she put in a dollar and waited until the very last pack of bubble gum dropped and the flash drive appeared.

It was the drive she had given to Fury from the data she had collection on the Lemurian Star.

Natasha knew he’d be going back to the hospital for the flash drive, but she also knew it was too risky to show his face around the city. He’d wait until things died down a bit, when everything was less chaotic and he’d be able to sneak in undetected.

That’s why she had gone to AJ’s apartment.

Her building was surrounded by fire trucks, part of the building missing, firemen and paramedics were running into the building to see if there were any survivors from the floor level that got hit.

AJ’s floor.

The explosion had come from her apartment – those were her windows that fire was coming out of. Natasha held her breath as she watched paramedics coming out carrying someone on a gurney, a white sheet covering their body.

She waited for what felt like hours and listened carefully as the paramedics began to try and identify whoever was under the sheet.

“Female, 5’4”, skin is too burnt for facial recognition, but she was found in the apartment where the explosion went off. We believe the woman is Adelyn Frost, the tenet. She died on impact from the explosion.”

Natasha felt sick but kept her emotions at bay. Fury was dead – AJ was, no, might be dead. She did not know that it was AJ. AJ was a survivor, she had already looked death in the face numerous times and told it to piss off – she couldn’t be dead. Natasha refused to believe it. Because AJ was too important to Natasha to ever think of losing. She had grown soft since working for SHIELD.

Barton, Coulson, Fury, and now Frost – she yet again found herself in a situation where she was compromised. Losing Fury was hard, but the thought of never seeing AJ again was damn near devastating. Natasha shouldn’t have left yesterday – she should have stayed and made sure that AJ healed properly. But she didn’t. Natasha knew that AJ was more than capable of handling herself and they had both believed Jordan when she told them that AJ would heal within a few hours. But now Natasha stood near the scene of the explosion and watched as they put the body in the back of a coroner’s van.

Natasha walked over to the coroner’s van, making sure she wasn’t seen. She waited until no one was near to get inside the van from the back and go to the black body bag they had placed the body in. It took her a minute before she finally moved to unzip the bag but heard the car door open from
up front and felt the weight of someone getting into the car.

She waited until they were a few blocks away until she pressed her gun to the driver’s head, hearing him take in a shaky breath as the gun clicked. “Keep driving.” Natasha ordered him. “And do not make a scene. Do you understand?”

The man nodded, breathing hard.

“Do you work for SHIELD?”

“No. I’m the coroner for St. Joseph’s. I’m supposed to take the body there and SHIELD will pick it up.” He answered. “But, I, I don’t, I don’t work for SHIELD. I’m just delivering the body.”

“You said the body you found was Adelyn Frost.”

“The body was found in her apartment.”

“So, it might not be her?”

“Height and weight are a match for the body we found. Female, early thirties, I’m not the one who is going to do that autopsy. But I’m sorry, everything points to the body being Adelyn Frosts.”

Natasha swallowed hard, closing her eyes for a moment. She hadn’t got a look at the body – and if she turned around to go look, the driver (who claimed not to work for SHIELD) she would be exposed to attack. “The body. Was it wearing dog tags?”

“D-dog tags?” He said in confusion. “I, I don’t under-” Natasha pressed the gun into his head a bit harder. “The body had no jewelry on it – no military dog tags.”

The body wasn’t AJ’s. Since the moment AJ was given Bucky’s dog tags after waking up in 2010 she had not taken them off. They were always hanging around her neck. The only thing she had left of him to clutch on to. There was no way in Hell AJ wouldn’t be wearing the dog tags – not even a possibility.

“Pull over.” Natasha told the man and waited until he pulled into an alley and turned off the engine before hitting him in the back of the head with the butt of her gun, knocking him unconscious.

She was alive.

Natasha didn’t lose her.

She was alive and somewhere in the city.

And knowing AJ, the first person she’d try to find would be Steve.

So, Natasha stole a car and went to the hospital where she knew Steve would be.
Steve watched from across the street as they had brought the body out. His eyes went to where the explosion had come from. AJ’s apartment. It was her floor, her window – and Steve knew that better than anyone because he had stayed with her after she was released from the compound – he knew the view, he knew how many steps it took until he was at AJ’s door – he knew that AJ’s apartment was just above a woman who always had her plants out in the sun each morning.

The flowers were dead.

As was AJ.

Steve bit down on the inside of her lower lip, unshed tears burning in his eyes. He had spent so much time avoiding her – and now she was gone. One of the only things left of Steve old life, and now that was taken from him too.

S H I E L D.

Don’t trust anybody.

He knew that SHIELD had done this – especially after Rumlow and some of STRIKE team had attacked him in the elevator. And the son of a bitch Rumlow had sent people to AJ’s apartment to ‘get her’ to bring her back to the Triskelion. Rumlow had killed AJ. He might not have done the deed himself, but it was him, Steve knew it deep down in his soul.

Steve watched as the coroner’s van drove away, his eyes leaving the destruction of the explosion briefly when he heard the car start up.

AJ had kissed him.

Steve had kissed her back.

She missed Bucky.

And he missed Peggy.

He knew it was wrong to keep kissing her but it had been the first time he had been kissed since Peggy. When she had grabbed him by his uniform and pulled his lips down to hers he wasn't think straight. He missed Peggy, and he had been too scared to go see her while was in D.C - but after AJ had kissed him, in an intoxicated state believing he was Bucky – Steve finally went to go see Peggy. He had watched as tears filled her eyes upon seeing him again. The doctors explained her condition to him, but Steve had already known about it. He had wasted too much time not going to see Peggy. He had wasted too much time avoiding AJ because of the kiss.

The kiss shouldn’t have happened. But it made him realize that what he wanted, what he’d always want, was something he could never have now. No, not AJ. Peggy Carter.

Adelyn Frost was Bucky’s girl. She had been from the very first time Bucky had laid eyes on her.
And Peggy – she was Steve’s best girl. He’d love her forever. Steve would continue to dream at night about the life he could have had with Peggy if he hadn’t crashed landed and wake up in the morning feeling empty. It had been that way since he moved back to D.C, knowing that that was where Peggy was. So, when AJ had kissed him, he felt less hollow for a moment. He felt less alone.

But then she had said Bucky’s name and he realized that it should have never happened in the first place.

He wasted so much time.

And Steve knew that if it had never happened, or if he had just spoken to her about everything, that AJ would not have been alone. She wouldn’t be hurt – she wouldn’t be…dead.

She was gone.

His best friend was dead.

And Steve felt a painful hollowness in his chest.

Why her?

Steve’s eyes widened when he remembered what he had in his pocket.

He ducked into a nearby alley and pulled the folded-up piece of paper out of his pocket, nearly ripping it in half when he opened it.

Jordan had written to Steve telling him her theory, about her suspicions, that while AJ was in isolation, there had been doctors other than Jordan working on her, taking samples from her. Jordan explained how when she saw the way AJ would sleep most of the day (unless she was training), she thought it had been depression, that AJ was losing all hope of ever leaving the compound, that she was feeling alone.

No, they had been doing something to her (that what Jordan believed). Pierce had locked Jordan out of her records after Steve had left and she was not able to see if it had been documented in her records if anything was given to her.

There were no puncture wounds. No incisions. But they had been making her drink a protein shake before she trained each time. Around the time they started making her drink those shakes was when AJ’s powers started to weaken. Jordan hadn’t put two and two together, she thought that her powers were affected by her mood.

But they were giving her something.

They had somehow found a way to weaken her, to make her vulnerable.

It had worked.

And now she was dead.

Steve crumpled up the paper and threw it as he through the alley and headed to the hospital.

They would pay for this.

He would make sure of that.
When he got to the hospital, Steve looked at the vending machine in slight horror to discover that the row of gum he had hid the flash drive behind was gone – as was the drive.

The sound of someone popping their bubble gum behind them caused Steve to look in the vending machines reflection to see that Natasha was standing behind him, chewing gum. *Don’t trust anybody.* In an angry state, Steve grabbed Natasha by the shoulders and pushed her into an empty room, shoving her up against the nearest wall. “Where is it?” He growled.

Natasha glared at Steve, “Safe.”

“Do better!”

“Where did you get it?” Natasha shot back at Steve.

“Why would I tell you?” He snapped at her.

Steve watched as realization swept over Natasha’s features. “Fury gave it to you. Why?”

“-What’s on it?” Steve wanted answers.

“I don’t know.” Natasha said back.

His grip on her arms tightened, “Stop lying!”

She seemed surprised by his outburst, but why would she? Fury was dead, he was just attacked by S H I E L D, and on top of that…AJ. He watched as Natasha glared at him, “I only act like I know everything, Rogers.”

“I bet you knew Fury hired the pirates, didn’t you?”

She blinked a few times, “Well, it makes sense – the ship was dirty, Fury needed a way in, so do you.”

He was done with riddles. Steve pushed Natasha against the wall again. He knew that if AJ were here (alive) she’d have smacked him upside the head for being so rough with Natasha, but AJ was dead. And it seemed like Natasha was protecting the people who killed her, “-I’m not going to ask you again!”

“I know who killed Fury.” Natasha finally admitted. Steve waited for her to give him more information, his grip on her arms loosening, “Most of the intelligence community doesn’t believe he exists, the ones who do call him the *Winter Soldier*. He’s credited with over two dozen assassinations in the last fifty years.”

“So, he’s a ghost story.” Steve wasn’t asking a question – the whole thing just sounded like someone people made up to scare new agents. Or, him.

“Five years ago, I was escorting a nuclear engineer out of Iran, somebody shot out my tires near Odessa. We lost control, went straight over a cliff. I pulled us out, but the Winter Soldier was there. I was covering my engineer, so he shot him straight through me.” Natasha said, pulling up her shirt to reveal a scar on the right side of her stomach from the bullet, “Soviet slug, no rifling. Bye-bye bikinis.”

Steve didn’t know what to say to that, “Yeah,” He finally spoke. “I bet you look terrible in them.”

That earned just the slightest hint of smile from Natasha. “Going after him is a dead end. I know,
I’ve tried.” Natasha pulled out the flash drive and Steve’s eyes went to her hand that was holding it. “Like you said, he’s a ghost story.”

He took the drive. Steve wasn’t sure if he could fully trust Natasha, but she was handing him over something he needed as a sign of good faith. And if AJ were with him she’d tell him to stop being an idiot and to let Natasha help. So, he would. “Well,” He looked down at Natasha, “Let’s go find out what this ghost wants.”

Steve stepped back but Natasha grabbed him by his arm, “We can’t go yet. We need to wait until AJ makes contact.”

*She didn’t know.*

Steve looked down at Natasha, “Jay is dead, Nat.” He ripped off the band aid.

“No, she’s not.” Natasha said, nonchalantly.

What?

“Someone put a bomb in her apartment – I went to her building and watched them bring out her body. She’s…gone, I’m sorry.” Steve swallowed hard. “Jay is dead.”

“I was there too.” Natasha told him and Steve looked down at her in confusion, “And the body they brought down wasn’t AJ’s.”

“H-how, how would you know that?” He asked.

“No dog tags.”

Steve’s brows pinched together. “What?”

“Barnes’ dog tags.” Natasha clarified. “She has not taken them off since we first gave them to her when she woke up – not even once. The body did not have dog tags around its neck.”

“They…maybe they took them off?” He suggested, wanting desperately to believed Natasha but finding it hard to accept. “The explosion came from her apartment – there is no way she could have survived that.”

“Her powers.”

“-They aren’t as strong as they are supposed to be,” Steve explained to Natasha what Dr. Connors had given him, the note where she told him her beliefs and why she wasn’t healing the way she should and why her powers were growing weaker, therefore, making her weaker. “AJ wouldn’t have been able to block the explosion…and after seeing the building…we both know she didn’t.”

Natasha shook her head, “The dog tags-”

Steve cut her off, “I don’t want to believe it either, Natasha.”

“She’s not dead!” Natasha rose her voice, glaring at Steve. “Do not give up on her.”

*How can you give up?!* He could still hear AJ saying from all those years back when he called off the search for Bucky. *Bucky would never give up on you!*

“How will she get in touch with us?” Steve asked Natasha.
She took in deep breath, as if she were glad that Steve was no longer fighting her on this. “AJ is resourceful. She’ll find a way.”

In July it would be three years.

Three years since Brian Frost died, leaving his twin; Andrew Frost, to suffer in this world alone. The two had been inseparable since the womb – they day that Brian died was the day Andrew lost a part of his soul. He left SHIELD. The only reason he even agreed to work with SHIELD was because of Brian. He wanted to help protecting their country and after they had both learned that their Aunt had worked for the SSR back in the 40’s, the more intrigued Brian became. But Andrew always had a bad feeling about SHIELD. Especially when they came to the Frost Twins and told them that their Aunt who had worked for the SSR in the 40’s was still alive.

Two days.

That’s all it took.

Two days of knowing their aunt before Brian was killed, taking a bullet in his head that was meant for their Aunt, the bullet piercing right through the middle of his forehead, killing him instantly. It was meant for Adelyn. Not Brian. His brother died because of her and Andrew told her that much. He screamed at her, telling her that he wished that they had never met her – that he wished that she would died back in 1945 because if she were dead – his brother would be next to him instead of her.

He hated her.
And she never even bothered to come to Brian’s funeral.

Why did his father speak so highly of her? She was a damn coward.

Andrew had asked to take some time off and SHIELD agreed, once that was over he asked to be transferred from out of D.C. And they had allowed that to happen as well. But it was just too much. He had never wanted to be a SHIELD agent, that had been Brian’s dream. And Brian was dead.

He left SHIELD in 2012 and never looked back, cutting all ties with the government organization and moved to Pennsylvania.

Andrew had a simple life in Lancaster, a steady job as a security guard, a small house that was the perfect size for just one person, he had even adopted a cat the year before named Freckles. It was a quiet life, the kind he had always secretly wanted. And even though a part of him was gone, he continued to live. Because Brian would never forgive him for shutting himself off to the world, locked away in a room drinking until he died. Because that’s what he had wanted to do. But he had looked at a picture of him and Brian from when they were ten and realized that he would only be letting his brother down if he drank himself to death.

Pulling up the long driveway in the wooded area of Lancaster, Andrew was greeted by his cat running down the front porch to his car. He chuckled, parking the car in his usual spot and turned off the engine before opening his door to let Freckles jump in.

It was something the cat always did, his little way of welcoming Andrew home. But Freckles didn’t jump up in the car, he just meowed until Andrew got out of the car and ran right to the front porch, meowing loudly until Andrew was standing next to him. He watched as the cat ran through the cat door he had installed and listened from the other side of the door as the cat continued to meow.

“You hungry?” Andrew asked, unlocking the front door with his keys.

When Andrew stepped inside the house, something felt off. Everything was in the right place but Freckles was acting so strange, meowing at Andrew until he followed him. Being cautious, Andrew grabbed the gun he had strapped to the bottom of the end table by his couch and followed after Freckles, who led him down the hall and into the master bedroom where he found towels on the floor of his bedroom covered in blood.

He stopped when he heard the sound of water running from his bathroom, walking slowly to where there was yet another bloody towel in front of it, as well as a bloody handprint on the door. When he opened his bathroom door, he found someone laying facedown on the ground. He set his gun down and quickly went to the person, turning them over to try and help.

Adelyn.

His aunt.

“What the hell?” He whispered. Adelyn was shaking as he moved her a little to get a better view of her injuries. “-What happened?”

“Ice.” She said, teeth chattering.

“Hu?”

Stab wound on her shoulder, split cheek, bleeding coming from her head, and a nasty burn on her left arm. What the hell had happened? And why the hell had she come to his house?
He followed her finger as she pointed to the bathtub, next to it was four large bags of ice. “Ice.” She said again, followed by. “Bath.”

“You want me to put you in an ice bath?” Andrew looked down at her, so very confused. She nodded her head in a fast motion, teeth still chattering. Why the hell would she want him to put her in an ice bath? She had already lost too much blood – she needed to go to the hospital.

“Please,” She continued to point to the bath. “Trust…me.”

He hated her. She was the reason why his brother was dead. But their father taught them a saying a long time ago. *Family over everything.* And Adelyn Frost was the only family member he had now. So, Andrew gently set her back down on the ground and began to open the bags of ice, dumping them in the already freezing cold water filled bathtub that was currently overflowing. He turned off the water and continued to dump bags of ice into the water.

When the ice was all gone, Andrew moved back over to Adelyn and began to lift her. “Help.” She said. “I’m trying.” He replied.

“No,” he felt her smack his chest with her hand.

“Hey, hey - it’s okay. I’m not going to hurt you.”

Adelyn shook her head, moving her hand down to hit her stomach. “Shirt.” She said. “Off.”

There was no time to argue, so he lifted the shirt off of Adelyn, leaving her pants on and set her down in the bathtub. When she was inside, her body slowly became submerged by the water and before Andrew could move to lift her up, the entire bathtub froze over and he had to run out of his bedroom when the ground that the water had touched began to freeze as well.

He watched, breathing hard, as the entire bathroom froze over. He fell backwards, tripping over the bloody towels and fell on the floor. Andrew sat there for seven more minutes when the first bits of ice began to crack on the ground. And then more of the ice started to crack until the whole room exploded with ice shards and Andrew quickly rolled out of the way of being hit.

After a few minutes, the shattering stopped and Andrew got up off the floor. From inside the bathroom, he could hear the sound of footsteps coming his way, and Adelyn walked out of the bathroom, only in her pants and bra.

The burn on her arm was gone, the cut on her cheek was just a faded scar now, and her stab wound was barely open any more. Andrew walked over to Adelyn, moving behind her to see where the blood had been coming from the back of her head and found nothing there, just her wet hair covering a perfectly healthy scalp.

He stepped back around to look his Aunt in the eyes, quickly taking his jacket off and handing it over to her. Adelyn covered herself and when she finally looked back up at him, she took in a deep breath. “We need to get out of town.”

*Seriously?*

“It’s not safe here.”

“-Not safe?!” Andrew laughed, “-Are you joking? I just watched you become…*reborn* from an ice bath? You’re the only thing that’s not safe here!”
“It’s a long story, Andrew, and I promise that I will explain on the way to New York, but we need to go.” Adelyn walked over to his nightstand and pulled open one of the drawers and grabbed a black t-shirt, slipping out of his jacket and put it on, and then slipped back into his jacket. The shirt was too big for her but she tucked it into her jeans. The jacket she’d just have to deal with. “Do you have any more guns?” She asked, opening more drawers.

“…No,” Andrew said and walked into the bathroom to grab the one he had set down. Which was completely frozen now. “I did have a gun but my bathroom froze over and now it’s a damn icicle.” His voice grew harsh, “-What the hell is going on Adelyn?”

She looked over at him, brows raised.

“What?” He said, feeling somehow exposed. He crossed his arms over his chest.

She smiled a little, shaking her head. “You sounded just like Sam, your Uncle. He’d say my name like that whenever he was furious with me.” She began to laugh and Andrew started to worry if the cold had done something to her brain because she sounded down right delirious. Once she was done laughing, she took in a shaky breath. “You sounded like Sam.” Her voice shook when she said his name. And then tears filled her eyes and turned her back to him as she began to cry.

Andrew frowned.

She was grieving. For the first time, it seemed.

He watched as she quickly composed herself, back still facing him as she ran her hands down her face and wiped away in tears she may have shed and then turned back to face him. “We need to leave.”

She was scared. But not for herself, Andrew realized. Adelyn was scared for him. He opened his mouth to speak but Freckles came running in, rubbing his head against his Aunt's legs. She picked up the cat and looked back at Andrew and he sighed. “I mean…can I bring my cat?” He asked, shaking his head in frustration. He hated this woman – she was the reason his brother was dead! Family over everything, he heard his father say.

Adelyn nodded her head, “Grab anything in this house that means something to you because I don’t know how long until SHIELD sends someone here, or even sends a bogey to blow this house to bits.”

“Wait, SHIELD is after you?”

Adelyn walked forward, still holding onto Freckles. “Hate to break it to ya, kid. SHIELD isn’t really SHIELD anymore. Get moving.”

Andrew watched as his aunt headed to leave his bedroom door, “Adelyn,” He said her name again and he watched her flinch.

She cleared her throat and slowly looked over her shoulder, “Do me a favor and don’t call me that, okay? Just…AJ.”

She’s the reason Brian is dead, you don’t owe her anything.

Family over everything.

“Okay.” Andrew agreed and when AJ left, he began to pack up everything that was important to him. Old family pictures, Brian’s military medals, anything that held meaning. And then they left,
driving away from his little home in a car with Pennsylvania plates that AJ had apparently stolen when she got into the state, ditching the car she had stolen in D.C.

AJ drove down the road, putting on a baseball cap he had given her and a pair of women’s sunglasses that were in the glove box. Andrew frowned, wiping the inside down a bit of the blood AJ had lost when she drove over.

“You wanna explain everything now?” He finally asked.

“How far until we’re at the next town?” AJ asked him.

He rolled his eyes, annoyed that she was ignoring his questions. “Twenty-minutes out. Why?” He asked as he looked down at his watch, it was nearly 9:30 PM.

“I need a burner phone. Mine got destroyed when they blew up my apartment.” AJ said in a grumble.

“Who are you going to call? -Wait, they blew up your apartment? Why?”

“I told you, kid. SHIELD isn’t SHIELD anymore.”

“Who are they then?”

“I don’t know. But I need to get in touch with someone who is not in D.C before we head back.” AJ told him, “I’ll explain everything afterwards.”

“Head back? Wait – are you seriously going back to D.C?” Andrew said, completely confused. “Why the hell would you go back there?”

“I have a doctor’s appointment.” AJ told him.

“You have a…doctors appointment? Are you joking? With who?”

“Jordan Connors. She’s going to explain to me why my powers are out of whack.” AJ said, turning down the road that Andrew had said would lead them out of town.

“Yeah, about these powers – ready to explain?”

AJ sighed but explained everything to Andrew. That back in the 40’s she had come into contact with an object that gave her gifts. He knew that she had worked closely with Captain America while she was an SSR Agent, but not much else about her time in the forties.

“After you see this Dr. Connors – are you going to go find Captain America?”

AJ shook her head.

“Because you don’t trust him?”

“Steve is about the only person I trust right now.”

“So why didn’t you go to him?” Andrew asked. “I mean, do you even know where he is? How do you even know if he’s alive – if SHIELD tried to kill you, who’s to say that didn’t take out Rogers, too.”

“Because I helped make him Captain America and I know it is going to take a lot more than an explosion to kill Steve Rogers.”
Andrew didn’t ask any more questions, he knew he’d only get cryptic answers. When they got to the next town AJ pulled into a gas station and handed Andrew a hundred-dollar bill.

“Burner phone. Nothing fancy. No camera. Just something that can make a call.” AJ told him and Andrew had to roll his eyes again.

“You do know that I worked for SHIELD, right? I know what a burner phone is.”

“Go.” AJ told him, narrowing her eyes at him. He got out of the car and went inside the gas station, avoiding the security cameras. Something that AJ didn’t tell him to do, but as stated earlier, he used to work for SHIELD, he knew how to not be seen. He lowered his cap and walked up to the register, pointing to the flip phones on the wall.

“Can I get one of those?” He used a thick southern accent.

“What kind?” The old man asked. “Touch screen?”

“No, I don’t know how to use those damn thing,” He looked up a little, baseball cap still shielding his face from the security cameras. “uh, how bout’ that one on the far left.”

“This one?” The old man walked over and pointed to it. “Are you sure? I don’t think they’ve been used since the early 2000’s. Maybe even late nineties.”

Andrew faked a chuckled, “I’d like to say I’m old fashioned – but the truth is, I’m just technology challenged.”

The old man laughed and got the phone down for Andrew. He handed over the money and watched as the old man ringed him up.

“Captain America is now a wanted fugitive of the United States Government. If anyone has any information as to where his whereabouts are, please call the number above.”

Andrew looked up at the TV that was playing behind the counter, craning his neck a bit to see that the tv screen showed a picture of Steve Rogers and the new anchor asked that if anyone were to see Captain Rogers, to stay away from him and call the authorities right away, that he was dangerous.

“Can you believe that?” The old man said, handing Andrew his changed back. “They’ve been playing that news story all morning.”

“What are they saying?” Andrew asked.

“Captain America planted a bomb in some woman’s apartment – what was her name, they’ve been saying it all damn morning...oh, AJ Frost.” He answered, “He killed her. He’s wanted for murder. Such a shame.” Andrew grabbed the bag the old man had put his receipt and phone into and headed towards the exit. “Hey, the confirmation number is on the receipt!” He heard the old man shout as he walked out of the gas station.

Andrew got into the car and AJ quickly pulled out of the parking lot, “-There’s a story on the news saying,” He began to say but she cut him off.

“I heard it.” AJ said, pointing to the radio. “I wanted to see if the news was reporting on anything.”

“They are – apparently Captain America is the one who tried to kill you, AJ.”

“No, he wasn’t.” AJ said back, eyes on the road.
“How can you possibly know that?” Andrew asked.

“Because he wouldn’t.” He scoffed at her answer but AJ didn’t say anything else. She sighed again, “Just…please,” She said softly, “Trust me.”

*Trust the woman who was the reason his brother was dead?* How was that even possible?

**Family over everything.**

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**January 11th, 2016**

**WASHINGTON, D.C**

The world had gone to Hell.

Captain America was wanted for the murder of AJ Frost, and apparently Natasha Romanoff was a suspected accomplice.

Jordan didn’t believe that for a second. But when SHIELD asked her who she was loyal to – she told them the she was loyal to them. “*AJ Frost was my friend and Captain America killed her. I am loyal to SHIELD.*”

It was Pierce who had brought her in to question her. Jordan made a show of the whole, stomping around his office while she cursed, saying awful things about both Steve and Natasha, even going as far as saying that they should have kept AJ in the compound.

“*Do you truly believe that?*” Pierce asked.

“*If she was still in the compound she would be alive.*” Jordan replied. Pierce seemed to buy it.

She left SHIELD after finishing her work and then went home, checking to see if Natasha had somehow left a message for her to explain everything – or even Steve. She had seen him the night before when they met at the bar so Jordan could give him the note explaining what she believed had happened to AJ’s powers.
It didn’t matter now.

She was dead.

No message ever came.

Neither did Steve or Natasha.

So, Jordan went to bed and woke up the next morning when her alarm went off at 4 AM.

Jordan washed her hair and put on her running gear and left her home to go for her daily morning run, earbuds plugged in as music blasted in her ears as she ran to the park she’d always run in. Five miles. That’s how far she ran before a man came running up to her, waving her down with a panicked expression.

“Please!” He said as Jordan took out her earbuds, “-Call 911! My daughter! She’s has diabetes and I don’t have her insulin! Her mom never packed it! Please, call 911!” He pleaded.

Jordan pulled her phone out, hanging it to the man. “You call them, I’m a doctor, where is your daughter?” She asked and the man pointed her in the direction from where he had come from. She could hear him behind her speaking to a 911 operator, telling them what had happened and their location. But when she ran around in the wooded area the man had said his wife was, no one was there.

Someone stepped out from behind a tree. Not a little girl.

AJ Frost.

Jordan instantly ran to her, wrapping her arms around the AJ’s shoulder, who let out a hiss of a wince from the force of Jordan’s body slamming into hers. “They said you were dead!” She said, still hugging AJ tightly. “How are you alive? I went over the charts-” Jordan pulled away from AJ and examined her. “How are your wounds? Are they all healed?”

“My stab wound is the only one not fully healed.” AJ told her, “I might need stitches. What the hell is happening with my powers, Jordan?”

“I’ll stitch you up back at my place, I’ll explain on the way.”

“-No,” AJ said and Jordan watched as the man who had run up to her earlier moved to stand next to AJ, dropping Jordan’s phone on the ground and crushing it with his foot. AJ looked over at him and shook her head, “Was that necessary?”

“It was that or throwing it into the lake.”

“-What is going on? Who the hell is he?” Jordan pointed to the man.

“He’s my nephew. Jordan Connors, meet Andrew Frost. Andrew, Jordan.” She introduced them.

“If we live through this I’ll buy you a new phone.” Andrew told the woman.

Jordan opened her mouth to speak but AJ cut her off, “We’re heading to New York – have you heard from Natasha?”

Jordan shook her head, “No. Her and Steve are MIA. They’re saying they are the ones who killed you.”
“No, that would be Brock Rumlow.” AJ told her, she pulled a hoodie and baseball cap out and handed it to Jordan. “Come on, you’re coming with us. You’re not safe here.”

Jordan followed, blindly trusting AJ.

When they were in the car, Jordan asked how long it had taken AJ to heal and Andrew explained what had happened to AJ when he put her in an ice bath as AJ put the burner phone to her ear and waited for the person on the other line. “Speaker.” Andrew hissed at his aunt and after shaking her head, she turned up the volume so that they could hear, not knowing how to put the phone on speaker.

“Clint?” She asked when the phone started ringing.

“I knew it. I knew it.” They heard him say over and over again in relief. “Where are you?”

“Safe. For now.” AJ replied. “Heading to see the big guy.”

“No, you need to stay where you are.” Clint told her, “You need to get in touch with Natasha.”

“Clint, you are lucky I even remembered one of your burner phone numbers. I can’t stay here – it’s not safe.”

“Natasha is with Steve. I’m calling her. Keep the phone on and I’ll call you back with her location.” Clint said and then hung up.

AJ looked over to Jordan, “Did they arrest Fury?”

Oh. Shit.

AJ didn’t know. “Fury’s dead, AJ.” Jordan said slowly. “He was shot and killed in Steve’s apartment.”

Jordan watched as AJ’s face fell. But the phone started ringing again and she quickly put the phone to her ear. “Fury is dead?” She said into the phone, the volume still loud enough for Jordan and Andrew to hear.

Clint was quiet for a moment.

“Who killed him?”

“Nat says that it was the Winter Soldier.”

Jordan watched as AJ’s face hardened. “Is she sure?”


“He’s killed two people who I’ve cared about now, Clint.” AJ replied back harshly.

Clint changed the subject and told AJ where she would be able to meet Steve and Natasha. They hung up and on the drive to where Steve and Natasha were, Jordan looked over at AJ, her knuckles turning white from how tightly she was gripping onto the steering wheel.

“Who is the Winter Soldier?” Andrew said from the backseat.

AJ licked at her lower lip before she answered Andrew. “He’s the son of a bitch that killed Theo.”
“Theo?” Jordan said in confusion.

“Her old partner.” Andrew said, moving his hand to squeeze AJ’s shoulder. “I’m sorry, AJ.” He apologized. “Losing someone you love is hard.”

“I didn’t love him.” AJ spat out at Andrew, shrugging her arm off of her shoulder. “But that doesn’t mean he deserved to be killed.”

The remainder of the ride was silent.

Jordan had learned quickly when to recognize when AJ was lying to protect herself (her emotions, mostly) but the way she reacted when Andrew said the word love was as if his hand had burnt into her shoulder? Most people would react in that kind of way if it was true – if they did love someone.

But Jordan knew AJ Frost.

And her response to Andrew suggesting she had been in love with this Theo was proof that she did not having any loving romantic feelings for him. And it almost sounded like she felt guilty about that.

Chapter End Notes

Also, meet Andrew Frost. He was briefly mentioned in the first half of this story and his face claim is Shawn Ashmore. (I’m pretty sure I’ve used that face-claim before but it’s a fic, and there aren’t many twin actors that I can think of)
Ghosts

Chapter Notes

Please forgive any typos/mistakes/errors - My brain and thoughts are at a different speed than my typing and sometimes words get jumbled or completely forgotten. I'll try and go over it to edit again if there are any mistakes.

OC MASTERLIST

See the end of the chapter for more notes
January 11th, 2014
WASHINGTON, D.C
Steve walked up to the door of the bedroom where he could hear Natasha speaking softly, looking through the crack, he could see the red headed woman pacing around the room.

“Are you sure?” She asked, and Steve could see that she was talking into the burner phone she had used earlier too. All Natasha told him was that it was Barton, and to ‘please’ just trust her. Natasha had gotten the call earlier this morning and looked relieved when she saw the number. Steve had hoped that it was AJ somehow making contact with Natasha, still gripping on to Natasha’s hope that she was alive. But when he heard her say Clint’s name, his grip slowly loosened. It had been over 24 hours and AJ had yet to make contact, if she was even alive, Natasha had told Steve that she would have made contact by now. But she hadn’t. “Yeah, I know where that is.” Her tone was dry, no humor or softness, strictly business. “Okay. Alright.”

Natasha hung up and Steve walked into the room, “Was that Barton again?”

She nodded, grabbing her gun and putting it under her coat. “I need to go out for a bit. I’ll be gone ten minutes tops.”

Natasha started heading towards the door and Steve stepped in her way, blocking her from leaving. “It’s not safe, Natasha.” He didn’t have many allies right now, and if Natasha truly was his, he couldn’t risk her going out on her own.

“Don’t worry, I’ll wear a hat and glasses.” She smirked up at Steve. “In and out.” Natasha moved to step around him but Steve placed his hand on her shoulder, stopping her.

“Not until you tell me where you’re going.” Steve told her.

Natasha’s brows furrowed. “We’re trusting each other, Rogers. Remember?”

He sighed in frustration, “How am I supposed to trust you when you are keeping things from me?” Steve said back.

Natasha groaned, seeing that he had a point. “Fine.” She huffed, “If you must know, I’m going to get some tampons.” Steve made a face, not believing her. Natasha shrugged her shoulders, “It’s that time of the month, Cap. I can’t help it.”

Steve shook his head but let go of her shoulder, “I don’t believe for a second that you are going to get tampons – but I’m not going to stop you from leaving.” He wasn’t going to beg her to stay and help him. It was her choice. Everyone deserves a choice. “And if you don’t come back…I’ll understand. Tell Barton I send my best.”

He moved to walk away but Natasha grabbed him this time, twisting his arm until he was facing her again, “Do you honestly think I’m not coming back?” She asked him, looking up at him with big eyes.

He shrugged his shoulders now, “What do you expect me to think? You talk to Barton and don’t tell me what he says, and then you just happened to need to run to the pharmacy to grab feminine hygiene products just as Clint calls again.” He could see Natasha’s lips twitching upward, amused by it all.

“I’m coming back, Cap. Ten-fifteen minutes tops. If I’m not back by then, go on and leave. I don’t blame you for thinking I’m only looking out for myself – you won’t hurt my feelings. I made a career out of looking out for number one. But I’m not like that anymore. But if you’re worried that I might turn you in, I won’t hold any grudges against you leaving before I come back.” Her voice
went softer when she started talking again, “Or, you can trust me when I say I’m coming back and stay…I’ll even bring you back something sweet.” She smiled, a Cheshire cat grin.

Steve rolled his eyes and stepped out of Natasha’s way. “Fifteen minutes or I’m leaving.” Steve told Natasha who smiled and walked past him, patting him on his arm as she did so.

He could hear Sam making a noise of dislike when the front door closed and when Steve came into the kitchen were he still was, Sam held one hand in the air in confusion. “-Why the hell did she leave? And where the hell did she go?”

“I don’t know.” Steve replied. “But if she’s not back within fifteen minutes – we leave.”

Sam frowned, and for a minute Steve wondered if he was already backing out of his offer to join them in the fight against Hydra. But then he turned and grabbed something off the counter and handed it to Steve. “I used the last of my eggs to make her a damn omelet.”

Steve chuckled quietly, looking away from Sam as he shook his head and went to the table in the kitchen to eat his breakfast. He was glad he met Sam. He knew off the bat that he could trust him. It had been the same thing that had happened when he first met Bucky, just a kid helping out a much smaller kid from getting beaten too badly. And from that day on until the day Bucky died – Bucky had always had Steve’s back. He believed that Sam was just as loyal as Bucky.

It took less than five minutes to get to where AJ and her nephew were located. It wasn’t safe to hotwire a car in Sam’s neighborhood this early in the morning. The second the owner of the car left for work they would see that it had been stolen and would call the cops and if that happened – they’d all be in danger. So, she left on foot, wearing one of Sam’s hoodies, a baseball cap and a pair of sunglasses acting as if she were any other person on their morning jog.

“Nat,” She heard someone whisper from a bit away in a wooded area. She quickly ran towards where the voice came, knowing who it belonged to, and found AJ waiting for her. Natasha engulfed her in a hug immediately once she was in front of her.

“I knew it,” Natasha said over and over again as AJ chuckled, hugging her back. Natasha pulled
away and laughed, “-You can’t kill AJ Frost, she’s too damn stubborn to ever die.” Natasha said with a smirk, her eyes slightly blurry from tears building up.

Her friend smiled, pressing her hand to Natasha’s cheek, wiping away a tear that had fallen. “I’m okay,” AJ assured her, and Natasha hated the fact that when it came to AJ, she was so damn vulnerable. Natasha had been trying to keep it together for Steve, to be strong, because he was on the verge of losing it when each hour went by and AJ hadn’t checked in – but the thought that AJ might possibly be dead? It damn near destroyed Natasha. Yet again, she found herself compromised. AJ dropped her hand from Natasha’s cheek and looked around the area, “Where’s Steve?” she asked, looking behind Natasha.

“He’s safe.” Natasha told her, taking a step back to get a good look at AJ. She didn’t seem to have any bad injuries, which was odd. “I left him behind – it’s not safe to have us all leaving together. I told him to give me fifteen minutes before he leaves without me.” Natasha explained, but she knew AJ understood. Natasha moved her hand to her gun when she heard someone coming out from the wooded area and AJ held up her hand, letting Natasha know that they were safe. Natasha dropped her hand and watched as Andrew Frost stepped out from a bit away, Natasha still surprised that AJ had gone to him for help and that he had actually agreed to help her. AJ had been so torn up after Brian Frost was killed on a mission, taking a bullet to the head that was meant for her – nothing Natasha or Clint could say could console her. Theodore Adams was able to take her mind off of losing a family member, though (in a way that Clint and Natasha hadn’t tried.) But then he was killed too and AJ grew harder, less breakable.

And then Steve was found. And the pain of losing Brian Frost wasn’t as painful. It hurt AJ, but she had Steve now.

“Romanoff,” Andrew said, walking up to where Natasha and AJ stood.

He and Brian had worked on a case with her in 2008, but nothing after that. She had liked the twins, and never thought that in just a few years she’d witness the rebirth of their aunt who had died in the 40’s.

“Andy.” She greeted him and watched him flinch. Andy had been what Brian had called him, but the team picked up on it while on the mission to make it easier to identify them over comms – Andy and Brian instead of Frost A and Frost B. Andrew looked away and scratched the back of his neck and Natasha turned her attention back to AJ. “You ready?”

AJ smirked and Natasha raised her brow in confusion. AJ whistled, signaling to someone to come out.

And the person who came out was not anyone that Natasha was expecting to see. Jordan Connors came walking out from the woods over to where they all were. And when Jordan saw Natasha, she picked up the pace until she was running, the blonde threw her arms around Natasha and sighed in relief. Natasha hugged her back, hand moving to the back of Jordan’s head as they hugged. And when Natasha finally pulled back, ready to tell them that they needed to go, Jordan did something that surprised Natasha. She leaned forward and pressed her lips against the former KGB assassin’s lips.

Natasha licked her lips when Jordan pulled away, her eyes blinking rapidly from the shock of Jordan kissing her. Yeah, they flirted and hinted but neither had ever expressed having any sort of feelings for the other. But Natasha did have feeling for Jordan, and it appeared that Jordan returned those feelings. When Jordan grinned, Natasha shook her head with a smile and moved forward and kissed her again.
“I thought she was with Barton,” Natasha could hear Andrew say as she and Jordan continued to kiss, Jordan’s fingers running through Natasha hair. “Nope.” AJ replied in a chuckle. When they pulled apart, foreheads pressed together, Natasha pushed Jordan’s hair behind her ears and looked into her blue eyes. “About damn time.” Natasha said with a smirk.

“I could say the same thing.” Jordan said back, sassing Natasha.

“Uh,” Andrew said, causing the women to slowly pull away from each other. “-Hate to break up this reunion but didn’t you say that Steve was only giving you fifteen minutes before he bails?”

“Later.” Jordan said, looking at Natasha with a smirk that matched her own. And then she linked their fingers together and told Natasha to lead the way.

Clint hadn’t told Natasha about Jordan being with AJ. She had a feeling that AJ had something to do with that – wanting Natasha not to worry about the doctor’s safety. But she was glad that it had been a surprise. Because even while they were in the midst of Hydra regaining power and having a weapon that could take out any person the algorithm thought was a challenge – Jordan running up to her and kissing her made Natasha completely forget that they were in any danger.

And when this was all over – Natasha could not wait to finally get Jordan alone.

She’d keep it PG…for now.

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Natasha had snuck in through the back door of Sam Wilson’s house, a man who Steve had apparently befriended the day before and trusted enough to go to without fearing the man would turn them in. Jordan and Andrew followed after Natasha but AJ stayed back a bit once she was in the house.

Would Steve even be happy to see that she was alive? Natasha had said that Steve didn’t know that AJ was the one who she was meeting with when she left the house fifteen minutes earlier. Would he be happy to see her? Or would things still be awkward?

AJ didn’t have feelings for Steve. She loved him, yes. He was her family. But it had never been anything more than that when it came to the two of them. They might play house from time to time but AJ, even though she knew he was dead, would never stop loving James Buchanan Barnes. It was why she had felt so guilty when Theodore was killed. Because he had feelings for her, told her that much. And she couldn’t return those feelings. It had just been sex but Theo had been important
to her. He was her partner. Theo was someone who went out of his way to watch her back, and his death had hit her hard – but not because she was in love with him.

It was the same damn thing with Frank Jackson. AJ had been with him for over a year and it took a war and him being countries away for AJ to realize that she did not love Frank in the way he loved her and that she never would. And...he died. He died while she was realizing that she did not love him.

Bucky was gone, AJ knew that. He wasn’t coming back.

And maybe someday she’d fall in love again. Maybe.

But it wouldn’t be with Steve.

And it hadn’t been with Theo.

There was a small chance that someday she’d fall in love someday but...it would never be like the way she loved Bucky. She would only be able to give just a small part of herself to whoever she might end up with because Bucky, even in death, he had her heart. All of it.

It took a while for AJ to admit that he had had it even while in Camp McCoy, just pieces at that time. And that the day he shipped off to England he left with half of her heart, and when they were finally reunited her heart was all his. Bucky Barnes had stolen her heart piece by piece until there was nothing left to give to anyone else, nothing left that she would ever want to give to someone else because she loved Bucky more than she could have ever imagined and would never stop. And then he died.

And her heart had withered away each day she spent without him. It was broken and cold and it wasn’t capable of ever opening itself up for anyone else.

And she was terrified that Steve would ask for it – that the reason he had been avoiding her for the last few months was because he felt something for her that he knew she wouldn’t be able to feel back. Or because he felt guilty because she had been Bucky’s girl.

AJ walked forward, listening to Natasha introduce Sam and Steve to Andrew after Jordan had introduced herself to Sam and hugged Steve.

“*It’s an honor to meet you, Captain Rogers. My dad was a big fan...obviously,*” AJ couldn’t help but smile at that. Little Henry worshiping Captain America was not a surprise to her. He had met Steve before he was Captain America and took a liking to him. Steve made Henry laugh, and AJ wished she could have seen Henry’s face when he saw the posters of Captain America and saw that it was Steve Rogers.

“*It’s nice to meet you too, Andrew...*”

“*Frost.*” Andrew answered.

“Frost?” Steve said, his voice full of hope and when AJ walked into the kitchen where they all were, out from behind Natasha, Jordan, and Andrew - Steve saw that she was with him and relief washed over his face. Steve moved forward and picked her up in his arms, hugging her tightly, apologizing over and over again.

“I’m sorry,” He whispered, still holding onto her tightly, pressing kisses to the side of her head. AJ didn’t know what to say, Steve sounded so broken and full of guilty, but still relieved that she was in front of him now. “God, I’m so sorry.” AJ finally hugged him back, hiding her face against his
shoulder. It’s okay. She whispered, her voice small. He pressed another series of kisses to her head before he finally set her down, his hands moved to cup her face as he examined her. “You’re healed...” Steve then looked to Jordan, “How?”

Jordan had explained to AJ her suspicions. That SHIELD had been weakening her. What she hadn’t know and did now, thanks to Natasha, was that it had been Hydra weakening her, not SHIELD. She hadn’t understood, Hydra was dead – the SSR made sure of it. But according to Natasha, it was very much alive. Jordan had told AJ that she had done the right thing by putting herself in ice. Ice healed her and when she used her powers, the ice was being taken away and instead of regenerating like they normally did – it was as if she was losing large amounts of her blood and not receiving a transfusion afterwards. The ice bath had saved her. And until they could find a way to reverse what Hydra did to her – the ice baths were going to be the only thing that would save AJ if she got injured that badly again.

“Because our girl here is a genius.” Natasha smirked as she answered, looking over at AJ.

AJ looked to Natasha, giving her a look of; clear the room. She nodded, asking Sam to show Andrew where he could get a change of clothes and offered to show Jordan where she could get cleaned up as well. Natasha explained that they all wore around the same size of clothes that Sam’s ex-girlfriend wore and the clothes she had left behind would work well. Why Sam still had his ex-girlfriends clothes though was a mystery to AJ.

When they were all gone, AJ looked up at Steve who had dropped his hands from her face by then. “I’m sorry.” She blurted out. “I shouldn’t have let things get this bad – I shouldn’t have kissed you in the first place!” She continued to apologize. “God, I’m such an idiot!”

“No, It’s okay.” AJ shook her head, “I was drunk and I felt alone and I miss Bucky…” She breathed in deeply, “-every day I miss him and I guess when I thought you were him I just…” She breathed out, looking up at Steve, “I just wanted to believe it.” AJ felt tears fill her eyes.

“I know.” Steve took her hand in his.

She frowned, slowly pulling her hand back from him. “I’m sorry.” He sucked in his lower lip, trying not to laugh again.

“No!” AJ said, upset. “This isn’t funny! This is really hard for me to say to you – you know how much I love you.”

“I love you too, Jay.” He smiled down at her. “But I’m not in love with you.”

He watched as AJ’s head fell back and she sighed in relief. “You aren’t?” She looked back at him, smiling a lot harder than someone should after being told that someone wasn’t in love with them.

“No.” He laughed, “I mean, I thought maybe I felt something for you after you kissed me, but then I went to go see Peggy.”

AJ’s mouth fell open and she glared at Steve, “-Please tell me you did not tell her!”
Steve shook his head, “No.” He told her, smiling softly down at her, “But I realized that I’m in the same situation as you. Bucky’s gone, he’s a ghost. But you still love him. Peggy is here, sometimes. And other times she’s not. And I still love the part of her that comes out sometimes. But…it’s like being in love with a ghost too.”

AJ swatted at Steve’s chest, “Dammit! Why couldn’t you have just told me that after you went and saw her!” AJ laughed.

Steve held up his hands, shielding himself from getting hit by AJ again. “-Hey, you waited until your apartment was blown up and I thought you were dead to admit to me that you don’t have feelings for me.”

AJ shook her head, smiling a little. “Quite the pair, we are.” AJ chuckled. “Avoiding each other because we’re too afraid to hurt the others feelings and still helplessly in love with ghosts.” Steve nodded his head in agreements, sighing as he opened his arms for her. AJ moved forward and into his arms, wrapping her own around his middle. “Sorry I kissed you.” She whispered.

She felt Steve’s chest rumble. “Sorry I kissed you back.”

AJ smiled, “For the record – you are a very good kisser.”

Steve let go and laughed, “Thank you! You mind telling Natasha that!”

AJ raised her brows and smiled, needing Steve to explain what he meant ASAP. “Explain.”

He simply shrugged and went to get her a cup of coffee.

Idiots. The two of them. Complete idiots. If they had just pulled their heads out of their asses they wouldn’t have wasted the past few months avoiding the other. It only took nearly dying and the fear of losing each other for them to finally say what should have been said last November.

“Hey, uh,” AJ walked over to Steve, taking the cup of coffee he was offering her. “Speaking of ghosts. There’s something you should know about the Winter Soldier.” Steve looked over at AJ, brows raised. “Clint filled me in and Natasha told me that she only told you about her history with him.” Steve now looked concerned. “After being at SHIELD for a year, I was assigned a partner. I was usually assigned on missions with Nat and Clint but after doing well on my first solo mission – SHIELD and Fury believed that I was ready to step back from them, Nat and Clint working together is like watching a masterpiece and they wanted to see if I was able to have that with a partner of my own.”

Steve frowned, not understanding.

AJ took in a deep breath, “His name was Theodore Adams. He was a descendant of a friend I made while at Camp McCoy; Nathaniel Adams.” AJ could see recognition in Steve’s eyes. He knew Nathaniel.

“You two were close?” Steve asked, almost cautiously.

“We were…” She licked at her bottom lip, trying to come up with a word that wasn’t vulgar. “Intimate for a while.” AJ admitted. Steve swallowed, nodding his head quickly as if he were trying to tell AJ to move on with her story. “-It wasn’t like that, Steve. I didn’t have feelings for him, it was just-”

“Sex.” Steve answered for her, still looking very uncomfortable. “I get it.”
AJ looked away from Steve, “In November of 2011, Fury sent me and Theo to Bucharest to extract an agent who was being held hostage. After we were able to extract our agent, we were on our way to the hotel that SHIELD had assigned as our rendezvous spot when our car got knocked off the road. It was the Winter Soldier. Who, I assume, is a Hydra asset.” Steve nodded his head, letting her know that she was right. AJ took in a deep breath to try and hold back her frustration that Hydra was even still alive. “Theo was stuck in the car and couldn’t get out in enough time. He told me to grab our agent and that if he wasn’t at the rendezvous spot within ten minutes to leave.”

*It was only one man.*

“The guy coming towards our car was alone. Metal arm.”

Steve frowned, “The Winter Soldier.”

AJ nodded her head, “SHIELD was able to locate Theo’s body – the Winter Soldier hadn’t taken it. Just left him on the side of the road like roadkill. He had snapped his neck and then shot him for good measure.”

“Did he go after you?”

AJ shook her head, “No. I got out in time – but I sure as hell wanted to go after him.”

“Why didn’t you?” Steve asked.

“Natasha told me it was a dead end. She had tried to go after him a few years earlier and refused to let me do that as well. Said it’d only get me killed.”

Steve took in a deep breath, nodding his head. “I’m glad you didn’t go after him. But I am sorry he killed your partner.”

“Theo was a good guy – he didn’t deserve to die like that.”

“You still hold a grudge?”

“How can I not?” AJ asked him back. “I’m telling you this because if we run into him again – I won’t hesitate to go after him this time.”

“AJ,” Steve began to protest.

“Not up for discussion, Steve. I’m just giving you a heads up.” AJ told Steve causing him to sigh. “He’s killed two people that I have cared about now.” Steve frowned at that, but not out of silence, but almost as if he was holding something back from her. “What?”

Steve opened his mouth to speak but was interrupted, “You need a change of clothes,” Natasha said from behind AJ, causing the woman to look over her shoulder. She did. “I found something more your style.”

AJ huffed out a laugh and rolled her eyes and handed her cup of coffee back to Steve after taking a large gulp, “Please say it’s something leather or black.” AJ said as she walked away with Natasha.

She felt relief.

Things were back to normal with Steve.

And they had the same mission. Take down Hydra again.
And the Winter Soldier was a part of Hydra. So, that was just a bonus for AJ.

AJ hadn’t told Steve much about Andrew, just that she had a nephew. And he had never pushed her to tell him more. And seeing as Natasha was asking Steve to keep something from AJ – he couldn’t exactly be upset that she wasn’t being more open about Andrew Frost.

After Natasha had shown AJ where to change, she had come back and pulled Steve aside and asked him to not tell AJ about what they had seen from Zola, about Howard’s death and his connection to the Winter Soldier.

“Howard was like a brother to her – she deserves to know the truth. That it wasn’t a car accident.” Steve had tried to argue.

“She already has it out for the Winter Soldier, add Howards death on top of all he’s already taken from her…” Natasha shook her head, “She will get herself killed. And I refuse to let her die – she is vulnerable right now and we don’t exactly have access to a tub full of ice if she gets hurt beyond repair. So…please, just…wait. Wait until this is all over.”

For the sake of AJ not dying because of her vendetta against the Winter Soldier, Steve agreed to keep Howards true cause of death from AJ.

They had gone to the army base to steal the EXO-7 Falcon flight harness, AJ and Natasha had been able to break in undetected and the alarms only went off when they were long gone. Steve had asked the two women why they had the alarms go off now – AJ had smirked, “So they know it’s gone. And they’ll know what’s coming.”

Sam didn’t like the idea of them knowing that the gear had been taken, but he wasn’t too vocal about it. He and AJ got along quite quickly, AJ no longer having to worry about whether or not they could trust the man. And Steve wondered if maybe it had to do with why he had been able to form a friendship with Sam so easily, because the man had reminded him of Bucky in some ways. Maybe AJ saw it, too?
They would wait to go after Sitwell for information on Hydra and Pierce until after Jordan and Andrew left, Natasha wanting Jordan safe, and AJ looking out for her family. Jordan had looked at her watch, saying that it was nearly time for her to head into work anyway. Natasha had told her no, that she shouldn’t go in. But Jordan wanted SHIELD to believe that she was still loyal to them. And if Jordan didn’t show up to work – they’d be looking for her too. And that she wasn’t as covert as the rest of them. “I’m just a doctor. I’m not truly an agent, or an assassin, or spy, or super soldier or AJ.” It had made AJ smile a little, being her own category. “And let’s face it – I’m hot. I’ll stand out.” Steve knew that Jordan was trying to make Natasha smile, but he could also see that Natasha was worried.

Jordan left, running around the city until she was far enough away and took a cab back to her apartment and left for work.

When AJ had begun to tell Andrew where a bunker was that Clint had in case of anything happening and any of them needed to hide out – the young man shook his head at AJ, telling her that he wouldn’t go. “You could die.” AJ told him, telling him that she didn’t want him to come. Andrew told AJ that it was too bad, “Family over everything.” AJ had looked at Andrew, eyes misting and took a step back, simply nodding her head and agreeing to let him come. When Steve asked her what had happened, AJ told him that when he said those words, Andrew had looked so much like Henry that she couldn’t argue.

Steve remembered how AJ was never able to tell her little brother no. It seemed like Andrew had the same effect on AJ that Henry had.

The goodbye between Natasha and Jordan was short and sweet and Steve watched as Natasha whispered something in Jordan’s ear after they kissed, causing the blonde woman’s face to flush a dark shade of red. The tables finally turning between Natasha and Jordan, the doctor previously being able to make Natasha blush while keeping her cool whenever Natasha flirted back.

They left separately. AJ going off with Andrew in a car they had stolen while Sam, Natasha, and Steve left in a separate car to go interrogate Jasper Sitwell.

Now, Steve, Natasha, and AJ walked up to the top of the roof, where Sitwell was stammering on about how AJ wasn’t supposed to be dead.

“-They said they killed you.” Jasper said, pointing at AJ. “-You are supposed to be dead!”

Steve grabbed Jasper by the shirt and tossed him through the now open door that would let them out and onto the roof, the man’s body flying forward.

“They lied,” AJ told Jasper, walking onto the roof next to Steve and Natasha.

“Tell me about Zola’s algorithm.” Steve demanded.

Jasper got up, putting his glasses back on as he walked backwards, trying to get away from them. “Never heard of it.” He lied, terribly.

“What were you doing on the Lemurian Star?” Steve asked next.

“I was throwing up. I get seasick.” Jasper replied and Steve grabbed Sitwell, forcing him to the edge of the rooftop. The man did not seem frightened anymore, he just smiled at Steve. “Is this little display meant to insinuate that you’re going to throw me off the roof?” Jasper asked, finding it all humorous. “Because it’s really not your style, Rogers.”

Steve let go of Sitwell, nodding his head in agreement. “You’re right. It’s not.” He said, smoothing
down the man's jacket. “It’s hers.” He said, stepping aside to let Natasha kick Sitwell hard in the stomach, sending him flying off the roof and plummeting to the ground.

“Always with the dramatics.” AJ said, leaning forward to watch as Sitwell screamed as he continued to fall. The three of them stood on the edge of the roof waiting.

“-Oh, wait.” Natasha said, “What about that girl from accounting, Laura…Lisa?”

“Lillian.” Steve corrected, knowing that Natasha was continuing on with her pursuit of trying to find Steve a date. “Lip piercing, right?”

“Yeah, she’s cute.” Natasha said, looking to AJ who nodded her head in agreement.

“Yeah, I’m not ready for that.” Steve told them.

He looked to AJ who smirked, “So, am I going to learn more about the kiss you two shared?”

Steve rolled his eyes at her just as Sam flew up, holding onto Sitwell with one hand, wearing his Falcon jet-pack that had wings. Sam flew a bit more about them before dropping Sitwell onto the roof and when Natasha, Steve, and AJ walked up to him – the man held up his hands in fear.

“Zola’s algorithm is a program!” He confessed! “For choosing Insights targets.”

“What targets?” Steve looked down at Sitwell who was breathing hard.

“You!” He looked to Steve, “Her!” He pointed to AJ, “A TV anchor in Cairo, the Undersecretary of Defense, a high school valedictorian in Iowa City,” He listed off names, “Bruce, Banner, Stephen Strange – anyone who’s a threat to Hydra! Now, or in the future!”

“The future?” Both Steve and AJ said in unison. He looked to AJ who looked incredibly worried and continued on, “-How could it know?”

His question was apparently funny to Sitwell. “How could it not?” He shouted, pushing himself up off the ground. “-The 21st century is a digital book. Zola taught Hydra how to read it.” Steve still didn’t understand, and when he looked to Natasha and AJ, they looked equally confused. “-Your bank record, medical histories, voting patterns, e-mails, phone calls, your damn SAT scores! Zola’s algorithm evaluates peoples past to predict their future.”

“And what then?” AJ asked.

Sitwell looked to the ground, breathing speeding up as he came to some sort of realization. “Oh my god.” He said under his breath, “Pierce is gonna kill me.”

“-What then?!” Steve yelled at the man, moving closer to him. Sam stood behind Sitwell, grabbing him by the back of his jacket and Jasper started giving them answers again.

“Then the Insight Helicarriers scratch people off the list. A few million at a time.”

“So why not wait to kill me?” AJ asked, stepping forward and into Jasper’s space. Steve didn’t stop her, he let her ask her questions. “-Why have Rumlow plant a bomb?”

“That wasn’t Rumlow.” Jasper told her.

AJ tilted her head to the side a bit, “Who was in my apartment?” She asked. Steve didn’t understand why it was so important to her. Why she was willing to waste the little time they did
have on finding out who had planted the bomb.

“You’re a weakness.”

That’s all Jasper would say.

AJ drove a car far enough behind the one Sam, Steve, and Natasha were in, so that the three were ambushed, they’d have back up. Andrew sat in the passenger seat next to her. “How are you a weakness?” Her nephew asked after AJ had explained to him what had happened. “And if Rumlow didn’t plant the bomb – who the hell did? Pierce?”

“I don’t know.” She snapped, knowing there was no reason too, but doing it anyway. She sighed, “I’m sorry – but whoever was inside my apartment took something that belonged to me and…” AJ stopped talking and focused on the road. “It doesn’t matter. We have Sitwell now – call Nat’s burner phone.” She instructed and Andrew nodded his head, pulling out the burner phone he had bought for AJ earlier.

But before he could even flip the phone open, someone had rammed into their car and there was a loud thud on the roof. Out of instinct, AJ moved let go of the wheel and pressed her hands to the cars ceiling and created a strong sheet of ice to protect herself and Andrew as a gun began to shoot into the car from above, the car went circling backwards into traffic and AJ could see through the window that whoever was on their car had jumped onto the car next to them as it sped up to cut through traffic. A metal arm flashed in her vision just before she grabbed onto the steering wheel and slammed on her breaks, causing cars behind her to crash into the back of the car she had stolen.

“Andrew!” AJ said, unbuckling her seatbelt and moved to grab at her nephew who had smacked his head against the passenger window when they had crashed. “Hey, are you okay?”

“Mm-hm.” He said, holding onto his head.

“Okay.” She said, shifting the gears and pressing on the gas, “-Call them. Now!”
Andrew did, “Serves are jammed – I can’t get a signal.” He told AJ, trying over and over to reach Natasha’s burner phone. AJ pressed down hard on the gas, swerving in and out of traffic to cut through people to get to the car her friends were in.

They were too far away for them to notice that AJ had crashed or that someone had been shooting at her car – that was her mistake – she should have gone along with Steve and drove behind them. But AJ had worried that they would be ambushed (which, they were) and they needed to spread out.

The car was now in her view and Andrew pointed to the car, “Is that?”

The Winter Soldier stood on top of their car, punching through the backside window and AJ and Andrew watched as Jasper Sitwell was ripped from the car and tossed into traffic. The Winter Soldier shot into their car they same way he had shot into AJ’s but was thrown off the roof when Sam slammed on his breaks.

AJ was just about to them when one of SHIELD’s jeeps passed her on the highway and crashed into the back of the car that Steve, Natasha, and Sam were in and pushed it forward at a high speed. AJ swerved into the next lane, grabbing her gun from her holster and tossed it to Andrew while she unrolled their windows. “Those windows are bulletproof she make your shots count!” She yelled, pulling up next to the jeep just as the Winter Soldier flipped backwards and onto Steve’s car.

Andrew pointed his gun at the jeeps tires, firing repeatedly but not doing any damage. AJ watched as the Winter Soldier pulled the steering wheel out of the car before he jumped onto the jeep. Sam managed to get their car a little bit away from the jeep but it rammed into them again with the Winter Soldier still on top of it and the car crashed, flipping through the air. “No!” AJ gasped but then saw that Steve, Natasha, and Sam were sliding along the highway on the highway on the door of the car with Steve’s shield protecting them. The jeep sped up and once she saw that Steve and Natasha were safe, AJ sped up, spinning the car so it was in front of them and quickly pushed Andrew out of the car so they could get out through his side, seeing as her side was right in the line of fire. “You okay?!” AJ shouted, running over to Steve, who was just a little bit away from the car.

He nodded but then quickly looked ahead, AJ looked where Steve was staring only to have him shove her roughly behind the car as a missile launched at him, the shield blocked the explosion but the force of it sent Steve flying over the guard rails and down onto the street.

“Steve!” She shouted, moving to run forward only to have Natasha grab her by the back of her coat and drag her back behind cover.

“Go, go, go, go!” Natasha yelled as guns fired at the car AJ had been driving, bullets piercing through the windows and nearly hitting them. AJ grabbed Andrew, pushing him behind another car while she and Sam ran in the same direction and Natasha ran off on her own.

“I can do it!” AJ yelled over at Natasha who hid behind a car a few feet away from her, firing her own gun at the Winter Soldier and the Hydra agents who were shooting at them.

“No!” Natasha yelled back.

It was risky but it was worth at least trying. “I’m gonna do it!” AJ yelled, stepping into the road and raised her hands in the air only to feel someone tackle her to the ground, the both of them rolling to the car Natasha was hiding behind. AJ looked up, expecting it to be Sam, but saw it was her nephew. “Andrew, dammit!”
A grenade was thrown into the car they were hiding behind and Natasha jumped over the railing onto the other side of incoming traffic while AJ pressed her hands to the car, freezing the back so that they wouldn’t be hit from the explosion.

AJ breathed hard, feeling tired from using so much of her strength to create ice shields to protect her and Andrew. Her nephew lifted her off the ground while the Hydra agents aimed at Natasha. AJ looked back just as the car Natasha was behind exploding and Natasha was nowhere to be seen. “Go!” Andrew hissed, seeing that they had an opportunity to get off the bridge.

When they were at the ledge, Andrew pulled out a device Natasha had given to him that would latch onto the side of the bridge and they could both be lowered. But AJ stopped him, instead, grabbing her knife, two guns, and a grenade. “Here.” She told Andrew, taking the device from him. “Go find Sam, watch his back.”

“I’m not leaving you!” He argued.

“Your brother died trying to protect me, I’m not going to let the same thing happen to you! Go find, Sam!” She ordered, latching the device onto the side of the bridge and jumped off. When Andrew looked back down, he saw her safely on the ground, heading in the direction of where Natasha had been thrown off of the bridge.

AJ looked up when she heard a gunshot and started running when she heard multiple. That’s when she saw Natasha fleeing the scene, running in the opposite direction. AJ was just about to go after her when the car under the bridge was smashed, the Winter Soldier landing on it, crushing the metal. She dove under a car and waited until he was no longer in sight, and then started to stalk him like he was her prey.

But a man had run up to her, screaming at her to go in the opposite direction, that there was maniac with a gun. Yeah, she knew that. AJ was currently trying to follow that maniac. She groaned, handing him her burner phone and told him to call 911 while he searched for anyone injured, and that she was looking for anyone who might be hurt too. He finally agreed and AJ ran in the direction the Winter Soldier had been headed.

AJ spotted Natasha just as she dropped down to her knees after a bullet ripped through her shoulder. She ran forward, and saw Natasha take cover behind a car.

The Winter Soldier had jumped on a car a few feet away from Natasha and pointed his gun at her, only to be blown off the car by a gust of cold wind that AJ had sent in his direction, knocking him down so she would have the advantage. He jumped to his feet and pointed his gun at AJ who dodged the bullet by sliding on her knees, skidding against the road until she was at his side, using the knife she pulled out from her belt to slash at his ankle and thigh causing him to buckle forward. AJ stood up, and the man spun around, gun pointed at AJ again only to have her raise her leg and kick him hard in the gut, sending him falling down hard on his back.

Before he could get up, AJ was on top of him, the knife she had used to cut at him earlier was still in her hand, ready to plunge into him only to have him grip onto her wrist before the blade could even touch his skin. She tried to fight him, but the grip he had on her wrist tightened until he was able to switch their positions, AJ now on the ground with the Winter Soldier on top of her. The man knocked the knife out of her hand and his metal arm went to her neck, choking her.

The man lifted her off the ground, metal hand still wrapped around her neck and when AJ finally looked into his eyes, something inside her snapped, her body completely losing control and instinct seemed to kick in. AJ gripped onto his metal arm with both of her hands, trying to freeze it solid. He stumbled a bit when his metal arm was nearly frozen over when a blast of heat came from out
of the metal arm. AJ looked up at him just as the blast from his arm sent her flying forward and into car ten feet away from where she had been standing. And the blast from her own powers sent him flying away from her as well.

AJ groaned, sitting up a bit against the car she had been thrown into, and held onto her side, feeling a warm liquid oozing out of her side. The Winter Soldier was up again and headed in her direction, handgun pointed at her when Steve came running forward, the assassin losing focus when he had looked in the direction AJ’s eyes had gone. Steve came at him and the man metal arm went straight for Steve, only to have Steve hold up his shield to block the blow. The sound of metal colliding against the vibranium of Steve’s shield echoed all around them.

She started to try and get up but could feel something painful in her side, just above where she had felt the blood. AJ moved her hand up and felt that it was a metal shard sticking out of her side. AJ took in a deep breath, trying to work up the courage to do what she had to do next. With shaky hands, AJ gripped onto the shard of metal and pulled, screaming out in pain once it was no longer lodged into her side. Blood began to spill from the wound and AJ quickly pressed her hands to it, using whatever she had left of her powers to use the ice to help it heal. It worked, slightly. Enough that AJ could stand up without falling back onto the ground but not enough for AJ to be able to see straight.

AJ pulled out her gun from under her shirt and ran towards where Steve and the Winter Soldier were fighting, firing off a few shots at the assassin, nearly hitting Steve in the process. The Winter Soldier turned to look at her and Steve was able to grab him by the back, throwing him behind as he ran in front of AJ to block her. “GO!” He yelled at her. The ice she had tried to heal herself started to melt and AJ stumbled forward and onto the ground. When Steve bent down to help her, The Winter Soldier grabbed at his neck, lifting Steve up in the air. AJ went to reach for her gun that had fallen only to have the man kick it away and try to kick at her, but she tumbled out of the way, only able to do so with the little bit of adrenaline she had left. When she looked back up, Steve had the assassin in a hold, grabbing at his mask from behind and flipped him over his back causing the man to fly forward, tumbling as well to land on his knees. Steve went to move in front of AJ when the assassin stood up off the ground, his mask a few away from where AJ was laying.

The Winter Soldier turned himself to face them and AJ inhaled sharply, everything around her becoming hazy. “No,” She whispered, looking up at that man. It wasn’t possible – she was near death and the last time she nearly died – Bucky’s face had been the last thing she saw.

But then she heard Steve say his name, “Bucky?”

It wasn’t just her that saw Bucky standing in front of him, Steve saw him too.

AJ didn’t take her eyes off of the man, “Who the hell is Bucky?” He pointed his gun as Steve as AJ gripped onto the car next to her, hearing his words – Bucky’s words, his voice, it came out of the man’s mouth, the man was Bucky – he was alive. Somehow, Bucky was alive. If she let go of the car she was gripping onto, she’d fall to the ground and lose it.

“Buck,” She breathed out causing him to look at her briefly only to be tossed across the street by Sam who had flown in wearing his Falcon gear. “No!” AJ yelled, trying to crawl forward. When Bucky landed, he looked at both her and Steve, his eyes showing he was conflicted. But in the end, he raised the gun and pointed it at Steve only to have a missile shot in his direction by Natasha, who was behind Steve and AJ. The car exploded and when the smoke cleared, Bucky was gone. “Bucky!” AJ shouted, “Bucky!”

Sirens surrounded them, SHIELD cars as well. AJ felt like she was going to be sick. Bucky. He was alive. AJ felt herself slumping against the pavement, looking up where Bucky had just been
standing with tears in her eyes. And then she was being yanked up and thrown down onto her knees, a gun pointed at the back of her head. “Don’t move!” Someone threatened her. She looked up as the person behind her put her in cuffs and didn’t fight against her capture when they lifted her off the ground to stand. AJ looked over to where Steve had been standing and saw that he was surrendering as SHIELD agents had their guns pointed at him.

She tensed, and the person behind her gripped onto her hard, “Don’t do anything stupid, Frost.”

The voice was gruff but it sounded familiar.

It didn’t matter.

All the noise around her became a buzz and the only thing she could hear was Bucky’s voice repeating in her head, “Who the hell is Bucky?”

“It was him.” Steve looked down as they road in the back of a van. AJ, Sam, Natasha, and Andrew. He couldn’t look at AJ – he didn’t want to see her face because if she felt anything like he did, Steve would break if he looked at her and saw the pain in her eyes. Bucky. He was alive. But…he wasn’t Bucky anymore. “He looked right at me like he didn’t even know me.”

“How’s that even possible? It was like seventy years ago.” Sam asked.

“Zola.” Steve answered. “Bucky’s whole unit was captured in ’43. Zola experimented on him. Whatever he did helped Bucky survive the fall.” Steve looked up and over to AJ, who wouldn’t meet his eyes, but he could see the streak of tear stains on her cheeks, and her lower lip quivering. “They must have found him and…” He shouldn’t have called off the search – he should have listened to AJ, he shouldn’t have stopped searching.

“-None of that’s your fault, Steve.” Natasha said.

Steve took in a deep breath, because he knew that Natasha was wrong. It was his fault. And hearing AJ breathing in and out in shaky breaths was proof enough that AJ knew that it was his fault too. I’ll never forgive you for this! AJ had told him when Steve called off search and rescue for Bucky. He had lived. And Hydra had turned him into a weapon.

“Even when I had nothing, I had Bucky.”

AJ took in another shaky breath and Steve looked at her, watching as her nephew looked down at her side. “Does it hurt?” He asked her.
She nodded her head, tears falling again. Steve knew AJ wasn’t referencing the pain from her wound. “It hurts.” She whispered.

“We need to get a doctor here,” Sam said, causing Steve to look away from AJ. Natasha’s shoulder was still bleeding heavily. “If we don’t put pressure on that wound she’s gonna bleed out here in this truck.” The guard next to Sam pulled out an electric rod and Sam shut up, but instead of the guard using it on Sam, the guard pressed it into her companion’s chest, leg lifting in the air as her foot collided with his face, knocking him out. His body fell to the ground and Steve looked to the guard who had just done that to the man.

“Ah,” The helmet was taken off and Maria Hill was revealed. “That thing was squeezing my brain.” She said, wiping the sweat off of her forehead. She looked to everyone, and then to Sam, only to look at Steve in confusion. “Who’s this guy?” AJ slumped forward and Andrew tried to move to grab her and Maria sighed. “Okay, we need to get her under ice.” Maria said moving out of her seat and began to unlock everyone. “You got her?” She asked Steve.

He nodded, pulling AJ up and into his arms.

“How the hell do you expect us to get out?” Sam asked Maria.

“Ye have little faith.” Maria said, pulling out a tool from under the seat.

Steve looked down at AJ, her eyes closed but her cheeks still damp from tears. “I’m sorry,” He whispered, moving her so he wasn’t cradling her and let her face falling into the slope of his neck. “I’m so sorry.”

Chapter End Notes

Soooooooooooo.....thoughts? Hm?
Frosty

Chapter Notes

Please forgive any typos/errors/or mistakes. I am only human, and my thoughts come at a much faster pace than my fingers can type.

OC MASTERLIST

See the end of the chapter for more notes
WASHINGTON, DC
January 12th, 2014

Too many things were in his head. Things he didn’t understand, blurs of faces he didn’t know but made him feel a sense of calm, which only caused him to panic. The man on the bridge. The woman with him. He looked in their eyes and ever since he felt like he was spiraling. Bucky. That’s what they had called him. Who the hell was Bucky? Why did the woman look at him the way she had moment earlier she had been trying to kill him – when he had tried to kill her.

The picture.

Old, worn up a bit, the woman and two other men. On one of his missions recently (or maybe not recently?), he had planted a device in a bouquet of flowers – the scent was familiar, but not the flowers. The scent coming from inside the place. It made the hair on his flesh arm stand up and he couldn’t help but find a way into the place. He had. It wasn’t part of his mission but he recognized the scent and he didn’t recognize much for quite some time.

Once he was inside, he looked around to try and find the scent. It led him to a bedroom, clothes were thrown on the floor – whoever lived in this apartment was not tidy. And he had smiled for some reason. He smiled. And it had shocked him. Because it had been so long since he last smiled. Or, remembered smiling. He picked up a shirt that was thrown on the floor, bringing it up to his nose and inhaled.


He could hear his own voice in his head saying it over and over again as he inhaled. Cherry red lips. Dark brown curls. Striking green eyes. Mole on the right cheek.

Some part of him felt like he was being electrocuted and he dropped the shirt to the ground, as if the piece of fabric had been the thing to feel like his insides were being fried.

He was leaving when he spotted the picture.

Cherry red lips. Dark brown curls. Striking green eyes. Mole on the right cheek.

The woman in the picture. It was not in color, but he could that she had dark hair and a mole on her right cheek.

His breathing increased and his felt a lump in his throat as he looked down at the picture, felt his brain buzzing in his head, it was screaming at him but everything was echoed, everything was a
blur. He could hear the sound of static, something playing on the radio – a song, a man singing and the smell of the ocean.

And then someone came in through his ear telling him to leave, to comply. And he did. But he took the picture with him. And when they searched him later and found the picture in his back pocket, he was punished. He was put back in the chair and they scrambled his brain like they did after each mission.

But the woman. And the man. He knew them. The way they both looked at him – with pain, and devastation, but also love. He didn’t understand. He didn’t understand anything. And he was becoming agitated, his heart accelerating dangerously high and his mind still running wild with things he didn’t understand.

“Sergeant Barnes.”

He was falling, the man on the bridge – he was there, he was screaming his name. “Bucky, no!”

“The procedure has already started.”

He felt pain where it was impossible to feel, flashes of a man amputating his arm, and then his metal arm appeared. “You are to be the new first of Hydra.” He fought back, I need to get back to her. I promised. He gripped onto a man's neck, trying to fight his way out but could not win. He needed to get back. He had promised. “Put him on ice.”

He was back, no longer inside of his head and his arm lunged out, knocking the agent who was trying to fix his arm. Guns were being pointed at him, letting him know he needed to comply. He felt like a caged beast, wild, in zero control. He never felt in control, but now he was spiraling.

“Sir, he’s…he’s unstable. Erratic.” He could hear someone speaking. And then the man who had been in charge of him for the last decade or so moved in front of him. Pierce, that was his name.

“Mission report?” Pierce asked. He didn’t answer, he simply looked blankly ahead, not meeting Pierces eyes, not reporting to the man in charge who continued to demand a response. “-Mission report. Now.” Pierce moved closer, but he still didn’t respond to his question. That’s when Pierce struck him hard across the face.

He blinked, and in his mind, he could see the man and the woman looking at him while they said his name. Bucky. The woman with striking green eyes, and a mole on her right cheek, but no dark curls, and her lips were a pale shade of pink, a little bit of blood seeping out of the left corner of her mouth.

“The man on the bridge,” He said, finally speaking. “And the woman…who were they?” He looked to Pierce now.

“You met the man earlier this week on another assignment. And the woman…” He paused, his jaw twitching. “-You met her on a mission a few years ago in Bucharest.”

No. no, that wasn’t it. “I knew them.” He said to Pierce.

Pierce took a seat in front of him, “Your work has been a gift to mankind. You shaped the century, and I need you to do it one more time. Society is at a tipping point between order and chaos. Tomorrow morning we’re gonna give it a push. But, if you don’t do your part, I can’t do mine, and Hydra can’t give the world the freedom it deserves.”

He saw the woman in his head again, but it wasn’t the way she looked on the bridge – her hair was
dark again, lips red, eyes still the same shade of striking green. He could hear himself speaking.

“I still never got that name, darlin’,” he had said easily.

“First of all, don’t call me ‘darling’,” The woman had said, her tone all business, not even the slightest bit of amusement creeping into it. “And you can call me Nurse Frost.”

“Nurse Frost,” He had said, drawing out every syllable carefully. “Does Nurse Frost have a first name?”

“I do have a first name,” She had said.

“Well, are you gonna tell me it?” He said, tone eager, his entire body igniting with excitement.

The woman had glanced over her shoulder, “No, I’m not,” She had replied with a smirk of her own when he let out a whine.

“But I knew them.” He said slowly, “Frost.” He said the woman’s name.

Pierce turned in his seat to face some of the scientists. “Prep him.” He ordered.

He felt himself panic.

“He’s been out of cryo-freeze too long.”

“Then wipe him again – he needs it. And then start over.” Piece walked away and the scientist began to strap him down, the woman’s face still in his head, the man on the bridge saying his name. The look in both of their eyes when they saw his face. Bucky.

A mouth piece was placed in his mouth, and he tried to prepare himself for the pain he was about to endure. Frost. Frost. Frost...y.

The pain started and he began to scream in agony.

Her face. The name ‘Frosty’ and then nothing.

Just darkness. And the quiet echo of a voice.

November 14th, 2011
BUCHAREST, Romania
Amanda Cogswell, a fellow agent with SHIELD had been taken. It was AJ and Theodore’s job to extract the woman from Bucharest, Romania, where she was being held. It was easy. In and out. The KBG agents who had been guarding her barely even put up a fight. AJ had been suspicious. It was almost too easy. Theo just thought that they had been lucky. He called it a win for them, and that even if they had put up a challenge – they would have still been able to extract Cogswell. He was always cocky like that and normally it would make AJ either smile or roll her eyes in annoyance.

But she felt something in her gut. They had missed something – or there was something that they weren’t seeing. AJ questioned Amanda on the drive back to their safety check point – why was she in Bucharest? Why didn’t she have back up or a team escorting her? How was she able to get taken? Amanda was one of the best agents AJ knew within SHIELD – how she managed to get taken? Whoever took her must be highly trained. And the KBG agents who were guarding the building she was being kept it? There was no way that those men could have got the upper hand on her.

“Give it a rest, Frost.” Theo had said from the driver’s seat, looking over at her with a smirk. “This was a win – and that just means that we have a few extra days to waste before we report back to SHIELD.” He smirked. AJ knew what he was implying – and normally she’d tell him to shut it. But she still felt off. Theo must have seen the worry in her eyes, “You still thinking about Brian?” He asked. “Because that wasn’t your fault.”

AJ took in a deep breath, “My having a bad feeling about this extraction does not have to do with Brian.” She snapped at him, agitated that whenever she expressed her worries on a mission Theo would take it as her not dealing with the loss of her nephew. He just kept bringing it up. For months he had tried to get her to talk about how she was feeling but the thing she shared with Theo had nothing to do with feelings. It was purely physical. “Just stop asking!” AJ hissed, and then quietly said, “You are my partner – you are not my boyfriend. So, stop acting like it.”

Theo didn’t say anything, he didn’t get a chance. Their car was run off the road, the car rolling down the road causing the three passengers to jerk around in the car. AJ had knocked her head against the window, Cogswell, thankfully, wasn’t as injured as AJ had been. She came out with just a broken wrist – Theo on the other hand was stuck.

AJ yanked at his seat-belt hard, trying desperately to get it off of him. She had managed to slice through it with a knife – but his leg was trapped between the seat and the steering wheel. “Go!” Theo had told AJ as she struggled to lift up the steering wheel, not making any progress. AJ groaned and grunted as she tried to lift it, “AJ, go!” Theo ordered her. But she ignored him.

“I almost got it.” It had been a lie, AJ just wanted to give Theo the slightest bit of comfort. But the sound of a door being slammed shut behind them caused them both to look behind them. “Get down!” AJ ordered Amanda, watching as a man walked towards the car slowly. It was too easy, she should have listened to her damn gut.

“Go!” Theo said, reaching for his gun in the holster strapped to his thigh. “Get Cogswell out of here!” AJ shook her head, ignoring his orders. “-Get to the safety point and if I’m not there in ten
minutes – get your asses to the jets and leave. I mean it!”

AJ looked back again, the man was getting closer, only a few meters away. There was something on his arm, something shiny and metallic looking. She looked back to Theo and started to work on the steering wheel again only to have him grab at her arms and roughly shove her to her door. “Theo – I am not leaving you!” AJ argued, he was her partner – she wouldn’t leave him behind to die! She looked back and watched and caught a better glimpse at the man. Dark brown hair, wearing all black except for his arm, which she could see now was made entirely out of metal. He wore a mask over his face and AJ tried to see if anyone else was with him, surely, he didn’t come alone. “We can take them out together.”

The man started shooting at their car and AJ knew she only have one choice now. AJ looked to Theo, shaking her head and handed him her gun. “No, you need this.”

“You need it more.” She told him before she got out of the car, dragging out Cogswell and running in the line of fire, looking briefly at the man who stopped in the middle of the road, watching her as she ran with Cogswell.

She heard gun fire but AJ did not stop running, she kept a good grip on Cogswell’s hand and tried to block out all the sound of gunfire in the background. They got to their safety check point and AJ waited for Theo to show up (though she knew he wouldn’t), but after ten minutes and Theo a no-show, AJ hot-wired a car to get them to where the jets were set to meet them.

AJ had left Theo to die. And she knew that if the positions were reversed, she’d have Theo do the same. Except he wouldn’t have left her, his feelings wouldn’t have allowed him to do that. Because AJ knew that Theo had feelings for her, she felt it in his gentle touches and from the way he kissed her. But she couldn’t find the will to return those feelings – and maybe if she had returned those feelings she would have stayed to save him, or at least gone back for him.

But she hadn’t. She did her job and got Cogswell back to the states.

After giving her mission report along with Cogswell, Fury had pulled AJ aside and that was when she requested some time off. Fury accepted her request, knowing how hard it was to lose a partner, and that not too long-ago AJ had lost a family member too.

AJ should have done more to save Theo – it was their jobs to watch the others back and she had just...left.

He died, and she did nothing.

Before he left the car, AJ could have sworn that Theo had wanted to say something to her – to tell her something. AJ didn’t give him the chance. It was another Frank situation, where he would say something to her that she couldn’t say back.

That man; the Winter Soldier, had killed Theo, left his body on the side of the road after snapping his neck. And AJ swore she would hold onto her hatred and anger towards that man for the sake of Theo. That one day she’d find the Winter Soldier and put an end to his cruelty. There was nothing she could do to bring back Theo – but she could avenger him.
“How long did it take before?” Steve asked Andrew, standing outside the room they had put AJ in. The entire room had frozen over, and Andrew all put pushed everyone out once she was placed in the water. Steve was terrified. Normally he could hide his fear pretty well, but AJ wasn’t waking up and it had been nearly two hours. And if she didn’t wake up soon – they’d have to leave her. And he really didn’t want to leave her. After his conversation with Fury, they were all in agreement that they needed to stop the launch. Fury had three chips that would destroy the carriers. Fury had wanted to salvage what was left of SHIELD after taking out Hydra. But Steve refused.

SHIELD had to end. Because if SHIELD continued on, Hydra would find their way back in. How the hell were they all supposed to know who was loyal to who? No, it all had to go. Hydra, SHIELD- it would end today.

But he needed AJ to wake up. Steve needed to know if what he was doing was right – she was always his shoulder to lean on and he couldn’t do this without her. Not after finding out Bucky was alive, not after finding out Hydra had taken him. Steve needed her, but they couldn’t wait much longer for her to wake up. Or, ‘de-frost’ as Natasha had so lovingly referred it as, only to get a stern look from Jordan Connor.

Dr. Connors was there – Clint had sent her to Fury, not knowing that where he was sending her, Fury was already camped out with Hill. Jordan had been the one to send in Maria to help them all, it was Jordan that saved their asses.

“Ten minutes.”

“-Why isn’t she waking up?” Steve said in anger, looking over to Jordan.

Jordan sighed, “Steve, she’s just gone through something traumatic – AJ just found out that the
man she loves is still alive.” Jordan explained, “And not to mention that she had just tried to kill him – and he the same to her.”

Steve looked away from Jordan and back to the room frozen in ice. Bucky didn’t know who they were – otherwise he would never have done what he did – they must have done something to his memory. Because Bucky would never lay a hand on a woman, and he would never lay a hand on AJ, that Steve knew was just not possible. He was Bucky…but he wasn’t. Hydra did something to his brain – the same way they had messed with AJ’s powers. Steve needed AJ to wake up so he could assure her that whoever they had turned Bucky into – it wasn’t him. But that they would find a way to save him and bring him back. That they’d both have Bucky again. He just needed her to wake up. “I’m going in.”

“Steve,” Natasha said, moving to stand by him. “It’s not safe.”

“I know AJ better than anyone,” Steve looked down at the red head. How could he explain to them what AJ was feeling without her expressing it? Sometimes AJ was such a closed book that no one knew what she was thinking – but Steve knew that she had to feel at least an ounce of the pain and guilt he felt when it came to Bucky. Because his guilt was overwhelming, “She feels guilty. That’s why she’s not coming out of this.” He shook his head and headed towards the door, “And I’m not going to sit around and wait for her to stop feeling guilty – I’m going to wake her up.”

Jordan stepped in front of him, placing her hand on his chest to stop him from walking into the room, “She’s not just cocooning herself in the ice because she feels guilty, Steve,” Jordan told him, “-the ice heals her - and if you interrupt that process, she won’t heal.”

Steve sighed, knowing that Jordan was right. “Can I just…talk to her? Will she be able to hear me at all?”

Jordan shrugged, unsure. “I don’t know.” She answered honestly, “But it couldn’t hurt.”

Jordan, Andrew, and Natasha left Steve alone in the hall, standing outside of the room AJ was being kept in. Steve waited a few moments before he moved his head against the door, closing his eyes and feeling the sting of the ice against his head. “Jay.” He said her name softly. “I don’t know if you can hear me…but I need you to wake up.”

Steve knew how much AJ still loved Bucky, he knew that this whole thing must be killing her – because it was killing him. That’s why she needed to wake up – they needed each other.

The door still stayed frozen. “Please wake up, Jay…it’s not just me that needs you, its Natasha, and Andrew – it’s Sam, and it’s…” He took in a deep breath, “Bucky needs you too.” Steve said, feeling his chest tighten just saying Bucky’s name. He was alive – he didn’t die. AJ had been right. “He’s going to need you to help him remember who he is – because I know he doesn’t know who he is now. He needs the both of us to help him.” Steve tapped his finger against the ice. “Please wake up,” He whispered. “I can’t do this without you.”

Steve stepped back when he felt the ice around the door crack.

But only a little crack. “Come on, Jay.” He whispered. “Wake up…for Bucky.”

The cracks of ice burst and Steve ducked to dodge getting sliced by them.

It took a full minute before AJ emerged from the room, completely healed. Steve stood up and opened his arms as he walked to her, pulling her to his chest and hugged her tightly. “I’m so sorry.” He whispered. “This is my fault – I shouldn’t have given up, you were right.” Steve shivered at the
cold radiating off of AJ, her skin so could it hurt Steve to even touch. But she didn’t even shiver at the cold, just held him back.

“It’s not your fault.” AJ said, her face buried against his chest.

“Jay,” He began.

“No,” She said in a stronger tone. “This is not your fault.”

He took in a shaky breath. “We’ll get him back.” Steve told her. But AJ didn’t say anything, just held onto him tighter.

When they finally pulled apart, AJ looked around at their surroundings. “Where are we?” She asked.

Steve simply smiled, knowing that AJ would be glad to see that Fury was not dead. But mostly, that Bucky hadn’t killed him. “Someone wants to see you.” He grabbed her hand in his and they started to walk away from the room AJ had been in that was fully melted now.

Her hands were freezing…when was she going to warm up?

AJ sat across from Fury, the man was alive, sitting in a wheelchair across from AJ as Jordan ran her vitals. She was healed, but her temperature was drastically low, and that left Jordan concerned. But AJ didn’t listen to what Jordan was saying, she just looked at Fury who watched her with concern in his eyes. Bucky hadn’t killed Fury. No, the Winter Soldier hadn’t killed Fury.

The Winter Soldier…he wasn’t her Bucky, right? If he was, AJ would have seen it in his eyes. Bucky had never looked at her the way the Winter Soldier did when he was trying to kill her. Bucky was soft, and gentle, and kind. The Winter Soldier was impulsive, and a murderer, and lacked empathy.

That’s not true.
You saw it in his eyes.

When she and Steve had seen that it was Bucky – when they had said his name, the hard look in his eyes had softened to confusion, he had looked down at her and then back at Steve, and his expression went back to anger as he pointed his gun at Steve. But after Sam had knocked him down, and Bucky looked back at her and Steve – she had seen it in his eyes. The way he looked at her eyes with those sad blue orbs that she loved so much – the pain and fear it revealed – it broke her. She wanted to remember the last time he looked at her, the way he had looked at her the night before he had died when they were together, the way he hovered above her. She wanted to remember those eyes, those were the eyes of the man she loved.

But she knew that it was impossible for her to ever stop loving Bucky. The Winter Soldier had tried to kill Fury, he had nearly killed Natasha, and he had killed Theo – she had hated him and that left her feeling sick because he was part Bucky. Or maybe he wasn’t. Maybe Bucky was completely erased.

No, he’s still there.

He took the picture. She had no doubt that it was Bucky who had taken the picture. He had been the one to plant the bomb in her apartment, but saw the picture and took it. There was no other explanation. Why would anyone else want the picture?

Bucky had taken the picture of her from back in the 40’s – he was remembering or trying to. AJ couldn’t give up on him because of the things Hydra forced him to do. She refused to. And as much anger as she had held for the Winter Soldier, her anger and hatred for Hydra was stronger. It outweighed everything else. Hydra had done this to him – they had taken him and turned him into a machine that they could control. That was the only explanation.

Because the Bucky that she loved – the Bucky she would always love – he was not the Winter Soldier. And AJ believed that their love was strong enough that if Bucky were to see her, to look in her eyes, he would know who she was.

We’ll get him back, Steve had told her. But what if Bucky was gone?

No. He’s not.

He’s still in there.

AJ took in a deep breath and looked away from Fury before she started talking, “Did you know who he was? That the Winter Soldier was Bucky?”

Was. Because she was going to get him back. He’d be her Bucky again.

And now she felt sick to her stomach – she had thought of all the ways she could kill the Winter Soldier, how she had tried to kill him earlier on the bridge and that was… it was Bucky the entire time. AJ took in another deep breath to try and calm her rapidly beating heart. If she didn’t calm herself down, the entire room would be covered in ice.

“I didn’t. I had no idea it was Barnes.” Fury said, his voice calming AJ. Because she could always tell when he was lying – and she knew without a doubt that Fury did not know that the Winter Soldier was Bucky Barnes.

She didn’t understand why it was all hitting her now – perhaps it was someone else saying that Bucky was in fact alive, that he was the Winter Soldier, other than Steve. But now it was all
crashing down on her – the realization that a few hours ago she had tried to kill him, that she had tried to kill the man she loved. And she had known that she had tried to kill him, and that she had wanted to kill him, she was aware of that – but it never truly registered to her, because she had tried to kill the Winter Soldier, not Bucky.

But…he was Bucky. And AJ couldn’t hold in her emotions any long. She had tried to stay strong for Steve’s sake, she tried so hard. But AJ felt like her world was crumbling apart. Everything she knew, everything she thought she knew was wrong.

Hydra had never died, SHIELD was a lie, and Bucky…

*Oh God.*

“I tried to kill him.” AJ said, tears filling her eyes.

“Adelyn,” Fury said but she stopped him, shaking her head over and over again, her fingers gripping onto his dog tags.

“I didn’t know,” the tears fell. “I didn’t know that it was…him.” Her voice broke. “Him being alive…it’s all I’ve wanted for so long now.” She inhaled sharply, pressing his dog tags against her chest to rest above her heart. “I didn’t know it was him.”

AJ was feeling it all, the hatred, the anger, the absolute fury she felt towards the Winter Soldier and the absolute despair she felt from missing Bucky for so long – the aching in her heart, in her whole body! She felt how much she still loved him, how much she’d always love him. And she felt the terrible feeling of thinking that she was betraying Theo by how she was so easily willing to let go of that anger, and hatred, and fury towards the Winter Soldier because he was…Bucky.

*My Bucky.*

Theo had been her partner, he helped her through Brian dying, he gave her the comfort he knew she needed and never asked for more. He was a friend. A good man. And being able to let go of his death, to pretend it didn’t happen for the sake of Bucky and the love she had for him that was still so strong – it shouldn’t be that easy. AJ should stay mad, right? She should feel anger towards Bucky for killing her partner, for trying to kill Fury, and nearly killing Natasha.

But she couldn’t.

Because she loved him so goddamn much. And all the things he had done in the past as the Winter Soldier – none of that mattered to her anymore, all that mattered to her was getting him back, to look him in the eyes and tell him that she should have kept searching, to apologize to him for giving up.

And that made her feel guilty. Because she had sworn to herself that she would avenge Theo’s death. That she would make things right – that he didn’t die in vain.

But she couldn’t keep that promise anymore.

And it seemed that Fury understood, “Adams would understand.” He told her, of course he knew what she was thinking – of course he knew exactly what to say. “If he were here, he would understand.” Fury tried to assure her, “Everyone who knows who you truly are.” *The woman in time,* “They’d understand. They know what Barnes is to you – what he means to you.” AJ closed her eyes now, only allowing one more tear to roll down her cheek, “It’s okay to stop hating him now, it’s okay to stop hating the Winter Soldier.” She shook her head, sniffing as she made her eyes wide and blinked, trying to make her tears go away. “You’ll get through to him, Adelyn.”
“What if I can’t?” She whispered.

Fury chuckled, shaking his head. “We both know that you are too damn stubborn to ever give up on him. You’ll get Barnes to remember you – I believe that.”

Fury’s confidence in her, Steve’s determination that they would get Bucky back – it was enough for her to get up and do her job. She’d help Steve, Sam, and Natasha stop Hydra by destroying the Helicarriers – and she would find Bucky and help him remember who he was, and who she was to him.

She’d do it.

He had hugged her when Steve brought her back to everyone – and it had surprised him. Andrew spent so long blaming AJ for Brian’s death, it was exhausting. But the thought of losing the one family member he had left? That fear was enough to help him let go of all that anger. AJ had been just as surprised when he had hugged her, and it took a moment for her to hug him back, but when she did hug him, Andrew nearly broke down. Because her hugs felt like his Dads. Almost. She wasn’t as tall, in length or width, but she did this thing where she rubbed soothing circles against the back of his neck.

It’s something his father had done to both him and Brian when they were kids. And now Andrew knew where he got it from – he got it from his big sister, who surely did the same to him when she was headed. And he had been right.

They had broken into the Smithsonian to get Steve’s old Captain America suit, seeing as SHIELD/Hydra had his old one. AJ had wandered off on her own but Andrew had an idea of where she was headed. And he had been right.

_Best friend since childhood, Bucky Barnes and Steve Rogers on both schoolyard, and battlefield. Barnes is the only Howling Commando to give his life in service of his country._

AJ was sitting on the bench watching the video playing of Bucky Barnes, he was standing next to Steve on the screen, something had made him laugh and it seemed that AJ was in on the joke, because she had let out a breathy chuckle when she watched him laugh while standing next to Steve.

Andrew took a seat next to AJ and looked to the screen, watching it loop now. “I wonder what he was laughing about.” He said, wanting to know more about his aunt’s past.
AJ chuckled again, clearing her throat, “Bucky asked if he looked camera ready.” She pushed a loose hair that had fallen from her pony tail behind her ear. “And I told him that no, he wasn’t. And that Steve was putting him to shame with how handsome he was looking.” She sniffled, “And he laughed, looking at Steve and saying that I was so horrible to him, and when Steve told him I was right we all started laughing so hard.”

Andrew frowned, hearing the sadness in her voice.

“I haven’t gone to see this exhibit.” AJ confessed. “I knew there was footage of Bucky and I just… I thought it’d be too hard to see him again.” Andrew moved his hand to rest on top of AJ’s. “I wish your Dad could have met him…and your uncles. God knows Henry loved Steve,” AJ chuckled, “Bucky might have been jealous of that.”

Andrew chuckled too, because he was well aware of his father’s admiration towards Captain America.

AJ moved her hand on top of Andrews and turned her body to face him. “I’m sorry about Brian.” She finally said. Andrew swallowed hard, nodding his head. “I should have been there for you after he was killed – I should have,”

“Jay, it’s okay.” Andrew told her.

But AJ shook her head, disagreeing with him. “It’s not. And your father would be so disappointed in me.”

Andrew shook his head now, “You were my Dads hero, AJ. He admired, Steve- but you…you were his hero. Dad never said a bad word about you and if he were alive today – he would be so angry at you for blaming yourself. And he’d smack me upside the head for blaming you too. But I don’t anymore. Brian always made his own choices – he knew what he was doing by throwing himself in front of the bullet, but he did it anyway because he wanted you to live. Because…you weren’t just our Dads hero…you were ours, too, growing up. Dad told us bedtime stories about you and how you would stand up to your guys’ brothers whenever they picked on him. Or how you taught him how to ride his bike, the times you’d take him to Coney Island or how you let him drive your car down the road once.”

AJ had to laugh at that, “That was supposed to be our secret.” She smiled, looking at Andrew.

“Yeah, well, after being in the car with you – I understand why my Dad was shit at driving.”

AJ laughed loudly now, shaking her head. Andrew stood up and extended his hand for AJ to grab a hold of, helping her stand up. When she was standing in front of him, AJ frowned, “You don’t have to do this, Andrew. You got out of SHIELD for a reason.”

He shrugged, “Someone’s got to watch your back.” Andrew said, as if it were nothing to him. But he smiled down at his aunt. “It’s what Brian would do.” AJ closed her eyes and moved to wrap her arms around his middle, hugging him tightly. He moved to wrap his arms around her too, resting his chin against the top of her head as they hugged. “Besides, I’ve always dreamed about kicking some Nazi ass.”

AJ laughed again, pulling away from him. It looked like she wanted to correct him, remind him that Hydra only joined the Nazi regime because they were who was in power at that time – not because they actually believed the cause. But she closed her mouth and looked back at the screen where Bucky was laughing. She smiled softly and slowly looked away, “Let’s go.” She told Andrew, and the two of them left the room to meet up with Steve and Sam. Natasha and Fury had
already left, having their own mission to accomplish in taking down SHIELD and Hydra. Maria was outside guarding the area, waiting for them to be ready to leave and would then help them inside of SHIELD headquarters. Which seemed impossible, but Maria acted as if it were the easiest thing in the world.

Andrew had always liked Maria and her confidence. Not to mention that she was breathtakingly beautiful. Brian would give him a hard time whenever they were in Marias presence, watching his twin stammer over his own words while talking to the woman.

“Lookin’ good, Steven.” AJ said once they were back with Steve and Sam.

Steve smiled, playfully rolling his eyes and Sam scoffed, “And what am I? Chopped liver?”

“Oh, I apologize, Sam. I had to look at Steve because you are absolutely radiating that seeing your handsome face was like looking into the sun.” AJ teased, smirking at the man.

“That’s better.” He smirked back.

Andrew chuckled. Sam and AJ were basically strangers but got along so well it seemed like they had known each other for years. It was the same with Steve and Sam.

“Are you both ready?” Sam asked, looking to AJ and then Andrew.


“Oh, I’m sorry – I forgot I was dealing with a woman in her nineties.” Sam snarked. “You could probably do it in your sleep.”

AJ bowed playfully.

It was nice to see her like this. When Andrew had first met AJ, she had been so serious, focused on the mission at hand. It had been the same when they were on their way to meet Steve – the playfulness he witnessed now was just not something he thought AJ was capable of. She had almost been cold. But even now, when there was a chance that they could die and she was going against the man she loved, and who she had thought was dead, to try and take down Hydra for good? She seemed…light. And Andrew believed that Steve was the cause.

Andrew was glad that AJ had Steve. He was glad that they had each other. Together, it seemed, they could face anything.
They stood in the woods far away from Triskelion that they would not be detected by any security or cameras. AJ, Steve, Sam, Andrew, and Maria stood together, looking out at their target. Since waking in the future, all AJ had ever known was SHIELD. It was something she trusted and believed in and that whole time, Hydra was working within it. It was hard to accept, even harder to let go of the identity she had created as a SHIELD agent. AJ was not Adelyn Juliet Frost, born 1918, biochemist. She was AJ Frost, an agent with unique abilities that she kept hidden. And then Steve was found and the Avengers were formed and the world began to ask questions about the heroes who fought to save New York. And Fury did a good job protecting her so no information of who she truly was would ever get leaked. But now the world would soon know who she truly was. Natasha would go in disguise and upload all of SHIELD (and Hydra’s) secrets to the internet. She wasn’t exactly thrilled that people would know who she truly was now – that she was a woman in time, but it was what had to be done. If Natasha was okay with her messy past being on display for the whole world to see? AJ could suck it up. And if somehow, they weren’t able to get through to Bucky – when the information was released…she hoped somehow, he would see it and remember who she was to him. Who he still was to her.

“What’s this?” Steve asked as AJ placed something on his wrist.

AJ fiddled with the device she had just placed on his wrist and then pulled one out of her pocket, slipping one on her own wrist, pressing down on something that made a hologram appear. “It’s going to tell me where you are at all times.” AJ explained, the hologram was a map and there was a large red dot that showed where Steve was now. “I think it’s safe to say that when we’re separated – nothing good ever happens. And this time, since it’s by choice,” AJ grabbed Steve’s wrist and began to program his so she could share her location. “We will both know where the other is at all times.”

When she looked up at Steve, he was smiling softly down at her. “It’ll be fine, Jay.”

She shrugged in response and dropped his wrist. “Well, the last time you went off on a solo mission to fight Hydra you ended up in ice for about seventy years.”

Steve smirked and AJ rolled her eyes, already knowing what he was thinking. “-I could say the same about you.”

“Yes, yeah.” AJ said, taking a step back. “My point is – we’ll be able to find each other this time. Because if I can’t get ahold of you through the comm system Maria gave us – I will assume the worst. So, humor me, please?”

Steve nodded, taking in a deep breath, “Don’t do anything stupid.” He told her, pulling her into a hug.

“I could say the same about you.” AJ replied, smirking while echoing his previous response to her. She pulled away from him and placed her hand on his chest, patting it lightly. “But…honestly – don’t do anything stupid. And if you run into Bucky…” She paused, looking to the side for a moment before her eyes went back up to Steve.

“He’ll remember us, Jay.” Steve said, knowing AJ was having a hard time with this.

“And if he doesn’t?” AJ said, her voice quiet.

“James Buchanan Barnes could never truly forget Adelyn Juliet Frost, no matter how hard Hydra tries to make him – You heard Sitwell. You were targeted because you were a weakness. Tell me
you don’t think that doesn’t have to do with Buck.” AJ swallowed hard, wanting to believe Steve. He sighed, placing his hand on her shoulder. “I know he’s inside there trying to fight it. So, we need to fight for him now.”

AJ nodded her head in agreement and opened her mouth to speak only to have Maria call her name, “We need to head out.”

She smiled at Maria, letting her know that she was ready and then looked back at Steve, pointing at her wrist. “Do not take it off.”

They hugged one last time, “We’ll get him back.” Steve swore to her and together, with Sam, Andrew, and Maria, they headed towards the tower.

It wasn’t easy, but they managed to get into the buildings main security station where Maria emitted a noise that would cut through all of the security personnel’s comm system, leaving them cut off to the main tower. When one of the tech guys walked out to check to see if it was satellite interference, he was met with four guns pointed at him, and Steve in all his star-spangled glory.

“Excuse us,” Steve said and the man quickly raised his hands in surrender letting them all walk into the room.

Sam, Andrew, Maria, and AJ all aimed their weapons at each person in the room as Steve made his way towards the intercom speaker where the tech crew was able to hack so his message would be heard from every single floor or the Triskelion, and surrounding buildings.

“Attention, all SHIELD agents,” Steve’s voice echoed throughout the areas. “This is Steve Rogers.” He addressed them. “You’ve heard a lot about me over the last few days, some of you were even ordered to hunt me down. But I think it’s time you know the truth. SHIELD is not what we thought it was, it’s been taken over by Hydra. Alexander Pierce is their leader.

The STRIKE and Insight crew are Hydra as well.” Steve informed the people. “I don’t know how many more, but I know they’re in the building. They could be standing right next to you. They almost have what they want; absolute control. They shot Nick Fury, attempted to kill your fellow agents; AJ Frost and Natasha Romanoff, as well as myself. And it won’t end there. If you launch those Helicarriers today, Hydra will be able to kill anyone that stands in their way, unless we stop them.” Steve said, “I know I’m asking a lot, but the price of freedom is high, it always has been, and it’s a price I’m willing to pay. And if I’m the only one, so be it. But I’m willing to bet I’m not.”

He ended his speech and AJ smiled over at him.

“Did you write that down first?” Sam asked, “Or was it off the top of your head?”

AJ chuckled and looked at Steve one more time and smiled. He returned the smile, and he and Sam ran out of the room while the rest of the tech crew cleared the area as well.

“Dammit,” Maria cursed, the screen of the computer she was sitting at showing her that the Helicarriers were being launched. “-the system was override.” Maria said, “They’re initiating launch.”

“Yeah, well that’s where Steve and Sam come in.” AJ reminded her. “I’m going to check the hangar bay – see if there’s a jet I can get to.”

“That’s not part of the plan, Frost!” Maria yelled as AJ ran towards the door.

“It’s part of my plan!” She yelled, leaving the room.
Andrew stayed with Maria – it was something he and AJ had agreed on earlier. She’d get to a jet and be another eye in the sky. He hadn’t liked the plan, but AJ had told him that she had once jumped into a war zone out of a plane in the 1940’s and that she could handle herself in this situation too. It also helped that being in the ice for two hours made her feel stronger than she had in months.

AJ was on her own – but she was more than sure that she could handle herself. She reached the hangar bay just as pilots were running to their jets.

“All SHIELD pilots, scramble!” AJ looked over and saw one of SHIELD pilots barking out orders to his team. “We’re the only air support Captain Rogers has got.” He looked over to AJ and waved her over, “I heard a rumor you died.” He said, looking relieved. “With Barton gone – you’re one of the best pilots we have left.”

“Get me to a jet.” AJ told him, and they ran towards the nearest one only to be blown back by a blast of explosion, the jet lighting up in fire. AJ, now on the ground, looked over and saw a silhouette appearing from the smoke. She looked over to the pilot only to see him bleeding out, eyes closed, presumed dead. AJ got up only to stagger backwards and inhale sharply when she saw Bucky appear from inside the smoke.

“If it comes down to it,” Andrew had said to her when they were alone, speaking of her plan, “Are you going to be able to do it? Can you go against Bucky?”

AJ had lied, told him it wouldn’t be a problem. Because if she told him the truth, that she would never hurt Bucky again – he wouldn’t agree to letting her go on her own. AJ was supposed to call in if she spotted Bucky to let Steve know his location – but she needed to try to get to him on her own.

Bucky fired his gun at more of the jets and AJ knew that it was now or never.

He ran forward, firing more shot and throwing a bomb into another jet – he was on his own, from all she could tell, he was on his own. For now. And then she felt her heart sink when people began firing at him, his raised his metal arm to protect himself, but AJ couldn’t stop herself.

“Stop!” She yelled to the agents, and before Bucky could get a chance to take them out, AJ blast a gust of cold air at them, sending them flying away from Bucky. He turned and looked at her. She held her hands up, walking over to him. “Bucky,” She said his name, watching as his face contorted in confusion. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

His hand moved to his holster, hovering over his gun but not pulling it out. AJ was stalling, there was a jet a few meters away and if she kept Bucky distracted long enough, it’d be able to get in the air.

She was only a few feet away from him and he still hadn’t pulled out his gun. AJ felt confident that Bucky wouldn’t try anything.

“Buck, I know you’re in there.” She said slowly, hands still raised in the air. “I know you know who I am.” His jaw clenched and AJ watched the little tick it always did whenever he was frustrated. She moved her hand to her chest, pulling out his dog tags. He watched her carefully, eyes trained on her face. “I met you on December 24th, 1941 – you had gone to the recruitment center with Steve and he had left his cross necklace behind – I saw it and brought it back to him. Do you remember?” She took the dog tags off from around her neck. “You tried to pick me up that day; asked me if I came here often. It was the worst pick up line I had ever heard.” She smiled softly. “You asked my name and I told you it was none of your business.”
She watched as he breathed hard, his chest moving up and down.

“Adelyn Juliet Frost.” She said her name slowly. “And you,” She held out the dog tags. “-are James Buchanan Barnes.” He moved his metal hand out to reach for the dog tags only to have bullets shot at it, AJ flinched back as Bucky pulled out his gun and fired at the men targeting him. It could have been him trying to get better access, but Bucky moved in front of AJ, preventing her from getting hit. But then he turned around once the gunfire ceased and grabbed AJ by the neck with his metal arm, lifting her off the ground.

Both hands went to his wrist instinctively, her powers ready to be used. But she stopped her survival instinct and looked him in the eyes.


His face twisted in anger and confusion, not understanding.

“I love you.” She said, feeling lightheaded now, her lung ached. “Always.”

AJ fell to the floor, everything going dark on her way down. Always, she heard inside her head. Always.

They had lost contact with AJ. He didn’t know if it was because she had wanted them to lose contact – or because she was in danger. “I’m tapping into the security footage to see what’s happening at the hangar bay.” Andrew said, fearing the worst.

“Charlie Carrier’s forty five degrees off the port bow.” Maria said, ignoring him. She then leaned back in her seat and pulled out her gun, firing as soon as the door opened stopping them from breaking into the headquarters. They hit the ground hard and lay motionless. They were kill shots, “Six minutes.” Maria told them.

Andrew got the security footage of the hangar bay up, seeing nearly every jet destroyed. He counted how many were still there and saw that only one was missing. It had to be AJ – she must have gotten to a jet before Hydra attacked. But then he saw something a little off screen, a body, motionless, protected and out of the way if anyone else were to show up. He zoomed in and saw a pair of dog tags being held in a limp hand and the same bracelet AJ had placed on Steve earlier.
“Jesus!” He got up quickly. “AJ is down – I’m going to get her.”

“Stay on comm!” Maria ordered him. “Give me your location every thirty seconds, Frost, that’s an order.”

He left and ran as fast as he could to the hangar bay, checking in with Maria whenever she said his name over comm. He wasn’t paying attention to the time and when thirty seconds was up, but whenever Maria would say his name, he gave his location. It was overkill to have to check in so much – but he knew that with AJ down, it was only him and Maria on the ground.

If it were Maria going after AJ, he’d want her to check in that much too. But, mostly for different reasons.

“I’m here.” Andrew said, running through the smoke and dodging the flames from the destroyed jets. There were bodies all around and out in the open. AJ must have taken cover before she – no, she wasn’t dead. AJ was alive, she had to be. She was the only family Andrew had left. He refused to even think that she wasn’t alive.

He spotted her, his legs pushing faster than they ever had before. “Jay!” He yelled, skidding on his knees once he was near her, pulling her body up a bit to check her pulse. He sighed in relief, hearing the steady rhythm of her heart still beating. AJ stirred in his arms, eyes blinking open as she looked up at him.

“Andy?” She whispered.

He laughed, God, he hated when people called him Andy after Brian had died – but hearing AJ say it now was like music to his ears. Andrew nodded his head and helped her stand, the dog tags dropping out of her hand in the process.

“Where’s Bucky?” AJ asked, looking around at all the damage.

He felt anger rise in him, “Was he here?” He asked her, temper flaring. “You swore you’d let us know if you saw him.”

“Yeah, well I lied.” AJ said, pushing herself off of Andrew. “And it doesn’t matter – he didn’t know who I was.” She said, sounding defeated. AJ looked down at the ground and saw the dog tags on the cement. She bent down and picked them up, staying low as she looked at the engraving. “My only hope is that Steve someway finds a way to break him out of his Winter Soldier state, because I sure as hell didn’t.” She stood up.

Andrew placed his finger to his ear and listened in on Maria, Steve, and Sam.

“Cap, come in. Are you okay?” Sam asked over comm.

“Yeah, I’m here. I’m still on the Helicarrier. Where are you?”

“I’m grounded, the suits down. Sorry, Cap.”

“Don’t worry, I got it.” Steve replied.

He looked back to AJ. “Steve is going to put in the last chip and then this is over.” Andrew said, but AJ shook her head, disagreeing with him.

“It’ll never be over.” She replied, walking away from him.
“Where are you going?” Andrew called out.

“Tracking Steve’s location.” She yelled back. “Go back to Maria – she needs you more than I do.”

Her words stung, but he knew that when he lost Brian, he had said far worse to her. And he also knew that she was only referring to Maria needing someone to watch her back during all of this. But his mind went to the thought that AJ just didn’t need him in her life. He watched her walk away and once she was no longer in sight, he listened as Steve came over the comm system.

“Charlie locked.” Steve said over comm.

“Okay, Cap. Get out of there.” Maria said next.

“Fire now.” Steve ordered.

“But, Steve…”

“Do it! Do it now!” Steve ordered.

Andrew looked up at the sky just as the last Helicarriers fired on each other, creating an explosion in the sky.

Steve had done it.

He had saved them all.

Andrew closed his eyes, knowing the price that Steve just paid.

He needed to find AJ. He needed to be there with her when she found out that Steve had sacrificed his life once again.

AJ had watched as Steve’s little red dot had fallen from the sky, plummeting into Potomac River. She ran, pushing herself hard to the point she nearly collapsed once she reached the lake. AJ stopped, looking around to see where Steve might be. He must have jumped – because she had told him not to do anything stupid and if he had stayed on that damn Helicarrier – that would have been severely stupid.

She had seen the Helicarriers fire on each other, watched as they exploding in the sky, destroying
the Triskelion in the process. And then she spotted a suit of red white and blue washed up onto the shore. “Steve!” She screamed, seeing that he was completely still. AJ ran over, falling to her knees as she got to Steve. “Steve, hey, hey, hey.” She said, hovering over his body. “Wake up, okay?” AJ slapped his face a few times but he didn’t wake up. So, she moved herself over him and began CPR, pressing the heel of her hands at the center of his chest and began compressions. After about thirty chest compressions, AJ tilted her finger under his chin and pinched Steve’s nose, moving her mouth over his to blow in air. But then she jerked up, reaching for her gun when she heard a twig break and pointed her gun in the sounds directions.

Bucky stood there, watching from a bit away.

AJ looked down at Steve and then back at Bucky, hands still shaking as she pointed her gun at him. His eyes weren’t hard, they weren’t cold. They just held so much sadness. And then he turned and walked away.

“Wait!” AJ got off Steve, knowing that the man had literally survived while frozen in ice for decades and that when she got back she could start compressions again. Because she wasn’t going to leave him.

Bucky stopped but didn’t turn around.

“If you truly don’t know who I am,” Her voice shook, tears falling down her cheeks. “Why did you take my picture?” She asked. “I know it was you – you were the one to take the picture of me that I had in my apartment.” Bucky didn’t move, and he still wouldn’t look back at her. “WHY?” She shouted now, anger getting the best of her and her voice thick with tears.

His head slowly turned to the side and AJ waited for him to speak, waited like she was clinging onto life itself. But before he could say anything, Steve began to choke and AJ ran back to him.

“Hey, you’re okay, you’re okay.” AJ said, moving to his side and picking him up a bit to rest against her chest so he wouldn’t choke on any more water. She looked to where Bucky had just been standing and saw that he was gone. AJ let out a small sob and hugged onto Steve, pressing her cheek against his head while he spit up water. “It’s okay.” She whispered. “I got you.”

AJ sent her location to Maria and soon enough, Andrew, Hill, Romanoff, and Fury were there with her, loading Steve into the helicopter to take him to the nearest hospital.

James Buchanan Barnes.

Adelyn Juliet Frost.
Steve Rogers.

Captain America.


I’m with you till the end of the line.

_Always._

So many words were running through his mind, images, memories forcing their way to the surface but still in a haze.

_Always._

_Cherry red lips. Dark brown curls. Striking green eyes. Mole on the right cheek._

_I’m with you till the end of the line._

He walked into the bank vault, dripping with water, and watched as some of the scientist stood in shock when they saw him enter.

“Sergeant,” They said, looking frightened.

“Captain America is dead.” He told them.

They looked skeptical, so he attacked, killing them all but when he got to the last one, the man pleaded for mercy. “I have a daughter!” the man cried.

And that’s when he realized that he didn’t have to kill any longer. He could leave, he’d be free of Hydra and their control and mission reports and the memory wipes – he’d be free from the trigger words that turned him into a monster.

He could spare this man.

He grabbed him by the neck, “Where’s the picture?” He asked and the man cried.

“-W-what picture?”

“_The_ picture.” He seethed.

The scientist opened his mouth, “Of Agent Frost?”

He nodded. The scientist pointed over to the closed bank vault and let go of him, ripping the door off of its hinges and tore through the room. He found the picture, looking down at it, and even though it was in black and white, he saw green eyes staring back at him.

_Bucky._

His name was Bucky.

He tucked the picture into his pocket and left, leaving the one scientist alive, and fled.

A word echoed in his head.
Sooooooo....? What did you guys think? I didn't really get a response the last chapter when AJ found out Bucky was alive? I'd love to know what you guys are thinking? Is this still worth continuing? I have a lot still planned so let me know your thoughts and what you might like to see in the future chapters/stories. Please, feedback/comments always leave me inspired to write more. And kudos are appreciated too!
Chapter Notes

Please forgive any typos/errors/mistakes, I'll do another read through to see if I missed anything.

OC MASTERLIST

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
She hadn’t shared her suspicions with Sam. AJ had kept that to herself; but while interrogating some of STRIKE Team, Sam had started to ask questions, and AJ knew the truth would come out. Steve had woken up but was currently recovering.

AJ had been there with Sam when Steve woke up. She had her head against the edge of the bed while she slept and had flinched when she felt fingers running through her hair. When she got up, she saw Steve smiling down at her. How she hadn’t heard him and Sam talking to one another was still shocking to her. But not really. AJ was exhausted. It was her first decent sleep since everything happened.

Steve had wanted to be the one to interrogate STRIKE Team with AJ – he wanted to make sure she didn’t lose control and lash out. But lately AJ felt more in control of her powers than she ever had before. Even with Hydra tampering with them, AJ was able to hold back her anger, harden her heart again so that things would not affect her as strongly as they would before. But, nevertheless, Sam had promised that if AJ showed any signs of becoming distressed, he’d shut down the interrogation.

AJ was the one with a cool head (pun not intended), it was Sam who was losing his temper.

“You’re really going to lie to my face and continue to say that Rumlow wasn’t the one to plant the bomb in Frosts’ apartment?” His voice began to raise. “He was the one to send the flowers and chocolate, correct?” Sam looked to AJ. She nodded her head, but kept her eyes focused on the man they were interrogating. AJ knew it hadn’t been Rumlow to plant the bomb.

It had been Bucky. No, it had been the Winter Soldier.

Colin, one of STRIKE Teams members, looked at AJ and tilted his head to study her. He then laughed, realizing that AJ knew, too, that Rumlow hadn’t been the one to plant the bomb. She narrowed her eyes at him, a warning to shut the hell up.

“Seems like your partner knows who planted the bomb.” He looked to Sam, “Do you two not talk?”

Sam looked over at AJ in confusion but she kept her eyes on their prisoner.

“Jay?” He said, waiting for her to explain what was happening.

“Even after he tried to kill you – you’re willing to protect him?” Colin laughed, shaking his head. “-God, Frost, that’s almost as pathetic as when we took your picture from him.” He went on, “God, he fought hard to keep it from us – but we got the picture from him.” He grinned. “For a cold-blooded assassin, he sure cried like a damn bitch.” AJ balled her hand into a fist, nails digging into her skin creating crescent moon shapes. She wouldn’t let her emotions get the best of her. AJ would be numb. “-Pierce had to have him wiped a few times after that. He just wouldn’t let go of you – so we scrambled his brains until you were nothing to him.”

She placed her hands on the desk and folded them together. “You can continue to try and get under
my skin, but you’re only wasting your time.” AJ said calmly. “Because I am trained to know when
someone is lying to me; and you, oh boy, your pants might as well be on fire right now.”

Colin glared, “No, I’m not!” He spat out.

“Rumlow is gone, man.” Sam cut in, “Why are you trying to protect him? I’m sure he’d turn on
you faster than I can say STRIKE Team. Why are you so loyal to a man who would gladly give
you up for a deal?”

“Because it wasn’t him!” He yelled. “Pierce sent him.” Colin looked to AJ. “The Winter Soldier
was the one to plant the bomb.”

“You’re lying.” Sam didn’t believe him.

But it was the truth. The whole crying part was not the truth – AJ didn’t believe that for a second.
That was just him trying to get under her skin. But it wasn’t going to work.

“Frost knows it’s not a lie. She said it earlier; she was trained to know when someone is lying to
her.” He looked to AJ. Sam did as well when AJ didn’t deny his accusation. “When did you figure
out it was him, Frost?” He asked, leaning forward in his seat. “When did you realize that the man
you loved was the one who tried to kill you?”

She didn’t answer Colin, which only pissed him off. “Why would you risk it?” AJ asked instead.
“Having him plant the bomb – why risk it?”

“Jay…” Sam said, seeing now that Colin wasn’t lying about Bucky planting the bomb.

“You sent the man I love to plant a bomb in my apartment and you didn’t think it’d trigger him in
the slightest bit?” AJ licked at her lips, chuckling a little.

“The bomb went off, didn’t it?”

“It did.” AJ nodded her head.

“He accomplished his mission.”

“I mean, technically, the mission was to kill me. But I’m still here. Or did you not trust that he
could finish the job? Maybe it wasn’t his mission to kill me? I think that if you sent him to kill me
– he wouldn’t have been able to.”

Colin scoffed, “You think too highly of yourself, Frost.” He glared. “If Barnes was ordered to kill
you – he would do it without even blinking.”

“Oh, okay, so then why didn’t Pierce just send him to kill me?” AJ asked again. “I mean, there’s got to
be a reason. Pierce knew that if a bomb went off, I’d use my powers to protect myself. And I did.”

He grinned now. “Do you really not remember your time in the compound?” Colin said, tilting his
head again. “I mean, we drugged you up pretty good – but I thought for sure you’d remember a
little bit.” Colin leaned forward more, “I’m sure it wasn’t as nightmare inducing as when Reinhardt
dissected you – but we sure put you through Hell, Frost.”

No, she didn’t remember. All she remembered while she was in seclusion was that she was tired.
All the time she was tired, her body ached, her head felt heavy, she felt herself giving up. But that
was it. Nothing else. AJ would wake up, Jordan would give her a meal and her shake, and she’d
train. Jordan would go home and AJ would go to sleep. But that was it.
They had put something in the shakes. That’s how they were able to drug her. “Clever.” She said in a dry tone. “Even more clever having Jordan bring me my meals – wow, bravo.”

Colin didn’t like how she wasn’t showing anger. It was almost like he wanted her to lose her temper.

Sam on the other hand.

“What did you do to her?” He seethed. Colin smirked and Sam lunged forward and grabbed him by the collar of his shirt. AJ placed her hand around Sam wrist and felt tension leave him. He shoved Colin back a bit when he let go of his collar and sat back in his chair, glaring at the STRIKE Team member.

“How were you able to manipulate my powers so that when I used them and was injured, I wouldn’t be able to properly heal like I used to?” AJ asked Colin. He shrugged his shoulders innocently and AJ got up from her seat. Sam didn’t stop her, he just watched her approach Colin. AJ moved her hand to his shackles and pressed her finger to the iron. Colin swallowed hard as they began to cover with frost. “We found a way to reverse them.” AJ told him, hearing him hiss from the cold frost burning against his skin. “Luckily, a lot of my friends are incredibly smart scientist’s – but I guess that’s a bit unfortunate for you.”

“Too many eyes are on you now – you won’t kill me.” Colin said, trying to sound brave but his voice shook terribly.

“We’re just having a conversation, Colin.” AJ smiled down at him. She leaned back a bit to grab the glass of water she had brought in and showed it to Colin, “I’m sure you are aware that I can manipulate water.” She said slowly as she brought the glass closer to him. He refused to meet her eyes. AJ tilted the glass so the water would fall on him, his lower region soaked now. “Oh, damn. I’m such a klutz. Let me clean that up.” AJ said, her hand hovering over his crotch.

“No!” He shouted, knowing what she was intending to do. “I don’t know how they were able to manipulate your powers – I just know it had to do with your blood! You’re not like us – you’re not human!” Colin said quickly. AJ raised her brows in amusement. The man was insane – AJ was born in 1918 in Brooklyn – she was human. Her hand went to his thigh and he yelped, shaking his head, “I know they tested your blood and mixed it with different toxins!” He revealed. “Tested which one would either take away your powers or weaken them so you were easier to kill!”

AJ patted his thigh before she walked back over to Sam and sat down next to him. “What toxin?”

“I don’t know, I swear!” Colin said, breathing hard in fear that AJ would think he was lying. But he wasn’t.

“He’s telling the truth.” AJ told Sam.

They let Colin be taken away by the CIA Agents and when he was gone, Sam looked to AJ for an explanation.

“Did you really know it was Barnes?” He asked.

There was no point in lying to him. “Yeah.” She told him honestly. “But I didn’t have confirmation. Now I do.”

AJ got up and left the room. Colin was their last STRIKE Team member to interrogate. They had done their job and now AJ was ready to go to Steve with the information. It’d upset him, AJ was
Sure, but they both knew by now that the Winter Soldier and Bucky were two separate people.

The Winter Soldier was the man Hydra created, a man who had no control of his own thoughts or actions – a man who had to follow orders or would be punished. He had done terrible things, some might say that the things he had done were unforgivable – but AJ was able to look past them now. And not just because of Bucky, because Bucky was not the Winter Soldier. He was trapped, just like him, but AJ knew that Bucky had been fighting like Hell to remember who he was and who she and Steve were to him. Bucky was Steve’s best friend that wouldn’t let anything happen to him, and when the Winter Soldier had hurt Steve, Bucky had broken through with Steve’s help and did not finish the job in killing him. Bucky was the love of AJ’s life, a man who would never physically hurt her. The Winter Soldier had tried, but after AJ said the word always, Bucky broke through. Even as the Winter Soldier, AJ believed that Bucky’s instincts would pull through. When he was fired at, the Winter Soldier had stood in front of AJ to prevent her from being shot.

*That* was Bucky. AJ believed that.

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Hill and Romanoff had already finished their committee hearing, now it was AJ’s. Steve watched, sitting on the couch in Natasha’s apartment while AJ’s testimony was live-streamed throughout the world. She didn’t look scared, AJ had always been prepared – that’s what made her such a good agent. Sam sat next to Steve on the couch, both of their bags packed (as well as AJ’s) ready to leave to try and locate Bucky. Steve leaned forward, elbows pressed against his knees as he cupped his hands.

“Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth?” The Committee General asked AJ.

“I do.” She replied.

“State your full name, please.”

The camera panned back to AJ. “Adelyn Juliet Frost.”
The Committee General looked down at the stack full of papers in front of him, flipping through each page of information on AJ that was released after Natasha put all of SHIELD and Hydra’s secrets on the internet. He set the papers down and turned his attention back to AJ. “-According to most records; Adelyn Juliet Frost died in 1945 in a plane crash just outside of Austria.”

AJ’s face was on screen again and she folded her hands together. “Yes, I’ve seen the records.”

The man did not look amused. “Care to explain how you are here?”

Steve watched AJ sit up a bit, “Well, as you can see, I am not dead.” She said, a little smirk tugging at the corners of her mouth. “In 1945 I infiltrated a Hydra base in Austria on my own while Captain Rogers and the SSR were otherwise occupied taking down Hydra and Johann Schmidt. They were unaware of my intentions and lost contact with me. While inside the Hydra Fortress, I came across an object.”

Steve saw AJ take in a quick breath. He saw she was conflicted – AJ wanted her story out in the world so that if there was a chance Bucky saw it, he’d know what had happened to her.

“Now, I do not know what this object is called or where it came from – but when I touched it something changed in me. I became…enhanced.” She chose her word carefully. Fury had told AJ not to speak much about the object; The Obelisk, for fear of her safety. They wanted to keep that a secret, seeing as it was never put in her SHIELD file. For a long time, the world had no idea she even had powers. But after New York and Loki, her powers became public knowledge when someone recorded her and put it on the internet for all to see.

“And by enhanced, you are referring to your,” The Committee General looked down at the papers again before he looked up at AJ. “Cryokinesis abilities.”

“Yes.”

“And you do not know what this object was?”

“I do not.” AJ lied. “On March 8th, 1945, I was in the Hydra fortress when I came across it – Dr. Werner Reinhardt, the lead scientist had the object and when he snuck up on me, I grabbed it to strike him. The only thing I remember is blacking out and waking up on an operating table. Dr. Werner experimented on me – and he continued to experiment on me until May 7th, 1945 when Agent Peggy Carter and the Howling Commandos rescued me. They found me nearly dead and brought me to the nearest SSR base where Agent Carter, Howard Stark, and Colonel Phillips placed me in a Cryostasis Chamber where they kept me until technology and medicine advanced enough to help me heal.”

Steve watched, muscles tense as he tried not to think about the ‘experiments’ Dr. Reinhardt had performed on her – or how long his experiments lasted. “Did you know?” Sam asked. Steve turned his head to the side to look at Sam and nodded. “What were these…experiments?”

Steve licked at his lips, “All she ever said was that he experimented on her. AJ never went into detail. I don’t think she wanted me to know.”

Sam nodded his head and didn’t press the issue.

“I was taken out of the Cryostasis Chamber on April 24th, 2010 by Director Fury where I was properly healed.” AJ continued on. “SHIELD took me in and I assumed the identity of AJ Frost, in my files it says that I am a descendent of my family – the daughter of one of my brothers, I believe.”
Henry.

Steve smiled, remembering the little boy and how much he loved his older sister. How much Henry had looked up to AJ. Andrew had explained to Steve that since they were the only living members of the Frost family left, SHIELD had spoken to him and Brian and told them that AJ would be listed as their sister in all of SHIELD’s files, including their own – because if the world found out that AJ was from the past, they might not be too accepting. It had been Brian who convinced Andrew to go along with the lie. Andrew talked about how Brian had been so excited to meet their Aunt, and how much he pestered Director Fury into finally introducing them. But Fury had wanted to ease AJ into the world. Fury only told AJ about Brian and Andrew a year later to warm her up to the idea of working with them.

After Brian died taking a bullet meant for AJ, she had wanted to come clean – or at least wipe her record where it said she was the sister of Brian and Andrew. But too many people had reviewed that file, and Barton and Romanoff had spent too much time creating all the records needed for Adelyn Frost to officially be AJ Frost, daughter of Henry Frost and Margaret Calvinson-Frost, sister of Andrew and Brian Frost.

“Some believe that you should be in jail for living under a false identity.” The Committee General told AJ and Steve felt her blood pressure rise (if possible) “That you are not truly a citizen of the United States since it was stated on record that you died in 1945.”

“By all means then,” AJ said, moving her arms out to surrender, her wrists pressed together, waiting to be cuffed. “Read me my rights, General.”

Steve closed his eyes, trying and failing not to smile.

“Girl has got some balls.” Sam said with a chuckle.

The General glared but continued on, “In the 40’s, you worked closely with Captain Rogers. As you do today. Do you have any idea where he is and why he is not here?”

“Well,” AJ dropped her arms on the table. “He’s not here because he’s probably watching while on a couch somewhere.” AJ looked directly at the camera and gave it a little wave.

“Ms. Frost, might I remind you that you are under oath.”

“No, need to remind me. I solemnly swore, General – it didn’t escape my mind since it was literally ten minutes ago. Or, was that you saying it because you forgot?” AJ snarked.

“Jay,” Steve breathed out with a little chuckle, knowing he shouldn’t find this amusing but couldn’t help himself. He shook his head and looked back at the TV.

The committee asked more questions and AJ answered them as truthfully as she possibly could. And at the end, she looked at the screen and said; “To anyone who may be watching.” AJ said, and Steve knew that she was talking to Bucky in hopes that he might be watching the broadcast. “Adelyn Frost survived. I’m alive. I’m still here. Always.”
Her plan had been to go with Steve and Sam to try and search for Bucky – but Tony had called her and offered her a position as one of Stark Industries scientists. AJ would be working alongside Bruce Banner, Dr. Helen Cho, and a newly hired; Dr. Jordan Connor. They would be studying her blood. Tony said he only felt comfortable studying her blood if AJ was the lead scientist. Or, co-lead. Either way, he would only research and test the blood if AJ was a part of his team.

Lord knows she wanted desperately to find Bucky – more than anything in the world. But she also wanted answers. She had lied to Colin while she and Sam were interrogating STRIKE Team. AJ had said that they had fixed her – but they hadn’t. That’s what Tony was trying to do. If any other person asked to study AJ, her powers, and her blood, she’d likely tell them to shove it – but she trusted Tony. She trusted him nearly as much as she trusted Steve when it came to her life. Steve Rogers would never let anything bad happen to her, would never put her life on the line. AJ believed that Tony would be just as protective and careful with her life as Steve had always been and would always be.

Andrew would be going with Steve and Sam and she swore bodily harm to them if anything happened to her nephew. Steve had laughed and promised he’d keep Andrew safe – and Sam had told her she was scary, but he’d make sure Andrew didn’t find himself in any trouble. AJ also made Steve promise to check in each day at 8 PM (New York time) – no matter where he was in the world. He would find the time to sit down and call her and update her on their search.

Fury left for Europe, still presumed dead to the world. Fury wanted the world to keep believing his was dead – AJ didn’t understand why, but Fury always had a reason for his decisions.

AJ had gone to the Captain America exhibit at the Smithsonian one more time before she left for New York. She sat on the bench watching as Bucky laughed on screen, his eyes shining and bright and there was so much happiness in them that it made her heart ache. Those are the eyes she wanted to remember before she left for New York. Not the sad, confused, frightened eyes or the eyes that had been void of any emotion. She wanted to remember him smiling and laughing so hard that his eyes were watering. Because when she remembered his eyes the last time she saw him – it made her feel guilt. It made her want to go with Steve and Sam instead of getting on the private jet Tony had sent to pick her up, along with Happy Hogan, the head of security at Stark Industries and Tony’s personal chauffeur/bodyguard.

So, she sat on that bench until Happy called her to tell her he was outside waiting for her. AJ had looked at the video, watching Bucky laugh one last time before she got up and left the Smithsonian to meet Happy. Natasha was in the car as well, a folder sitting in her lap when AJ slid into the backseat.

“I thought you were going to the farm?” AJ said, referring to Clint’s farm.
“Well, that had been the plan until Stark offered my girlfriend a new job.” Natasha said in a dry tone.

AJ grinned, not missing the fact that Natasha had referred to Jordan as her girlfriend. “Hmm,” She hummed and she didn’t have to see Natasha’s face to know she was rolling her eyes. “I did not you two had made it official.”

“Shut it.” Natasha said, but when AJ looked over, she saw a crooked little smirk. She then looked over at AJ, the smirk gone and her expression serious now. “I have something for you.” Natasha said, picking up the file in her lap. “I gave Steve the original, but I made a copy for you.” It was a normal file, one you would find in any office throughout the world – but what was inside, it was anything but ordinary. AJ opened the file and saw a picture of Bucky frozen in a Cryostasis Chamber, one nearly identical to the one that AJ had been placed in sixty-nine years ago. But there was another picture clipped to the page. Bucky in his military uniform from the 40’s.

AJ pressed her fingers to the picture and closed her eyes, trying to imagine that she was back in time with Bucky, that they were standing under the fireworks at Howard's Expo smiling at the other after seeing each other for the first time since Camp McCoy.

She pictured them sitting under their tree at Camp McCoy, Bucky falling asleep, slumped against their tree as AJ smiled and looked down at him (and occasionally stole some of his food rations.) He’d wake up and notice the food was missing and give her a lazy grin and told AJ that all she had to do was ask and then tease her, calling her a thief. She remembered their banter and how she had never felt so connected to someone in her entire life.

AJ pictured them standing under the bright moon, hand in hand as the snuck around base on Christmas while everyone slept soundly. AJ remembered how Bucky had slid the bracelet made of yarn onto her wrist, made by a little girl who had hustled him and how he had he in his own Bucky way, had asked her to be his girl. The way he had grinned when she told him yes and how in her head she had thought that maybe she had been Bucky’s girl all along from the very first time they met all those years ago in the recruitment center.

“-You know what I do know? What I do know is that I love you Adelyn Frost.”

AJ closed her eyes, trying to remember the way she had felt the moment Bucky had told her that he loved her. She opened her eyes and looked at his picture, tears filling her eyes as she smiled at it, or really, all of her memories with Bucky.

“You okay?” Natasha asked causing AJ’s eyes to tear away from the picture of Bucky from the 40’s.

She nodded and wiped away stray tears. “Yeah,” AJ cleared her throat. “Just got a little swept away in memories.” Natasha moved her hand to rest on AJ’s to show comfort. It helped. It made AJ feel less alone.

They rode the rest of the way in silence, well, Natasha and AJ had been silent. Happy on the other hand talked the entire way to the airport and then continued to talk while on the jet – the man only stopped talking when he ended up falling asleep on the ride over, Natasha dozed off as well.

AJ took her time alone to go over Bucky’s file.

She went over the notes made by Zola and how when Bucky had been taken by Hydra the first time – they had experimented him. They had wanted to make him a super soldier. They had their own serum that they had created using the little amount of Erskine’s notes they had managed to get
their hands on. AJ read over each thing they had done to Bucky and shook her head in anger. Zola had no idea what he had been doing – Bucky could have died on that table! But before Zola had been able to give Bucky his last injection, Steve and AJ had showed up to rescue him. If they had given him the last bit of their serum, Bucky would have turned into the monstrous creature Schmidt had turned into.

But without those serum injections, Bucky would have never been able to survive the fall. He would have died immediately on impact. But he had survived. The Russians had found him and brought him to Zola and he continued on with his experiments. Only this time, removing Bucky’s mangled arm and replaced it with the metal arm he had today.

They ran numerous tests on him. They took his blood to try and replicate more of the serum for God knows what. But they had never given him the last dose of serum. Perhaps Zola realized that he had made a mistake? So instead of having a complete super soldier, they had the Winter Soldier who they could train and wipe and control and then keep frozen until they were ready to use him again. Mind control was an understatement compared to what they had done to Bucky.

It made her sick.

She read the logs they kept monitoring Bucky’s behavior. How he had fought for so hard against them for the first few months, but eventually gave up and lost the will to fight. AJ couldn’t find why he had given up, Hydra hadn’t noted the reason. AJ just knew that Bucky finally stopped fighting it and complied. The brain wipes started working and the trigger words had been a success.

AJ continued on reading the file, still feeling sick each time she read every horror they had put him through. It was heartbreaking to read what had been done to him – what he had been forced to do. And then she came across something she wished she didn’t.

It was a list of all the Winter Soldiers confirmed kills.
And on that list were Howard and Maria Stark.

AJ pressed her hand to her mouth, trying hard not to cry.

*It wasn’t Bucky. He wasn’t in control. It wasn’t Bucky.*

She moved forward and grabbed at Natasha’s leg and shook her awake. “What?” Natasha grumbled.

“Steve and I have the only copies, right?” AJ asked.

Natasha blinked, not understanding. “Yeah, I told you that.”

AJ shoved the file in her bag and then looked at Natasha. “We need to keep it that way.”

Natasha’s brows knitted together but realization finally swept over her face. “You saw?”

She nodded, sitting back in her seat.


If Bucky were in control; he would never kill Howard. They had been friends! Howard was the reason she and Bucky even got together! He wouldn’t have…he just wouldn’t.

“Steve knows?” AJ asked Natasha, the red head nodded. AJ closed her eyes, trying not to think about Howard and his wife, about their death, about the fact that she was about to work with their son knowing how they truly died. It wasn’t a car crash – it was…it wasn’t him. Not Bucky.

“Adge,” Natasha said her nickname slowly.

“I shouldn’t have stopped looking for him.” AJ said, eyes still closed. “If I just…kept looking,” She shook her head, eyes still closed tightly. “This wouldn’t have happened.”

She felt Natasha grab a hold of and squeeze her hand. “If it hadn’t been him – it just would have been someone else.”

*If Bucky survived and wasn’t turned into the Winter Soldier, someone else would just be sent to kill Howard. Hydra wanted him dead – if AJ had found Bucky and they had lived happily ever after, Howard and Maria Stark still would have been killed. There was no changing that. “-You know that, right?”*

AJ opened her eyes, breathing in through her nose. “I do.” AJ nodded her head. Natasha was right.

“Don’t give up on him, Adelyn.” Natasha said.

AJ looked to Natasha. “Never.” She promised.

They were quiet, but AJ couldn’t help but smile slightly. Natasha had called her Adelyn. It was who she was now, or, again.

The world now knew that Adelyn Frost had not died in 1945, they knew almost every single secret she had been keeping. What they did not know and what the world couldn’t know; was that Dr. Adelyn Frost had helped created the super soldier serum. Because even as they tried to wipe out Hydra completely, there were other forces out there who would try to replicate the serum. The US Military, the Russians, any communist country – anyone who wanted to create a race or army of
super soldier would be ready to take her.

AJ would not be safe if the world found out she helped make Steve Rogers ‘Captain America’ and the star-spangled man with a plan wouldn’t even be able to save him. None of the Avengers would.

AJ pressed her hand to her chest, something very significant missing. She had left it in a safe place, somewhere she believed Bucky would go to. A place she had just been at before Happy and Natasha picked her up.

He had researched, he read every file put online by SHIELD that had to do with Adelyn Frost and Steve Rogers. He watched her on a live-stream – always, that word kept echoing in his head over and over. Memories were slowly making their way to the surface but he was still trying to figure out who he was – who he had been.

Searching Steve Rogers led him to the Smithsonian; The Captain America exhibit.

He watched the footage of himself from the back, his heart racing, blood pumping in his ear as he heard the narrator speak. But those weren’t the only voices he heard.

He heard his own, he heard the woman’s, and he heard Captain Americas voice as well.

He closed his eyes and let another memory fight it’s way to the surface.

“Will you just stand still?” The woman, Adelyn had said. Her voice was slightly annoyed – but he knew that she wasn’t. Somehow, he knew that she was more amused than anything. The lightness in her voice and the way her green eyes twinkled mischievously when she looked at him.

“Oh, come on now, Frosty. I got to make sure I’m camera ready.” His own voice said, and he could feel the way his stomach fluttered when he looked at the woman, Adelyn Frost; Frosty. She was smiling and he felt his stomach clench at the very image of her. “Now, do I look camera ready?” He asked.

“No, absolutely not.” Adelyn replied, a smirk playing on her lips. “Steve on the other hand is looking incredibly handsome – he’s putting you to shame, really.”
He had laughed, as did Steve. “She’s horrible to me.” Steve laughed harder, as did Adelyn, and he couldn’t help but laugh with them. The cameras went away and it was only him and Adelyn left in the room. He had her back pressed against the wall and she was smiling up at him, his nose nudge against hers and he could feel his cheeks hurting from how hard he was smiling at her.

“Steve could come back in minute, Bucky.” Adelyn had told him. “Or any one else for the matter!”

He had smirked, “Let them.” He told her and Adelyn rolled her eyes playfully at him. He moved forward to press his lips against hers only to have Adelyn swiftly turn her head to the side so his lips met her cheek. He had groaned and she had laughed.

“Are you still jealous?” She asked him in a playful tone. He pulled back to look at her, her green eyes were so green in that moment that he nearly got lost in them.

But he had managed to pull himself together and smirked, “-You could break my heart sayin’ Steve is more handsome than me.” He heard himself say and Adelyn laughed loudly, he couldn’t help but smile as she tossed her head back in a fit of laughter. “Don’t you remember what I told ya, Frosty? Don’t go fallin in love with Steve while I was away.”

She smirked, “Well, I recall telling you that I made no promise when it came to falling in love with Steve.”

He had pouted and Adelyn had beamed up at him and moved both of her hands to his face, standing on her tip toes and pressed her lips to his. Her lips had been so soft, moving gently against his. But when her arms moved around his neck and she pressed her body closer to his, he felt his body erupt in flames as the memory of her lips on his changing their pace and pressure, his hands gripping her hips as their lips moved together in a series of needy kisses. He could feel the ghost of her fingers running through his hair, nails gently scratching against his scalp. He felt his heart beat rapidly in his chest and his breath catch in his throat and could remember thinking that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with this woman.

“Steve is handsome, yes.” Adelyn told him, pulling away slightly so they could catch their breath. She moved her thumb to his mouth, wiping her shade of red lipstick off of his lips with a smirk. “But you’re my guy, Bucky Barnes.”

“And you’re my girl.” He felt himself smiling.

She grinned. “Always.”

The memory went away and he was fighting against the horrible memories of what Hydra had made him do, of his metal hand wrapped around her neck and her green eyes filling with tears. Of the first time he saw her in Romania and how he had killed the man she was with. Of the way she cried out his name on the riverbank begging him to tell her why he took the picture from her apartment. Death, destruction, pain – he felt it all.

He wanted to relive the memory, he wanted to close his eyes and try and block out the sounds of people crying and screaming, of them begging for their lives – but he couldn’t. He turned to leave when something caught his eye.

Walking over towards the screen, he saw something under the bench that was in front of the screen. He walked over, bending down and pulled out something taped to the bottom of the bench. Dog tags.
The ones she had tried to give him – his dog tags. He frowned, looking down at the tags where his name had been engraved. He held a small note in his hand that had been taped to the back of his dog tags.

_Bucky,_

_When you remember – bring these back to me._

_-Always,_

_Your AJ._


Those were the names he called her.

He shoved the envelope on his coat pocket and left, gripping the dog tags in his flesh hand.

_You’re my guy, Bucky Barnes._

_And you’re my girl._

_Always._
AJ couldn’t believe she had forgotten it. It was one of the most important things to her and she had left it in D.C. AJ had been ready to hop on a plane back to D.C to go to her apartment and grab it, but Tony went instead, saying his ride was much faster. It had been. He had come back with the box of things Peggy and Howard had packed up for her after putting her in cryofreeze, including the unopened letter from Bucky that he had written while he was overseas.

She sat in her room in Avengers Tower – yes, she had her own room. And thankfully Pepper had been the one to decorate it. There was also a room for Steve whenever he was back in New York, a room for all of the Avengers.

AJ laid down on the bed, holding the envelope up in the air. For so long she had refused to open it up because she didn’t want to open the wound of losing Bucky – but…he was alive she didn’t know who she was – but he was alive. She took in a deep breath, her eyes scanning over the envelope with her name and address written in Bucky’s handwriting. The once (she was sure) very white envelope was now tinted yellow with age.

Why couldn’t she work up the damn courage to open the letter? She highly doubted that Bucky had written any kind of love declaration – he probably just wrote to check up on Steve, to ask her how her days had been – nothing big. But she was still terrified of opening it.

Someone knocked lightly on her bedroom door and AJ sat up a bit, setting the letter down next to her, “Come in.” AJ hollered.

Natasha opened the door and she and Jordan slipped in. Jordan looked around the room and frowned. “I’m kind of regretting telling Stark that I didn’t need to stay at the Tower – these rooms are amazing.”

AJ chuckled. “I mean, Natasha has a room here, yaknow.” She reminded the blonde and watched as Natasha blushed. “Wow, I’m so proud of myself for getting you to blush! That’s something only Jordan has been able to do!” She laughed and Natasha rolled her eyes before sitting on AJ’s bed, Jordan trailing after her and taking a seat on the edge.

“Stark said that he brought back the box for you.” Natasha said, her eyes landing on the old envelope that sat next to AJ on the bed.

“Yes, you must tell me more about this mysterious box that Natasha refused to discuss with me.” Jordan said, playfully glaring at Natasha. Natasha grinned at the blonde and shrugged her shoulders. But the two of them both looked back at AJ.

“It’s just an old box of my things.” AJ tried to act like it wasn’t a big deal.

“From the 40’s?”

AJ looked down at the envelope and nodded. “Howard and Peggy went to my apartment after everything happened and gathered a couple of things for me so that when I woke up, I’d have them. Tony actually just told me that Howard kept a whole storage unit full of my old things.” She had been surprised, but at the same time not really surprised that Howard had kept all her things. He had always been such a good friend – it shouldn’t be shocking that he’d gather up all her things to keep so that when she woke up one day, she’d have them. “My old car is even in storage.” AJ couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Is that the letter?” Natasha asked AJ.
AJ licked at her lower lip and nodded her head. Natasha knew about the letter – she had just never seen it. AJ kept all her things locked away in a safe in her closet and only ever took them out when she was alone. “Yeah.” She answered Natasha.

Natasha waited a moment before speaking. “I think you should open it.”

She looked behind Natasha at Jordan who simply smiled, encouraging AJ as well. Though, AJ doubted Jordan knew what the letter was or who it was from. Or maybe she did and she was able to master quite the poker face by pretending that she didn’t know what had been in the box.

“We can stay…if you want.” Jordan said and AJ simply smiled and shook her head.

“Thank you, Jordan but…I think I’d like to be alone to read it.”

Natasha got up and held out her hand to help Jordan up as well. “Well, we’ll leave you to read it.” She smirked, her way of telling AJ to just read the damn letter finally.

AJ waited until the door clicked shut and took in a deep breath before she carefully opened the letter, not wanting it to be destroyed in any way.

She pulled out the paper that he been folded three times and looked down at it for a long moment before she opened the letter and let her eyes scan over her own name, written by Bucky.

Dear Adelyn,

I haven’t been in London long, but we’re already being shipped out to another army base. Now, I can’t say where, but I’m sure any letter you send to this base will be sent to me there as well, or, I hope it will. How are you? How is Steve? Is he stayin’ out of trouble? And you stayin’ out of trouble? I sure do hope so, because Steve is never one to not stand up and fight for a damsel in distress. And yeah, I know you ain’t a damsel, Frosty, so don’t go rollin’ your eyes. London was cold, it rained a lot and I don’t think I saw the sun once while I was there. Most of London has been affected by the bombings. I don’t know what the city looked like before the war, but London sure has taken a hit. I can’t imagine anything like that happening in New York. Which makes me glad that you’re safe in America. And Steve, too, of course. I don’t know why writing this letter is so difficult for me, I can’t think of anything to write about. War is rough but I’m staying safe. Haven’t gotten shot yet, so that’s good. I’ve made a few friends out of my bunk mates. They sure know how to give a guy some Hell. I’m sure you’d get along with them just fine. The food here is worse than the mush they served at Camp McCoy, or maybe I just preferred the company that the food didn’t bother me. Well, the food you hadn’t stolen off my plate.

I wanted to thank you, Jay. I’ll be honest with ya, I was terrified when I got my draft letter. I felt dread all day long and seeing you at the Expo helped numb that fear. So, thank you for spending my last night in the states with me. I don’t think I can imagine wanting to spend it with anyone else.

Don’t tell Steve that. Don’t want the little punk getting jealous.

You made what I thought would end up being a dreadful night full of panic one of the best nights of my life. I don’t know how ya managed to do it, but I’m grateful, Frosty. So, thank you.

I owe you a drink when I get back to the states. Maybe even a dance?
I miss ya, Frosty. I hope you are well. And I meant it when I said before I left. Don’t go fallin’ in love with Steve while I’m gone. Give me a fighting chance.

Stay safe.

Always,
Bucky

Chapter End Notes

comments/feedback/kudos are always appreciated! Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter!
Flares

Chapter Notes

Sorry it took so long to update this! I had a little stint of writers block for a bit but I have bounced back from it! Please excuse any mistakes/errors/typos - I'll try and do another read-through after posting this to see if I missed anything after editing! Enjoy!

OC MASTERLIST

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Ninety-six.

Today was Adelyn Frost’s 96th birthday.

She hadn’t asked for anything – honestly, she just wanted to be left alone for her birthday at some old bar where no one would recognize her, and she could sit peacefully while having a cold beer. That’s all AJ wanted. And that was not what AJ got. She should have known better.

Tony was going all out for her birthday/valentines day party, inviting all the Avengers and some
former SHIELD agents that AJ had been close to before the fall of it. He also invited some of his favorite people; Pepper, Happy, and Rhodey. And AJ did not mind that because she adored all three of them. Bruce had been told he could invite a guest; Natasha was bringing Jordan as her date and Steve was flying in with Sam and Andrew (though, Andrew would have come either way seeing as it was his Aunt’s birthday.) Clint would be solo for the party, and Thor was bringing his girlfriend Jane Foster. The two had been reunited in November but Thor had to go back to Asgard after the Battle of Greenwich but had come back a week ago after Tony somehow got a message to Thor about AJ’s birthday.

Which was incredibly odd to her…what did Tony do? How did Thor get the message? And honestly – couldn’t Tony have called from him during the fall of SHIELD? A birthday party for a ninety-six-year-old was a bigger priority than protecting the world from Hydra? Okay.

But she was happy that Thor had decided to come back to Earth for her birthday because it would be nice to not be the oldest person in the room. And, of course, he wasn’t the worst company. And she did enjoy Jane Foster’s company, so that was a bonus.

The press would come (briefly) to snap pictures of the ‘Woman in Time’ on her big day. If it weren’t for Bucky being out there somewhere – she would have told Tony ‘no’ when he told her that the press had contacted him. But Bucky came to AJ’s mind. He was out there and maybe somehow, he’d see the pictures and it would trigger memories? She was willing to do just about anything to get him back but there was only so much she could do. Natasha had talked her out of dying her hair back to her natural shade of brown and wearing it in a 1940’s style fashion, ‘That’s a bit drastic, Adge.’ Natasha had said. But if AJ couldn’t be out there searching for Bucky with Steve, Sam and Andrew, she wanted to be able to help from home.

Tony and Bruce had her working harder than she had in years – not since Project Rebirth. AJ had forgotten just how much she loved science and working in the lab. AJ felt right at home in that lab coat with her hair kept up in a bun with her pencil while she was looking at her blood in a petri-dish under a microscope. They were comparing her blood to Bruce’s, Steve’s, Thor’s, and Clint’s to see the difference between all of them. AJ hadn’t wanted to use Steve’s blood, but Tony had spoken to him over the phone before he had left to look for Bucky and Steve gave him a sample. Right after they had compared his blood AJ had thrown out the vile.

“AJ, how could you do that? We need to do more testing!” Bruce said, slightly irritated with AJ for throwing out Steve’s blood without discussing it with them.

“There is no more testing needed.” AJ told him feeling overly protective of Steve. “We compared my blood to his and it was not a match to the serum – we don’t need it anymore.”

“-But with his blood there was a chance we could try and replicate-”

AJ stopped him, “Not happening, Bruce. It didn’t work in the 40’s when we studied Steve’s blood – it won’t happen now. I don’t care how much science and technology has changed. The only way we could ever create the serum again was with Erskine’s part of the project. And those notes died with him.” Talking about Dr. Erskine made her emotional, angry, a bitch. Because Hydra had killed him, and Hydra had taken Bucky and programmed him into the Winter Soldier and that made her furious, so her next words were out of anger and she still regretted them to this day, “-Having Steve’s blood is not going to cure your angry green alter ego. You really screwed that pooch on that doc, there’s no fixing it!”

Tony had made AJ leave the room upon seeing the flash of anger in Bruce’s eyes. But the scientist hadn’t Hulked out. Bruce had nearly complete control of the Big Guy so AJ hadn’t been too concerned. But Tony had become overly protective of her in his own Tony way and didn’t want to
bet on the chance that Bruce could control the Hulk from coming out and risk AJ getting hurt or worst.

After both AJ and Bruce had cooled off, AJ went back to the lab and apologized. AJ explained to him why she was so protective over Steve’s blood – about how her mentor had died because of the serum and how testing Steve’s blood was too risky. Bruce understood, and he apologized for getting upset with her over tossing the blood. ‘This is your project, AJ. Tony and I are just here to assist you whenever you need it. I’m sorry I overstepped. I guess I’ve been working alone for so long now that I forget what it means to work with a team – especially when I’m not in charge of that team.’

Banner’s blood was nowhere near a match to AJ’s, Clint’s had some similarities but that it was the parts of any ordinary human. Which meant that AJ was part human – but she had already known that. AJ was born and raised in New York and her family was as normal as any other family on the block.

Thor’s blood wasn’t a match either but that wasn’t the least bit surprising to AJ. He was a literal God. There was no way that AJ was part God, that never even crossed her mind and when Tony suggested using a sample of Thor’s blood she had laughed in his face. But Tony wanted to test every possible source of blood that was not human and compare them to AJ’s.

They had yet to figure out what she was and though they did spend time researching her blood still, they had moved on to a project that was more helpful, and incredibly successful.

Together, AJ, Tony, and Bruce came up with a wristband that the other Avengers could wear while out on the field during missions that would protect them from AJ’s powers. She had been absolutely terrified of testing the wristbands because she didn’t want to hurt any of her friends, but in the end, Tony convinced her to do it by promising that he’d wear his Iron Man suit to protect himself in case it didn’t work.

It had worked on the suit, it had worked on Bruce, Clint, and Natasha. They were just waiting to rest it on Thor and Steve.

The wristbands didn’t stop AJ’s powers. They just protected the person wearing them from feeling the affect of her powers. AJ could freeze an entire room and turn every object, humans included, into a block of ice but while wearing the wristbands, her friends would not feel any change. They’d be protected and that’s what was important to her. After they tested it on Thor and Steve, AJ would have some made for Sam Wilson, Rhodey, Pepper, Andrew, and Maria Hill, and Fury.

And now AJ had finally worked up the courage to ask Tony to make one for Bucky as well.

“Yeah, that’s not going to happen.” Tony said, denying her request as he fiddled with the first prototype for the wristband. He looked up at her and AJ had given him a stern look, folding her arms over her chest, not backing down. Tony huffed in irritation and shook his head, “Didn’t the guy try and kill you the last time you two had an encounter.”

“No, actually, the last time I saw Bucky he had saved Steve from drowning.” AJ reminded Tony. He turned his back on her by spinning in the chair to face his lab bench and continued working.

She hated that most of her friends only remembered the fact that Bucky had tried to kill Steve and AJ – not that he had saved Steve from drowning and that even while he was the Winter Soldier AJ was able to trigger him, and that Steve could as well!

Tony couldn’t look past the fact that Bucky had tried to kill her.
Sam didn’t understand why she and Steve were so desperate to get Bucky back either, but he was still willing to help them.

Natasha told AJ that it was too dangerous, but she understood why AJ couldn’t let go of him and that she would never be the one to stand in her way from getting Bucky back to who he truly was. Because Natasha knew just how much AJ still loved Bucky and that no amount of time would ever change that. But the red-headed assassin did worry and was incredibly vocal about it to AJ. Which meant Jordan worried about it as well.

Clint wanted AJ to be safe, but more than anything he wanted her to be happy.

Andrew was cautious when it came to the subject of Bucky. He didn’t give her his opinion about Bucky, but he did tell her that he just wanted her to be careful. And he was still willing to go with Steve and Sam in her place to search the world for Bucky.

Banner was hesitant after watching the footage that citizens had taken on the bridge in D.C of the Winter Soldier – but he told AJ that love was a powerful force and he understood why she couldn’t give up on Bucky.

Thor was mostly in Asgard and even before, the two of them didn’t really talk about Bucky – but Thor was her friend and AJ hoped that he would support her.

And Steve? Steve was searching the world for Bucky, wanting him back just as much as AJ did. She knew that Steve felt responsible for what happened with Bucky – that if he hadn’t called off the search and rescue that they might have been able to find him before Hydra got too deep in his head and erased who he was. AJ had begged Steve not to give up and though it had been so long ago, and the two friends were closer than ever, AJ believed that Steve could still hear the words she had spat out at him when he called off search and rescue.

“How can you give up?! Bucky would never give up on you! I will never forgive you for this!”

She had been angry, devastated, and so absolutely determined to get the man she loved with her whole heart back. And she had blamed Steve. But really, she blamed herself; AJ had begged Bucky not to go and he still had – maybe if she had told Howard to go solo to London she could have gone on the mission with the Howling Commandos and maybe…

It didn’t matter.

There was no changing the past.

“Bucky would never hurt me, Tony.” AJ told him.

“And what about the Winter Soldier?” Tony spun around in his chair to face AJ. “Hm?”

“Tony,” She sighed in frustration. “I don’t think he’s the Winter Soldier anymore.”

“Well, Adelyn, just because you think that he’s back to being your boyfriend that you loved from the 40’s and is no longer the Winter Soldier does not mean that I am going to automatically hand over one of these,” He held up his arm, pulling down his sleeves to show AJ his own wristband, “to him someday. Because if there is a chance that he still is the Winter Soldier and has one of these on, you can’t defend yourself. He could kill you and that’s something I’m not going to let happen.”

“Tony, I can take care of myself! I’ve been around a lot longer than you have!” Her voice raised.

“No, actually – you haven’t!” Tony yelled at her. “-Because you were only twenty-seven when my
Dad put you on ice. You may have been born in 1918 but you’ve been in that chamber for more than half of your life. Hell, I’ve had more experience on this earth than you have!” She opened her mouth to argue but he didn’t let her speak, “-You might technically be 96 today – but in reality, you are really only turning thirty-one. And I’m forty-four so that makes me older than you so stop arguing with your Elder.”

AJ tried her hardest not to smile but sometimes Tony reminded her so much of Howard it was hard not to. Her features did soften, though, and Tony took that opportunity to try and change the subject.

“-Now, I know that you probably aren’t up to date with some of the hottest trends,” Tony said, getting up from his seat and walked over to AJ, “-That’s why I had Romanoff and Pepper pick out your outfit for tonight.” He moved behind her, his hands going to the back of her shoulders and began to push her out of the lab.

“Tony, I’ve had four years to get accustomed to the new world – you act like I woke up yesterday.”

“Well, then why are you wearing flannel? Tony asked, pushing her throw the door and letting of once she was out of the lab. “-The nineties are done, Adelyn. Get with the times.” The door automatically closed, and AJ couldn’t help but laugh.

“This is your shirt!” She yelled through the glass doors, but Tony had already started blasting old rock music from the 60’s. Pepper had been the one to give her the long-sleeved men’s flannel shirt. It had been from Tony’s grunge phase (that’s what Pepper told her) during the nineties and since Tony was what Pepper called a ‘hoarder’ he kept all his old clothes. It was small enough to fit AJ and allow her to wear it comfortable over her tank-tops.

It wasn’t the first time she had seen someone wearing flannel and the only reason why she even took it from Pepper was because the leather jacket she always wore had caught on fire in the lab thanks to Banner. Thankfully AJ’s skin was always covered by her lab coat whenever Tony or Bruce would catch things on fire – but when she walked out of the lab that night, Pepper had gone up to her and gave her the flannel shirt.

‘It’s drafty in here and I know Tony likes to keep the lab coats in the lab, so I figured I’d bring you something, but you hadn’t unpacked your boxes yet and I didn’t feel comfortable going through everything to find you a jacket, so I just grabbed this.’

AJ had thanked Pepper and took the shirt. Even though she couldn’t technically feel when it was cold anymore. Cold temperature no longer affected AJ the way they might affect Tony or Pepper, but it was sweet of the woman to think of AJ.

“Oh, it’s no problem, Adelyn.”

Both Tony and Pepper called her by her actual name. It had been strange at first to hear someone refer to her as Adelyn, seeing as even back in the 40’s most people called her by her nickname or the nicknames they had given her; frosty. But it was somewhat comforting when they called her by her name. Thor called her by her name as well, but mostly because he was a true gentleman. Steve rarely called her Adelyn, he only ever called her Adelyn when he was trying to snap her out of something or when he was angry with her. Other than that, everyone else just called her AJ, Jay, or Adge (really that was only Clint, Natasha, and occasionally Maria and Jordan.)

The press referred to her as Adelyn Frost, too. After it came out that she was born in 1918 journalist had dug, and dug, and dug into her past. They even went as far back as her college years. The one thing that they hadn’t found (and AJ was incredibly thankful for that) was that AJ had helped
Erskine create the Super Soldier serum. The SSR and Howard had done a good job keeping her name out of all the documents to protect her.

AJ walked over to the elevator that Bruce was exiting out of, “Hey, Banner.” She greeted him as they walked past the other to leave and enter the elevator.

Bruce smiled, giving her a little wave. “Happy birthday, AJ.” He told her, using his hand to keep the elevator door open. “Did I hear Tony correctly when he said you’re ninety-six?”

“I know, right? I don’t look a day over 75.” She winked and Bruce chuckled, “Are you going to go help Tony with the wrist bands?” She asked.

“Yeah, we’re working on one that will expand when the Other Guy makes an appearance. I can’t just hope that I have time to slip the wristband off if something happened to trigger me...Or, the Other Guy.” Bruce said quietly as he pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

AJ smiled softly. It was hard to believe from just looking at Bruce that he could form into such a dangerous thing. He was so shy and clumsy and good – how was it possible that Bruce could turn into this giant green rage machine? (That’s what Tony called the Other Guy.) “How is your training going with Nat?”

Natasha was level headed, she was the first person to ever experience the Other Guy on the team, and she was slowly earning Hulk’s trust. Or maybe it was just Bruce? Either way, she calmed him. And that was very good. Bruce felt the most comfortable working with Natasha on ways to come back down to who he truly was after a battle. To go from the Hulk to Bruce was very difficult for the scientist. But Natasha was helping make that process easier for him. Jordan had helped Nat, teaching her something she learned while studying psychology and hypnosis. Everyone on the team knew the words to say – but it was the easiest for Bruce with Natasha.

The words; ‘Hey big guy, the sun’s getting real low’ followed by the person trying to calm Hulk down raising their hand up. When or if Hulk mimicked the gesture, the person would move their hand down, palm up for Hulk to place the back of his hand in. After he would do that, the person would slowly remove their hand out from under his and gently tap his wrist where there was a pressure point, sliding their hand down his until they were no longer touching.

AJ didn’t know how it was possible that Bruce was able to come out because of that, but each time Natasha did it, it worked. Maybe it was because of their bond? The point was; it worked.

“Have you talked to Betty at all?” AJ asked.

Bruce chuckled, clearly uncomfortable by AJ’s question. He shook his head while rubbing at his jaw, “No. I...I don’t want her in danger.”

“Understandable.”

Betty Ross. The love of Bruce Banner’s life. The one he had run from in order to protect her. The woman AJ knew Bruce must miss terribly.

“But...” AJ said causing Bruce to chuckle again, probably knowing she was going to put her two cents in, AJ shook her head, looking down at her hands. “I miss Bucky every day and...I would give anything to just...hear his voice...hear him say my name even if that’s all he said.” She admitted, looking back up at Bruce now, “Even if you want to protect Betty – if you think she’s safer by you staying away – it’s not going to make her stop missing you. It’s not going to stop her from waiting for the day you do reach out.” Bruce frowned, knowing that she wasn’t just talking...
about Betty. “-So,” She said with a little laugh to try and lighten the mood, “-take some advice from someone who is still waiting for the love of their life to reach out...don’t waste time.” AJ told Bruce, “Reach out. Even if it’s just a five-minute phone call...even if you only say her name. You are staying away because you don’t want to hurt her, but by you staying away, it is hurting her. Not physically,” AJ told him, she grabbed his hand and pressed it against his chest right above his heat, “But in here.”

He nodded his head, squeezing her hand slightly. “Thanks, Jay.”

She smiled, letting go of his hand, “Now, to repay me for my words of wisdom – I need you to try and convince Tony to make another wristband for Bucky. Because the day that he does reach out, I want him to have one so there’s never a chance that I could hurt him.”

“I will.” Bruce said, dropping his hand from the elevator door so it could shut. AJ waved goodbye just as the elevator door closed.

“JARVIS?” AJ called out for the AI.

“Yes, Ms. Frost?”

“ETA for Captain Rogers?”

“Captain Rogers should be arriving on the quinjet within twenty-minutes, Ms. Frost.”

“Thank you, JARVIS?”

“Is there something I can assist you any further?”

“No, thank you, JARVIS. Just alert me when Captain Rogers arrives.”

“Will do, Ms. Frost.”

AJ was so excited to see Steve, Andrew, and Sam. They had spoke on the phone of course, but she missed them all terribly. Especially Steve. They had been through so much together and the fact that she wasn’t with him trying to help find Bucky was killing her.

“JARVIS?” AJ said again.

“Yes, Ms. Frost.”

“I think I’d like to start up Project Visio again.”

“Of course, Ms. Frost. Would you like me to include Mr. Stark or Captain Rogers?”

“No, JARVIS. This is just going to stay between me and you again, okay?”

“Of course, Ms. Frost.”

Project Visio was something AJ had been working on during her downtime. It was a lot like SHIELD’s facial recognition system – but since most things SHIELD had been scrapped, a lot of their devices had been destroyed and AJ couldn’t use the facial recognition system they had used to locate Loki in 2012. This one was different, mostly because the only person who had access to it, and ever would have access to it, was AJ and it could only follow her commands. Her voice, her fingerprint, her pass-code, her second pass-code, a third one for good measure. It was un-hackable (so far, but then again, nobody knew about Project Visio).
She had gotten one hit.

Project Visio had managed to find Bucky when he visited the Captain America exhibit. AJ watched as he grabbed his dog tags and the note she had left him. He had shoved the piece of paper in his coat pocket and left the Smithsonian. The security footage outside showed him standing across the building gripping tightly to his dog tags. He stood there for three minutes without looking away from his dog tags and then finally, he put them on and tucked them under his shirt.

But then he disappeared. And that was the last time AJ had been able to get a facial recognition.

It left her gutted and after a few days of nothing – AJ had decided to give up on Project Visio.

But she was tired of sitting around and doing nothing but have her pictures taken in the hopes that Bucky might see them. AJ needed to help find him. She needed to bring him back.

He could remember the way her hair felt between his fingers, the way her lips felt so soft against his, and the way her skin always smelt of vanilla with the slightest hint of citrus mixed together. Bucky remembered that her voice was always the raspiest in the morning or when she had drunk too much of Howard bourbon. He remembered her striking green eyes and the mole on her right cheek. He remembered how her dark hair had always perfectly held together in curls even while they were in a war zone, or the way her SSR Uniform hugged her body and the way the fabric felt against his finger tips when they’d sneak away. And oh, he remembered those red painted lips that would smear against his own causing her to laugh, how her thumb would gently brush against his lips to try and wipe the lipstick off so that no one would know what had just happened. He remembered the way her lips were bright red and swollen afterwards and she would hurry off with her hand covered her mouth slightly to fix it and he chuckle while watching her scurry off and how his heart would swell at the mere sight of her.

*Adelyn Frost.* The first woman he had ever loved.

Things were still hazy, memories felt more likes dreams and each night he’d wake up trying to figure out which were real. Bucky had a small notebook that he could write everything he was starting to remember down in and then study later on.
He knew that he was Bucky, *not the Winter Soldier*, but James Buchanan Barnes. He was childhood friends with Captain America; Steve Rogers. He remembered Steve as small and large. Bucky knew that Steve was his best friend, *I'm with ya till the end of the line, pal.*

Bucky knew that he loved AJ Frost, he knew that he missed her, but he also knew that he had to stay away.

He needed to stay away from both AJ and Steve. It was for their own protection.

Bucky may be away from Hydra, but he was still not in control of his own mind. He needed to keep running, always on the move, not staying in one place for too long. It was too dangerous. He kept to the shadows and avoiding all things technology. He hid his metal arm with coats and kept his hands hidden with gloves. That was going to be incredibly uncomfortable during the warmer days that were coming up. It was only February, so he could continue wearing the coats and gloves and hats – but people might look at him oddly during the summer and he didn’t want anyone looking at him. He needed to be a ghost. *That’s what they called him.* A ghost because of how he would reappear every couple of decades whenever Hydra needed him.

A ghost.

Unnoticeable.

And now; free.

Bucky took the glove off his flesh hand and pressed it flat against the tree he was standing in front of. It was dangerous to come to this place – but this was the place where it all began. His finger traced the letters he had carved into the tree in 1943. *It had been cold back then, too.*

It had been a secret he never told her – it was something he continued to do while they were together. But it was a secret just for him to know and one day when the war was over; he’d take her to this tree and all the others that he had carved into and she’d know just how long he had loved her.

*Bucky + Frosty*

His fingers traced over the letters of the nickname he used to call her. Bucky could have written *Adelyn*, or *AJ*, but Frosty meant something more. It was something only *he* could call her. Bucky remembered how annoyed she used to get when he first started to call her Frosty and then over time how her eyes would light up when he would call her by that name.

Bucky couldn’t help but wonder what her eyes might look like if he were to say that name now. *Frosty.*

*His Frosty.*

He closed his eyes, fingers still tracing against the carving.

It was Valentines Day.

But it wasn’t just Valentine’s Day.

This day had become something so much more important to him. It was so important that Hydra refused to wake him on or near this date knowing that it somehow, even through all the decades, and wipes, and stays in the cryo-chamber this date still triggered him.
Bucky’s eyes opened and looked at the words.

“Happy birthday, Frosty.” He said quietly.

Bucky took his hand off the tree and pulled on his glove.

*It was too risky to be here.*

But he needed to be close to her on her birthday.

Camp McCoy had been a big part of their relationship. *Friendship.* AJ had made it incredibly clear that they could be nothing more than friends at Camp McCoy. But sometimes he would catch her watching him as he ran drills with the rest of the camp and wonder if maybe she saw him in the way he saw her.

But the first time he saw her truly look at him the way he always dreamt of her looking at him was after he had been taken by Hydra and AJ and Steve had come to save him. He had fought for so long to keep going, to survive, to get back to her so he could see her again. And when those green eyes locked with his, he had thought he was dreaming, or that he had finally died and she was his heaven.

Her green eyes were filled with concern, and happiness, and relief, and just the slightest hint of love. Her eyes were like a green flare in the night letting him know that she was with him, that she was *there,* and that he was safe now. All the men he had lost, all the pain Zola had put him through…none of that mattered because her eyes were like a million flares lit up in the sky letting him know that he was no longer alone.

Bucky would give anything to look into her green eyes again but he knew it wasn’t safe.

He couldn’t be with her.

He needed to protect her from Hydra…and from himself.

Bucky was leaving the States for good and this trip to Camp McCoy was his goodbye. Their names were still carved into the tree even after seventy-one years…that had to mean something.
The room was loud and full of laughter as AJ opened up her presents that the team had given her. Thor, had given her a lovely necklace that had belonged to his mother. A gift Thor had told AJ had once been given to Frigga from Loki when he was a boy. She didn’t especially love the fact that the gift had been a gift from Loki to his mother as a boy, seeing as the man he grew up into had been an absolutely psychotic lunatic – but Thor was still feeling the loss of his death and AJ wasn’t going to turn the gift away. And it was incredibly thoughtful for Thor to give AJ something that belonged to his mother. She knew how important the woman had been to Thor.

Privately, Bruce gave her a wrist band for Bucky that he had swiped from Tony and personally worked on. AJ had hugged him tightly, thanking him over and over again telling him just how much it meant to her and he had awkwardly hugged her back while laughing. It meant the world to her that Bucky would be protected from her powers – she was just waiting for the day Steve found him so she could give it to him personally. If he ever finds Bucky.

“Okay, my turn!” Natasha said, pushing past Sam to grab her presents for AJ off the table. AJ laughed as Sam scoffed dramatically that the redhead had took his turn.

“It’s okay, Sam – you can be after Natasha.” AJ said to Sam with a smile and the man looked around at the crowded of their friends.

“You all hear that? I’m next.”

Sam had already had quite a few drinks tonight.

Opening presents in front of people had always been mortifying for AJ, even as a child with just her family. She would look up and see all their eager faces just waiting for her reaction and she knew that if she didn’t give the right one that she would disappoint them. Birthdays had been incredibly stressful for AJ. Until Bucky.

She took the presents from Natasha, one a medium sized long box wrapped in silver wrapping paper and a red ribbon, and the other was a medium sized box wrapped in red paper and a silver box. AJ was surprised Natasha hadn’t gone with red and black wrapping, seeing as she was Black Widow after all. But she had a hunch that Jordan told her not to do it. AJ opened the smaller box first and grinned happily when she saw what it was. “How?”

“I may have swiped a few of the weapons before SHIELD fell.” Natasha said with an innocent shrug.

“What is that?” Steve asked.

“Yes?” Andrew moved so he was in front of AJ, looking at what she held in her hands now. “Oh my God – I was never allowed clearance to use one of these but I wanted one so bad!”

AJ laughed, looking down at the object in her hand.

It was called the Thunderstick. A weapon that SHIELD used that would release a wave of sonic energy that would incapacitate their enemies.

“It was one of my favorite weapons to use when I first started out at SHIELD.” AJ told Steve who sat next to her, looking the object.
“-She damn near leveled a warehouse in Croatia. She was such a rookie.” Clint said loudly and everyone in the room laughed. AJ playfully stuck out her tongue at Clint and then carefully set the Thunderstick back into the box and moved to open Natasha’s other gift.

It was a brand new black leather jacket. She chuckled, taking it out of the box. “-Stark said that you’re other one got destroyed.” Natasha told AJ, “-And that you have been wearing flannel ever since.”

“It was your flannel shirt, Tony!” AJ yelled with a laugh, looking at Howard Stark's son who continued to sip his scotch, waving his hand in the air to change the subject. She playfully narrowed her eyes at him and grabbed the present Sam was holding out for her.

AJ pressed her hand over her heart and gasped while smiling, “My very own action figure?!” She laughed, looking at the packaged toy that Sam had given her.

“You’re pretty freakin’ popular is Canada, Jay.” Sam chuckled, “You’re their favorite avenger.”

AJ had to laugh at that. Mostly because she didn’t really consider herself an Avenger. She was a helping hand at most, in her opinion. But with all the information on her now out – she had grown increasingly popular in the last few weeks.

“Thank you, Sam.”

“Okay, move aside amateurs.” Tony said, snapping his fingers for Happy to bring in a black garment bag. AJ couldn’t help but chuckle as Happy tried to make his way through the group of Avengers. She stood up and unzipped the garment bag. “Alright, Adelyn, I see you eyeing our outfits all the time.” Tony said once the bag was unzipped and an outfit was revealed. “-So, I had this designed especially for you.” Tony told her, “-It can withstand extreme cold, your cold.” Tony stressed and AJ smiled. “Now, I thought a whole-body suit might be a bit much,”

“-Liar!” Pepper laughed, walking forward. “-I told him not to do the body suit – you have me to thank for that!” AJ ginned at Pepper.

“Whatever,” Tony said, “-Right here,” he pointed to the waist of the outfit, “-is your special utility belt that has an attached thigh holster for all your gadgets including that weird police baton thing Natasha got you.”

AJ chuckled and walked up to Tony, “Thanks, buddy.” She hugged him. It surprised him; the hug. His body went stiff for a moment but soon relaxed and he hugged her back. “I love it.” She said as she pulled away from him.

“Yeah, good.” He cleared his throat and looked to Pepper who was smiling at him softly, “Anyway – next present?” Tony said, taking the attention off of him.

Maria was next, her gift was something she owed AJ. A bottle of whiskey. Buchanan’s Whiskey.

Clint had gotten her a new record player since hers had been damaged in the explosion in her D.C apartment along with some of her favorite albums from growing up.

Steve and Andrew said that they both wanted to give AJ her presents privately. Tony didn’t like that – he really just wanted to know what Steve got her and that’s the reason he put up a fuss about it. But Pepper pressed a kiss to his cheek and whispered something in his ear and Tony announced to the party that he was retiring for the night. They all laughed and soon after that, everyone started to clear out.
Natasha, Jordan, Bruce, Steve, and Thor were all still at the Tower. Clint had left early to get home before it got too late, and Maria had a flight to catch to London with Jane.

“Hey, Jay,” Bruce said when AJ was refilling her drink. She turned around and saw that Bruce was not alone. Standing next to him was a very tall, very muscular man with brown skin and tribal tattoos on his chest (which was barely covered by a dress shirt that he had buttoned down extremely low). His hair was in something Clint once called a ‘man-bun’ and a scar on his eyebrow. “This is my former colleague I was telling you about; Dr. Kai Palani.”

“This is Kai?” AJ laughed in a bit of disbelief. “The biochemist. You’re joking right?” Bruce shook his head ‘no’ and AJ laughed even harder, “I’m sorry, but you look nothing like any biochemist I’ve ever worked with!”

The tall muscular man named Kai raised his scarred eyebrow up at her, “And you don’t look ninety-six. But you don’t see me laughing.”

AJ made a face, feeling incredibly guilty now. She had a few too many drinks than she had planned on having tonight. “I just…you look like you are more…Thor,” She motioned to the Asgardian Prince. “And not so much…”

“Me?” Bruce said and when AJ looked over at him, ready to apologize, he chuckled. “It’s okay, Jay. I was skeptical of him, too, when he first walked into the lab.”

Bruce hadn’t told AJ much about Kai. Just that he was a biochemist that he had met while working at Culver University, Kai Palani and Betty Ross had worked together to try and recreate the Super Soldier Serum using the notes Dr. Erskine had left behind (which were actually her notes, since Abraham had kept all the information he gathered in the one place no one would ever be able to steal them: his mind.) and ultimately created the Hulk after a combination of the serum they had created and far too much gamma radiation.

AJ still felt guilty every time she watched Bruce struggle with trying to control his anger so that Hulk wouldn’t come out.

“I’m sorry, Dr. Palani.” AJ apologized, extending her hand for him to shake. He did and smiled. “It’s nice to meet you, Bruce has told me a lot about you.”

Kai laughed, dropping AJ’s hand and nudged Bruce, “Hopefully nothing too bad! But if he did, I got a few stories about him, too.” He then reached into his pocket, “Oh, uh, I got you something.” Kai handed AJ something she had not expected. “Happy birthday.”

“Um,” AJ looked up at him with a raise of her brows. “…Blood?”

“Blood sample.” Kai explained. “Bruce mentioned you are studying a rare type of blood and the blood samples you’ve tried to match it with weren’t successful.”

Her eyes darted to Bruce, shocked that he’d share such sensitive information with someone not in the inner circle. “Hear him out.” Bruce told AJ. She took in a deep breath before looking back at Kai.

“This blood sample was one I took from a guy I met in Cuba last year.”

“And you’ve just been carrying around his blood sample waiting for the right moment to give to someone as a birthday gift?” AJ said, her tone snarky.

But Kai laughed, “No, I kept it locked away in one of my labs.” He told her, “But I think that if
you compared it to the sample Bruce told me about – you’d see that they are similar, if not the identical.”

She opened and closed her mouth, not knowing what to say, “–Who…how…the sample, who does it belong to?”

“Josh Hendrix. He was…unique.” Kai worded it carefully.

“Do you have any idea why his blood was different?”

He shook his head, “Never told me.”

“Is there a way I, or, Bruce could reach him?” AJ asked Kai.

“-Afraid not. He died.”

AJ looked down at the ground, feeling defeated. “Do you mind me asking how he died?”

Kai frowned, “Killed.”

“Hydra.” Bruce told her. But the look in his eyes and the tone of his voice told AJ that it wasn’t just Hydra. She closed her eyes and licked at her lower lip. *The Winter Soldier.*

“I’m sorry for your loss.” AJ apologized, truly meaning it.

“Thanks,” Kai smiled. “Anyway, uh – I’d love to be a part of the project you’re working on with Banner.”

AJ looked to Bruce who raised his brows, eyes hopeful, she chuckled and looked back to Kai, “Well, I’d love to have you on board.” Her eyes then went back to Bruce, “But you, are going to be the one to try and convince Tony to let him on board.”

“I was afraid you were going to say that,” Banner chuckled.

AJ told Kai that it was nice to meet him again and that she hoped to work with him soon, to which he said the same. He and Banner left, as well as Jordan and Natasha. Andrew gave AJ her present when it was only him, Sam, Thor, and Steve left with AJ. Andrew and Sam were headed out by Andrew wanted to make sure that AJ got his present before he left.

Thor left, leaving only AJ and Steve at the top of the Tower. AJ wanted to speak with Steve privately about Bucky and Howard – but she didn’t feel right having that talk while in the Tower.

“Happy birthday,” Steve said once Thor was gone, hanging AJ a leather-bound sketch book. She smiled, AJ always loved Steve’s drawings. When they first started hanging out after Bucky left for Camp McCoy, Steve would always come over with a new drawing he had done the night before. The first one he had ever drawn her was a beautifully detailed snowflake. She opened the book and inhaled sharply, eyes filled with tears as she looked down at the drawing. “I uh,” Steve cleared his throat but AJ kept her eyes on the drawing, “Zurich,” Steve told her, “I uh, I was taking a walk around base on Christmas and I saw you and Bucky walking, too. It was before you guys told me about you two.”

It was a picture of Bucky hugging her, a big grin on his face, eyes closed tightly as his arms wrapped around her middle. Her feet were up in the air, mid spin while her hair was covered in snowflakes, her arms wrapped around Bucky’s shoulders. Her face wasn’t shown, but AJ could still remember exactly how she felt in that moment.
She flipped to the next page, a drawing of her and Bucky the night of Howard’s expo. The fireworks that had gone off that night were drawn above them. This time the drawing only showed AJ’s features. It showed Bucky’s back, his regulated army hat on top of his head as he stood a bit away from AJ while she raised her hand in a little wave.

The next was a drawing of AJ and Bucky laughing. She was sitting on the table in the lab, her head was thrown back as she laughed at Bucky who was hunched over a bit laughing too, the crinkles in the corners of his eyes were deep and his open-mouthed grin made AJ give into a shaky breath.

“You guys never did tell me what was so funny.” Steve said with a little chuckle, standing in front of AJ and looking down at the drawing.

AJ smiled and looked up to Steve, “Uh,” she chuckled, “I had surprised Bucky by making an extremely dirty innuendo,” She confessed, “-You see, what you didn’t draw was the mess he made when he had knocked over a bunch of Howard’s beakers and they spilled all over a bunch of my notes. The look in his eyes after I made that innuendo, I had never seen anything funnier,” AJ chuckled, “-And then the look in his eyes after he had knocked everything over was just… priceless. I kept laughing about it throughout the rest of the day.”

“-Innuendos?” Tony said, walking into the room, “I hope for good ol’ Cap’s sake that they are not dirty.”

Steve rolled his eyes at Tony’s words and watched as AJ carefully closed the sketchbook. She looked up at him and whispered her thanks, “I’ll look at the rest later.” She told him quietly.

“What’s this?” Tony asked, moving to pick up the shoe box sized gift. “Did you forget to open one?” He asked, walking over to her and Steve, handing over the box.

“That’s from Andrew, he had to leave.” AJ told Tony as she took the box from him. She moved over to the large couch and sat down, opening the gift. Steve and Tony took a seat on either side of her. It was almost as if they both knew what the gift was. She tore off the wrapping and opened the top of the box and inside was a bunch of pictures. AJ grabbed the first one, extremely old but kept in great shape, it was a picture of AJ and all of her brothers.

“Wow,” AJ whispered, her voice shaking. Steve moved his hand to her leg, giving it a little squeeze, encouraging her to look through more of them. The next picture she had to quickly cover her mouth when she began to laugh loudly. “Oh my God,” she said, words muffled by her hand. “Oh, Henry.” She continued to laugh.

“Andrew said that it was his Graduation picture.”

Somehow, even aged, Henry still looked like her baby-faced little brother. His smile was wide and unfortunately his eyes were closed in the professional shot picture.

“Very photogenic.” Tony said with a snort.

There were pictures of her and her brothers growing up in New York, of Sam and Eileen’s children, Dougie, Lauren, and Juliet as they grew up throughout the years. There were pictures from Henry’s wedding to Andrew’s mother; Margaret and baby pictures of Andrew and Brian with Henry.

Her baby brother so grown up, so handsome, so in his element as a father. She saw the way he looked down at his twin boys with such pride and joy and AJ couldn’t even imagine what it must have felt like. Andrew told AJ that Henry had been an amazing father – AJ would have never doubted that.
There were more family pictures, even a few baby pictures of AJ that had Tony laughing hysterically, threatening to steal them and upload them to the internet.

The very last picture was one that finally caused AJ to break down into tears.

It was a picture of her mother and father at her college graduation.

“Is that Ma and Pa Frost?” Tony asked, seeing the tears roll down her cheeks. She nodded her head as she looked down at the picture in her hand. “I see where you got your looks,” Tony said causing AJ to let out a laugh, “-Your mom was a fox.”

“Shut up, Tony.” She sniffled, wiping away her tears.

“Bucky was terrified of your Dad.” Steve said causing AJ to quickly turn her head to look over at Steve.

“What?” She said in disbelief, “-He never even met my Dad!”

Steve frowned, “Bucky, he uh,” He shook his head as if he were debating on telling her what he was keeping in, “-He had been working on a letter to your Dad.”

AJ blinked in surprise. “He what?”

“On the way to the Alps…he started writing your Dad a letter.”

“Why?” AJ asked in confusion. Steve gave her a look; come on, Jay. You know why. Her eyes went wide in shock. “He was asking his permission?”

Steve nodded his head.

And the tears came back and they were overwhelming and felt like they were never-ending and she must have looked like a complete mess sitting between Tony and Steve, hunched over fighting back loud sobs. And then she felt Steve move his arms around her middle, resting his head against the back of her shoulder as she cried. Tony pressed his hand to hers and AJ grabbed onto it, gripping onto it tightly as she held onto the two of them as if they were her only lifelines.

“I would have said yes.” AJ said, sniffling and trying to catch her breath as she tried to calm herself down.

“I know.” Steve whispered. Tony squeezed her hand and AJ felt incredibly embarrassed.

“God, I am so sorry.” AJ pulled away from the both of them, wiping away her tears and moving her hands under her eyes to wipe away her messed up makeup. “-Tony, you did such a good job with the party – I’m sorry I’m ending it on this note.” AJ stood up, sniffling again and straightening her dress.

“Hey, don’t worry about it.” Tony told her, “You know the song; it’s your party, Adelyn, you can cry if you want to.”

She nodded, grabbing the box of pictures as well as the sketch book that Steve had given her. The two men stood up and AJ smiled at them both. “Thank you.”

Steve nodded, moving forward and pressed a kiss to her cheek, “Happy birthday, Jay.”

Tony was next, pressing a quick kiss to her forehead, “Don’t stay up too late, Adelyn. We have work in the morning.” He told her causing AJ to chuckle.
AJ took the elevator to the floor where her bedroom was on and walked until she was at her bedroom door. She entered the room and set the box of pictures down on her dresser and brought the sketchbook to her bed. AJ slipped out of her heals and climbed into the bed, flipping through the pages of the sketchbook Steve had given her. There must have been at least forty pictures Steve had drawn from memory.

The sound of a large boom went off and her room lit up in a light green. AJ sat up a bit, looking out her window and saw fireworks going off in the sky. AJ crawled out of bed, setting the sketchbook down on her nightstand and walked over to her window to watch the fireworks.

The sky filled with color, reds, and greens, and purples and pinks. There was one that caught her eye though, it didn’t explode in the sky like all of the others did; it was just a long stream of green light.

Almost as if it were a flare.

It made her think of Bucky for some reason.

Chapter End Notes

One more chapter left, guys! Are you excited? Scared? Relieved? Sad? Hit me up with some feedback and what you would like to see in the next installation of the AJ Frost Series! Kudos and comments are always appreciated.
YOU GUYS. THIS IS THE LAST CHAPTER OF THIS STORY! But fret not! I'm working on the next story [part 3 of the AJ Frost Series] which will center around Age of Ultron and CIVIL WAR. Lots and lots and LOTS of AJ/Bucky goodness coming up! I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter and story! [I apologize for any errors/typos/mistakes, I'll do another read-through again once it's posted!]

OC MASTERLIST

See the end of the chapter for more notes
“You’re not coming, are you?” Steve asked as walked into AJ’s personal bedroom in the Avengers Tower. She had her suitcase out and open, but there was nothing inside of it. Instead, she was sitting on her bed looking at the pictures Steve had drawn for her as her birthday present. AJ looked up from the book and over at Steve who stood near the door. She licked at her lower lip and shut the book.

“Steve,” She said his name softly, “I,” AJ closed her eyes, as if she were trying to work up the
courage to say something to him that she knew he didn’t want to hear. “There’s still so much work that needs to be done here and we still haven’t found out why I’m not healing properly.”

He frowned, “But we know how to help you heal.”

“An ice bath is a band aid at best, Steve. You know that.” She was right. But Steve couldn’t help but think AJ was just using it as an excuse to not leave New York to go find Bucky.

They had gotten a lead from a Hydra informant telling them that from their intel, they believed that Bucky left the country and was now in Central America in a small town on the coast. Steve, Sam, Andrew and AJ had all been ready to leave last night, agreeing to meet at 6 AM the next morning on the roof. But it was 6:30 AM and he was standing in AJ’s room where her bags were unpacked.

“I’m vulnerable to an attack, Steve. And we can’t carry a tub full of ice wherever I go.” She started to say but Steve stopped her.

“Are you afraid of being vulnerable to an attack or are you afraid of being vulnerable about Bucky again?” She narrowed her eyes at him in frustration and he sighed, “Or are you just afraid of him?”

“No!” She now glared, “How can you – how could you even think that?!” AJ raised her voice. His waist band began to beep, letting him know that the temperature was dropping. He looked at AJ and raised his brows. She closed her eyes, trying to take in deep, calming breaths. “I’m not afraid of Bucky, Steve. I love him. I always will.”

“So, what’s stopping you?” Steve questioned her, “-Why aren’t you on the quinjet right now with us to go find Bucky?”

AJ looked up at the ceiling, blowing out air from her nose. “Steve…” She looked back at him, “He doesn’t want to be found.”

“It’s only been a month,” He argued.

“I know. I also know Bucky.” AJ said back, “He doesn’t want to be found – that’s why we haven’t been able to find him. He’s… a ghost. You know that. He’s spent decades learning from Hydra how to disappear and if he doesn’t want to be found – we’re not going to find him.”

He knew she was right. But he had given up on finding Bucky once – he refused to do it again.

“-Until he wants to be found… I’m not going to search for him or follow leads and get my hopes up or have my heart break each day that goes by and we haven’t found him.” AJ told Steve. “-I love Bucky with every part of me, Steve – but I can’t handle another heartbreak. I’m barely holding it together now.”

Steve understood. “Can I keep you updated?”

AJ smiled, getting off her bed and walking over to where Steve stood. “Of course, Steve.”

He moved forward and pulled her into his arms, his arms wrapping around her body in a warm hug. Steve didn’t like that he was leaving her again, that they’d be separated and he wouldn’t be able to keep a close eye on her. But Steve knew that Tony would never let anything bad happen AJ. If there was one person he trusted AJ with more than himself, it was Tony.

The two had formed a close friendship which had surprised Steve. Tony wasn’t exactly the biggest fan of his father and AJ had loved Howard like a brother, she had adored the man and the friendship they had. But Tony had described his father as cold and unloving. And Steve knew that
it broke AJ’s heart to hear that because the Howard she knew wouldn’t have behaved that way.

But the Howard that they both knew had lost AJ, someone he had considered a little sister. He had lost Bucky, his good friend, and Steve, as well. Howard had gone through so much pain and heartbreak that would cause any man to become a cynic and close himself off to protect his own heart. That didn’t mean Steve condoned the way Howard had raised his son.

He felt guilt creep in his chest at the thought of how Tony had lost Howard – how Hydra had sent Bucky to kill a man who was once a friend. Did AJ know? Steve pulled away from AJ and looked down at her.

“Jay…there’s something I have to tell you.”

“AJ, Mr. Stark requires your assistance in the lab.” Jarvis said over the comm system in AJ’s room.

“When you get back?” AJ asked Steve.

He nodded, “Okay.”

AJ walked over to her bedroom door but stopped, looking back at Steve, “Do me a favor and look out for Andrew? He can be really impulsive sometimes.”


AJ smiled at him, though he could see the guilt and sadness in her eyes that she wasn’t going with him. But Steve understood. He waited to leave her room until he knew she was gone. Steve took the elevator up to the roof and met up with Sam and Andrew.

“Where’s AJ?” Andrew asked, seeing that Steve was alone.

“She’s staying.” Steve said, walking past Sam and Andrew into the quinjet. They followed after him but didn’t speak. “Sam, you’re piloting again.” He told his friend.

“No problem.” Sam said, walking to the cockpit and got into the pilot’s seat.

They took off and Steve watched as the Avengers Tower slowly became a became a dot in his vision.

“She’ll be alright, man.” Sam said, causing Steve to look over his shoulder to the cockpit where Sam and Andrew were seated.

Steve sighed, looking again at the disappearing city. “I hope so.”
It had been a little over a month since Steve, Andrew and Sam left for Central America. AJ missed them all terribly, but more than anything – she missed Bucky. Knowing that he was alive was torture. Because AJ had to learn how to mourn Bucky, to live without him because she believed he had died. But now she was living without him knowing that he was alive. So, she buried herself in her work with Tony, Banner, and Palani.

Tony, Bruce, and Kai were on the verge of figuring out how to fix AJ’s healing problem when it came to using her powers. When they had explained the situation to Kai, he suggested they test her blood for each toxin that didn’t belong in her system. It meant that AJ would have to go under for surgery. Dr. Helen Cho and Dr. Jordan Connor was brought in to perform the surgery, taking a small piece off of her kidneys so that they could compare it to an ordinary person’s kidney.

Steve had been furious when Tony told him about the surgery, but in the end, it was AJ’s decision. No one had a say in it other than AJ – she didn’t care if it were dangerous; she wanted answers. And the longer it took to try and get her ability to quickly heal after being injured – the longer she was in danger.

After the surgery, Cho, Connor, Banner, and Palani all studied the small piece of kidney that had been taken from AJ. It had been Kai who found the toxin in her system that was different from the ordinary kidney. The group, including Tony, and excluding AJ, began to create a device that would single out the toxin and take it out of her system, cleansing the blood. Normally, they would have tried to work with her kidney to get the toxins out – but Tony was sure that he could eliminate the single group of toxins that were not allowing AJ to heal. And she trusted him.

While they all worked; AJ was stuck in the lab alone to study the blood sample Kai had given them and compare them to other research done all over the world. But even Hydra had scrapped all of their information. AJ had thought that by going through Dr. Reinhardt’s old studies and notes that Hydra kept that she might discover what she was. But she found nothing. And after SHIELD captured the mad doctor, he hadn’t told them much about his experiments or why he had experimented on humans. He had talked about the object; the Obelisk. But he only gave the name, which AJ was already aware of.

So, she focused on studying the blood incase she missed something. Kai had joined her today, saying he was exhausted from Tony’s work schedule and needed a break from the pop culture references. AJ chuckled and agreed to let Kai work with her on the blood samples.

“How’s it lookin?” Kai asked AJ, her concentration still on the blood sample on her slate under the microscope. She pursed her lips. It was different.

AJ had already compared her blood to the blood Kai had given to her the day that Steve had left for Central America and saw that they were nearly identical. But this blood sample? Yes, they were still identical – but compared to the one she first studied (the one Kai was claiming was the same blood sample), this sample was fresh.

The blood she had first studied, it had been clear to see that it was a few months old, but this one? It
was brand new. It was a fresh sample, not something that had been stored away. Which meant that Kai’s story about the person he had gotten the blood sample from being killed by Hydra was a lie. Because AJ knew damn well that The Winter Soldier had been on the run for the last three months.

The biochemist moved away from the microscope and looked to Kai. “Was this a test?” She asked him, eyebrow raised up at him in suspicion.

“Hu?” He played dumb.

“I may have only just got back into the swing of biochemistry, but it was kinda my thing in the 40’s.” AJ said, holding out her hand in front of her and a gust of frost began to leave her fingers, not strong enough to hurt Kai, but it was more for dramatic flair. A way for him to know that she was on to him and that he better tell her when and where he got the blood sample from or else he would be a popsicle in the next 60 seconds. “I know the difference between a fresh blood sample and one that has been stored away. Where’d you get the blood?”

He audibly gulped when AJ cocked her head to the side, her hand now up, waiting for him to answer her question. “I,” Kai closed his mouth and then sighed, “So, the sample isn’t as old as I let on.”

“I’d say it’s about a week old. So, I know that your story about Hydra killing your buddy is complete bullshit. How about you tell me the truth, Kai, before I tell JARVIS to send one of the Iron Legions to come throw your ass out of the building.”

The large man sighed and rubbed at his neck roughly. “-Yeah, it’s a week old.”

“So, your friend is alive?”

“No.”

AJ narrowed her eyes at him in a glare, “Don’t bullshit me, Palani. I know damn well that who you said Hydra had sent to kill your friend couldn’t have possibly killed him last week.” She spat out. “I want the truth.”

“The Winter Soldier did kill my buddy Josh, just…not last week. He killed him a few years ago while we were studying in Cuba.” He admitted, “But…the blood sample isn’t his.”

“Who’s is it?”

He waited a moment before answering, “Mine.” Kai said, just barely above a whisper.

“Yours?”

He nodded.

AJ shook her head, not believing him. “Prove it.” She demanded.

Kai sighed and walked over to the large fridge where they stored the blood samples and bent down, lifting it up as if it weighed nothing at all. AJ walked forward and with wide eyes, she saw that Kai was only holding it up with one finger. “The mist made me…stronger.”

What? “-But Bruce,”

He rolled his eyes, probably knowing that AJ was remembering the comment Bruce had made about how he had been skeptical about Kai being a scientist when he first met him. She assumed it
was before he had always looked this muscular, “I could bench press Bruce back when I first met him but I couldn’t lift an army tank well above my head, sis.”

AJ raised her brow at his choice of phrase to call her but chalked it up to it being something he had grown up with in Hawaii. There was a time where Westley wrote her letters about his time in Hawaii and how the locals spoke differently than they did back in Brooklyn.

Kai set the fridge back down on the ground and moved to look down at AJ, she frowned, “Why didn’t you just come out and say it? Why lie? Bruce campaigned so hard for Tony to finally trust you – does he know?”

“No,” He shook his head. “I gave him one of my older blood samples to look at but…you’re like me so, yeah. It was a test.” Kai admitted and AJ could tell that he didn’t like the fact that he had lied to Bruce. But these days, AJ understood the feeling of not knowing who to trust. Kai continued on, “-After I saw what you could do from the New York invasion and D.C attack footage, I knew you had to be like me. That I wasn’t alone.”

She frowned, AJ had felt alone for a very long time. None of her friends understood what it was like for her – or what she had gone through after she received the powers. Mostly because she didn’t talk to them about it. AJ, when it came to her powers, had felt very alone, too.

But that was the only time she felt alone. Because she was surrounded by friends that she loved who tried their best to make her feel a part of a new world she knew nothing about, who rallied for her when Pierce had tried to keep her locked away at the compound to ‘monitor’ her. And now she had Andrew, too. Her nephew. She had Steve, her very best friend. AJ wasn’t alone…but she still didn’t have Bucky.

Sometimes that made her feel very alone.

“…Why did Hydra send the Winter Soldier after your friend?” AJ asked, her mind going back to what Kai had told her about his friend being killed while they were in Cuba.

“Because they were trying to get me.” Kai said causing AJ to look down at her hands, feeling a little guilty. “They hit Josh first and he died right away. The kid shouldn’t have even been there with me – I told him it was too dangerous, but he wanted to make sure I was okay.” Kai shook his head and closed his eyes, almost as if he were remembering. A scowl formed and Kai opened his eyes again and looked to AJ. “It was the Winter Soldier.” He spat out, “Guy hit me a few times. But Hydra didn’t know that bullets basically bounce off me.”

AJ scoffed at that, not believing him. She really didn’t want to talk about the Winter Soldier anymore, so she thought that changing the subject from the assassin who had killed Kai’s friend to the fact that Kai was likely over-exaggerating would be a good way to end his angry rant about Bucky. No, it wasn’t Bucky. The Winter Soldier had killed Josh Hendrix. Bucky wasn’t in control.

“I’m not lying!” Kai told her, his tone sharp and irritated.

AJ laughed at Kai getting so defensive. “If a bullet bounces off your skin – how the hell were you able to give me a blood sample?” She challenged him.

Kai grabbed a blade off the table and held it out for AJ to grab. “Stab me.”

She arched her brow. “Seriously?” Her voice was flat.

“Do it!” He urged her.
AJ took the blade, a little hesitant to do what Kai was asking her to do. But, she grabbed his arm and pressed the blade against his skin and tried to slice him.

Nothing happened. AJ frowned, pressing down harder on the blade with all her strength but the blade snapped in half causing Kai to laugh loudly. He grabbed another blade and handed it to AJ. “Now try.” AJ snatched the blade away from him and did it again, pressing down just as hard as she had earlier causing Kai to wince. “Ow! Not that hard!” He complained as blood now oozed out of his arm.

“Oh my god!” AJ gasped, dropping the blade and ran to grab the first aid kit that was stored away in her locker. *Tony was always getting hurt – AJ had insisted they have a first aid kit in the lab for the sake of not wasting towels on cleaning his blood.* “I am so sorry, Kai – how the hell,” She grabbed the kit, tearing the lid off of it and hurried back to Kai. AJ took out a large alcohol swab and began to clean the gash.

AJ motioned for Kai to sit down on the bench so that she could clean his wound. He did as she told him and sat down on the bench and AJ took a seat across from him, “Relaxation.” Kai told her as she now dressed his wound. “When my body is totally relaxed, I am as vulnerable as any human.” AJ looked up at Kai after hearing his choice of words.

*Did that mean that they weren’t human.* “Do you know what we are? Were you born like this or did you touch the Obelisk?”

Kai chuckled, “Oh, trust me, sis. I wasn’t born like this.” He told her, “-And if you’re talkin’ about that weird silver thing – yeah. Found it in Qatar about five years ago.”

“You don’t know anything about it though?”

“Nah,” He shook his head. “Do you? I mean, you were pretty vague in your testimony to congress but I figured that you were just trying to protect yourself.”

“I know the name. And I know that a man named Dr. Reinhardt experimented on me and a woman like me. She was a Chinese immigrant, he had brought a lot of them to Austria to see what would happen if they touched the Obelisk. After too many of his men died trying to study the object; Reinhardt wanted people who were…expendable. That’s when he found a woman who survived the mist. And that’s when the experiments started.”

Kai shifted a bit on the bench, “He experimented on you, too?”

She nodded her head, bandaging his wound now. AJ hated talking about that time. She had kept it to herself for so long – no one truly knew what she went through. Except for the other woman. “Yes.” AJ answered. “He did.”

“You said in your testimony that you infiltrated the Hydra base in March of ’45.” Kai said as AJ let go of his arm, his wound properly cleaned and covered. The woman got up from the bench and moved to grab the mop in the supplies closet so she could clean up the blood that had spilled on the ground after she had cut Kai. “-But the Howling Commandos didn’t find you until May of ’45.”

“Yup.” AJ replied. She already knew his next question. It was one that the people close to her had asked once they found out Reinhardt and her powers. *How long did he experiment on you?*

But it wasn’t experiments. It was torture. Reinhardt didn’t do it simply out of wanting to collect data – he *liked* to inflict pain. For a long time, anytime someone would touch AJ she would flinch and her powers would flare up. Clint called it PTSD. They talked a little about it; but AJ hadn’t told
Clint that there were times that she could still feel the slice of a blade tearing open her skin or when Reinhardt would perform surgery without anesthesia to see just how much pain her body could take before it shut down. AJ never talked about the needles or the tubes or the torture devices they would put her in all in the name of ‘science’ so they could gain more information.

“Maybe the Winter Soldier did know bullets wouldn’t hurt me.” Kai said, causing AJ to flinch. “Maybe Hydra only sent him after me so that they could bring me in and do to me what they did to you in 1945.”

She took in a deep breath as she finished mopping up the floor.

“Maybe.” AJ managed to say. Kai stepped in front of her and took the mop from her. She looked up at him and he was frowning down at her. She shook her head, “Don’t pity me, Palani.”

“I don’t pity you.” He disagreed. “I think you’re rad. A bit of an attitude problem,” Kai added causing AJ to give into a small smile. He was right. “But you’re loyal as hell and a badass. What you went through in ’45 doesn’t define you. Your powers don’t either.”

“Well, the powers help my badassery.” AJ said with a smile, taking a step away from Kai and walked back over to the microscope.


“You haven’t read his file?” She asked, her voice quiet as she closed the fridge door, looking back over at Kai. He shook his head, “Yes, I do have a past with him.” AJ said. “Or, the man before Hydra made him the Winter Soldier. His name is James Barnes…Bucky,” Her voice got softer. But AJ quickly went back to her more serious tone, not wanting to reveal her true relationship with Bucky. That he was the man she had loved, still loved, and would always love. “-He is Steve’s best friend, if you’ve seen the Captain America exhibit in D.C – you can learn all about him.”

Kai squinted his eyes at AJ. “You love him.”

It was a statement. Not a question.

She could lie to him. But no part of her that wanted to deny the fact that she was still very much in love with James Buchanan Barnes. It felt wrong to even think it, how could she possibly say it out loud and make a person believe it?


Kai licked his head, “How can you?”

She licked at her lips, trying not to be too offended by the disgust in Kai’s voice. “For a long time, I thought that Bucky was dead. I had lost him in ’44. I had no idea he had survived or what Hydra had done to him – what they made him.” AJ explained, “I didn’t know who the Winter Soldier was – I had a run in with him a few years back, but I did not know who he was until D.C.”

“But you still love him?” She nodded her head, “After everything he’d done – the guy is a murderer, AJ. He killed my friend!”

“They’re the same damn person!” He shouted.

She opened her mouth to protest but the sound of the door opening caused her to stop from saying anything further. She looked over her shoulder and saw that Bruce was now in the lab.

“Everything okay?” He asked, his voice slow and careful to avoid pissing anyone off in an already hostile environment.

AJ was mad. Furious. How dare Kai question why AJ still loved Bucky?! He didn’t know him – he didn’t know their connection, he knew nothing about James Barnes and his anger towards the Winter Soldier was clouding him from being able to understand. And he was pissing her off so AJ let her anger get the best of her and looked at Bruce, “-Yeah. Your friend is a liar. The blood samples belong to him, not his friend. He’s like me.” AJ said, throwing off her lab coat and stormed out of the lab.

It was childish to tattle on Kai just because he had pissed her off.

But Bucky was a really sore subject for AJ. She was fiercely protective of him, still. And that would never change. Just because she wasn’t out there searching the world for him with Steve didn’t mean that she didn’t love him, that she wouldn’t do just about anything to protect him. Kai running his mouth about Bucky was just the last straw today. He had lied to them all about the blood sample, he was infuriating on top of that, and now he was talking about Bucky like he knew him when he didn’t.

AJ thought that now that she knew that she wasn’t the only person who had gained their powers from the mist she would feel less alone. That she could form a friendship with Kai and together they could figure out what they were.

But AJ still felt alone. Even more so now.

Arrogant prick.

April 27th, 2014
Brooklyn, New York

Fury had gotten in touch with Hill, who had gotten in touch with AJ to set up a time for the two of
them to meet. Apparently, Fury was back from Europe, his vacation shut short and wanted to speak with AJ. They met up in Brooklyn in the apartment AJ and Steve had shared when he first woke up. It’s where she had been currently staying.

AJ had refused to continue working with Kai Palani but after Bruce and Tony found out that he was like her, the two wanted to keep that arrogant asshole around. There was no arguing with them – but then Bruce gave Kai the wrist band he had given AJ for Bucky. And she just lost it. AJ moved her things out of the Avengers Tower and moved her things back to her apartment in Brooklyn. Steve had called, trying to get her to go back to the Tower, but she refused. AJ told Steve that Bruce had given Bucky’s wristband to Kai – that Kai was a giant dick who thought he had the right to judge her for still loving Bucky – and that he had lied about the blood sample belonging to someone else; and that it was his.

But Steve already knew that. Tony had told him. And her one true ally still told AJ she should return back to the Tower. She hung up on him and not even two days later, Andrew arrived to her apartment with is bags and cat, Freckles (who Natasha and Jordan had been pet sitting), with him. She couldn’t be angry that Steve had sent Andrew home – especially since he brought Freckles with him. It was nice to have her nephew around, it made AJ feel less alone.

Tony and Bruce still reached out to her trying to persuade her to come work with them again. But AJ put her foot down. She wanted a wristband for Bucky and Palani gone.

Natasha and Jordan were visiting Clint at the farm, Thor was off in Asgard or some other realm, and with Steve and Sam still searching for Bucky, AJ was thankful to have Andrew around. And Freckles.

“I hate cats.”

She smirked, scooping up the cat and placing it on her lap, stroking her fingers through it’s long hair. “Well, Freckles hates you.” AJ replied back.

Fury huffed out a laugh. She smiled at Fury, realizing now just how much she missed him. “How are you doing, Frost?” Fury asked her.

She shrugged her shoulders, “Fine.”

He gave her a skeptical look. “Yeah, I’m sure.” Fury replied. He then sat forward, “Do you remember when you woke up and I showed you some of the old footage from the war?”

_of course._ “Yes.”

It had been a few days after she had woken up. It was footage of Steve and the Howling Commandos, including Bucky. They were going over strategies, though, the film was silent. When it panned to Bucky, she saw he was holding something in his hand.

A compass, with a picture of her in it.

AJ hadn’t known about the compass or that Bucky even had a picture of her.

“It was the first and last time I really saw you smile.” Fury told AJ. “Until Steve woke up, of course. But…even then. It wasn’t like the way you had smiled when you saw the footage of Barnes.”

She took in a deep breath and looked away from Fury, “-Why are you bringing this up?”
“You love Barnes. There’s no doubting that. And hiding out in New York because you’re afraid of getting hurt again is not something the Adelyn Frost from that day” He referred to the day that Fury had showed her the footage, “-would do. You would have seized the chance to find Bucky if you knew he were alive.”

“I’m not fit to be out in the field right now.”

“-Nope. Knock that shit off.” Fury said causing AJ’s eyes to widen in surprise. “Stark told me that he’s been trying to call you to let you know that the device is ready but you are still refusing to go to the Tower because of some new guy.” She rolled her eyes at Fury’s comment. “-You’re using every excuse to stay in New York, but guess what, Frost? You dropped out of the projects you told Steve were keeping you from searching for Bucky and you have a solution to your healing problem. But you’re not doing it because you’re scared.”

“-I’m not scared of Bucky!”

“I never said you were.” Fury leaned back in the chair. “-I only said you were scared.”

“Of what?”

“Losing him again. Of getting your heartbroken.”

Yes, she was terrified of losing Bucky again. Because it would break her heart, “-Why would I put myself through that then, hu? Bucky doesn’t want to be found, Fury! I told Steve the same thing! He doesn’t,” AJ took in a deep breath, “He would have come to me or Steve if he…” She looked down at her hands and tried to compose herself as she felt tears swell in her eyes. “He doesn’t want to be found.”

“Do you ever think that maybe he thinks you’re afraid of him?” Fury questioned.

She blinked at Fury in confusion, “-Why would he think I’m afraid of him?”

“He tried to kill you, Frost.”

“And I tried to kill him!” AJ remind Fury. “-We didn’t know who the other was – there’s no way he would believe that I’m afraid of him, not if he has his memory back.”

“Then prove it to him.”

Freckles jumped from her lap and scurried away down the hall at the sound of Andrew’s bedroom door being opened. She looked over her shoulder and then back to Fury, “How?”

“By letting Tony fix you,” AJ looked over her shoulder again when she heard Andrew talking. “-And then getting on a damn plane to help Steve, Sam, and I find the man you love.”

“Andy,” AJ said in a whisper, “I can’t.”

“-Yes, you can.” He disagreed. “Not get off your ass,” Andrew walked forward, moving around to stand in front of his Aunt and tossed her bag in her lap. “And get to the Tower, get fixed, and leave with me.”

She didn’t know what to say.

“Your nephew has got a point.” Fury stood up from his seat and stood next to Andrew. AJ looked up at the both of them, finding the courage to stand up and say; “Okay. I’ll go.”
Sometimes it felt so hopeless.

Somedays it felt like they were on a wild goose chase.

But it didn’t stop her from searching for Bucky.

Fury and Andrew had been right. She had been hiding out in New York to keep herself from getting hurt. A long time ago when she first woke up, AJ had wondered how it was possible for Howard Stark to have become the man he had – to turn so cold that his own son wondered if his father ever really loved him. AJ wondered how the man who had fought so hard for her to give Bucky a chance, who believed in soulmates and fate; turned into such a cynic.

It was to protect himself.

AJ might not have drastically changed her personality like Howard had to protect himself; she didn’t push away her friends or family – but she didn’t open up to them either. AJ kept things to herself, holding them in until she felt like she would burst. And even then, she chose carefully who she would open up to.

She was afraid of loss. AJ was terrified of losing another person who had snuck into her heart. That’s why she had hardened her heart.

AJ understood now how Howard had become the man Tony grew up with.

But she was done hiding in New York, she was done hiding her emotions and her heart. AJ would search the entire earth to try and find Bucky and bring him home. She’d follow every lead and deal with the pain of every dead end because she loved Bucky. And she was not going to give up on him.

That didn’t mean that her work with the Avengers had come to a halt.
Which was how she found herself in Indonesia instead of Sweden with Sam and Steve.

The mission was to take down a Hydra factory they heard word of where they had taken command, trying to rebuild their organization. It would be a simple job. It was AJ, Thor, Natasha, Clint, and Andrew. AJ always knew that when she was on a mission with Thor it would be over soon. They could kick, punch, shoot, stab, or use her powers and complete the mission successfully, but with Thor? He was the God of Thunder. He summoned lightening to strike down his enemies. Thor could throw his hammer and take out an entire group of people – it was good to be teamed up with Thor. It meant less work for AJ.

The device had worked; but it didn’t mean that AJ’s injuries no longer took a toll on her. She would heal quickly, but it took a while for her body to bounce back from the pain of getting hurt. AJ tried to hide it as best as she could, but Steve had always been so observant. After the mission with some of the Avengers, AJ was going to have to go back to New York so Tony could see what was happening. Tony hadn’t wanted her to go on the mission and to simply fly to New York instead, but AJ didn’t feel right about leaving Andrew. It was her first real mission with the avengers (yes, he had worked with Natasha, Clint, and Steve before; but never Thor.) She wanted to be there for her nephew to keep an eye on him and make sure he didn’t do something impulsive or stupid.

Tony was speaking to them over the comm from New York. He, Bruce, and Palani were trying to go over what was making AJ still feel the effects of an injury while she had already been healed. She had spoken to Kai a few times since she left New York, but it didn’t mean she forgot what he had said about Bucky. But she was pleasant for the sake of Bruce, who really enjoyed working with someone from his life before the Hulk. AJ was better out in the field anyway – the group needed every advantage they could get and with AJ’s unique gifts; it was much easier to take out Hydra members. And add Thor to the mix of things? It was a piece of cake.

“Adelyn, I want you and Thor to take the roof. You good with that, Pointbreak?”

Thor rolled his eyes, and AJ quickly answered for him. “-We got it Tony.”

“Romanoff and Barton, I want you coming in from the front – take out as many Hydra douchebags as you can. Baby Frost; you’ll come in from the back while everyone else is doing the hard work. I want you to sneak in to their storage and tell me everything you see. I hear that they still have some of the paintings that the Nazi’s stole in World War II – I think they’d look great in conference room.”

“-Stark, are you done?” Natasha asked, her tone was bored – it was clear that she just wanted to get back to the States as soon as it was possible so she could be with Jordan again. It had been at least two months since Natasha had been stateside so AJ was sure that Natasha was counting down the seconds until they left for New York.

“Never.”

AJ looked over at Andrew who was putting on his gear. She didn’t like the idea of him going in alone. “I’ll go with Andrew to the storage area.” She told Tony.

“Nope.” Tony replied. Her eyes met Andrew’s briefly and saw the irritation in his eyes that she didn’t want him going in on his own. “I need you to freeze the roof exit. We can’t have any of them fleeing. I also need you to take out their helicopter with your ice fingers.”

“Fine, Thor can go with Andrew.”
“Jay,” Andrew said, his voice sharp. “Stop.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, Adelyn – have you gained the power to fly? Did you not mention this to me or have I just forgotten?” Tony said sarcastically. “You need Thor to get you up there and if anyone is already up there, you’ll need Thor as your back up.”

“So, Andrew is just supposed to go in with no back-up?” She felt her temper rising.

“Adge,” Clint said, walking over to where she was standing in the quinjet. “We need to go.”

She rolled her neck, trying to relieve some of the stress she was feeling. “Fine,” AJ agreed with the plan. She then walked over to where her nephew was standing, a smirk plastered on his face probably because he had gotten his way. Tony had gotten his way – Andrew was just part of that. “Andrew, stay on comm. Do not do anything stupid.”

He rolled his eyes, not acting his age.

“I’m serious, Andy.” She said quietly, pressing her hand to his arm. In eleven days; it would be three years since Brian Frost died after he took a bullet meant for AJ. After spending the last few months with Andrew, she had grown to know him – and she could see how hard this month was for him. He was moody, more impulsive than normal, too cocky, he overestimated his own strengths and pretended that his weaknesses didn’t exist. AJ had fought hard against Andrew even going on the mission – but he had told her that it was something he really wanted to do.

And how could she say no to him?

His brother had died to save her – his twin. If this would help him in his grieving process to feel like he was part of something good, she wouldn’t take that from him, too. He had already lost too much.

“I’ll be fine.” Andrew told her, securing a few more clips to his thigh holster. “You don’t need to worry.” She huffed out a laugh, “I’m serious, Jay. You worry too much. Brian would be pissed to know that he died just for you to become a stress case.”

His words stung. But AJ knew that he was frustrated with her and her overprotectiveness – she wouldn’t hold his words against them or let it hurt too much.

“I’ll be on the roof.” AJ told Andrew. “Keep your comms on.”

Andrew nodded and walked away from AJ.

She turned and saw Clint heading in her direction. “You ready?” He asked.

AJ smirked, “Are you?”

He patted at his wristband, “Do your worst to the roof. Take everyone out in the building if you want to – I have chores waiting for me at home.” AJ laughed at that. Clint then moved his hand to rest on AJ’s shoulder, “Andrew will be fine.”

She inhaled, nodding her head. “I know. I just…”

“Worry about him?”

“Yeah.”

“Once Nat and I take everyone out from the front; we’ll head over to the back to keep an eye on
Andrew. You focus on your job, okay?” He squeezed her shoulder and AJ moved her hand on top of his, giving him a smile that read thank you.

The quinjet was still in the sky while the team moved on foot to the factory.

Natasha and Clint went in first, using an explosive to open the doors, alerting the members of Hydra that they had company.

“Ready?” Thor asked, looking down at AJ.

She hopped up a bit when Thor leaned down, his arm moving around her waist as hers wrapped around his neck. He swung his hammer and soon enough, they were in the air, dropping down onto the roof. They knew that there were people on the roof thanks to JARVIS being their eye in the sky, so AJ was ready for the guards to open fire on them. When they did, their bullets were blocked with a sheet of solid ice. Thor swung his hammer again and it went flying through the ice and took out each guard behind it. He held out his hand and the hammer returned to him.

AJ ran over to the roof’s door and pressed her hands against the metal. She closed her eyes, concentrating hard as the metal began to freeze.

They had tested just how cold the ice AJ could create could get – how strong it could get. So far, AJ’s ice was able to withstand Tony’s rocket blasters on his Iron Man suit, a flame thrower (the fact that Tony had one of those handy was alarming), and Steve’s shield. The only thing able to break the ice AJ created so far (since they didn’t want to have Bruce ‘Hulk out’ to test his strength) was the heat that came from Thor’s lightning bolts. Which meant that AJ was pushing herself harder to try and create stronger ice that would be able to withstand that kind of heat.

Bucky’s metal arm had been able to break through the ice – that’s when she knew she needed to work harder. Pierce had her use her powers while in the compound, testing just how much strength her powers had. It had been a way to weaken her and know what they would need to have to stop her. The right amount of heat, the amount of force they’d need to break one of her ice walls. It was all for Hydra to learn her weaknesses.

God, she really wished that she had been the one to kill Alexander Pierce.

The metal door was frozen solid and AJ looked back at Thor. They could hear gunfire from inside and AJ thought of what Clint had said earlier. She pursed her lips together and walked up to Thor. It’d get them home sooner, and it also meant that she’d be wiping out more hydra fanatics – that was definitely a bonus. “I’m going to go off books here, okay?” She said, bending down so she could press her hands to the roof. All she had to do to turn this building into a freezer was to think of all the horrible things they had done to Bucky, to her. She’d think of Dr. Reinhardt and Arnim Zola, she’d think of Johann Schmidt and the hydra spy who had killed Dr. Erskine. It would take all of her anger, but it was about time she finally let some of that anger out.

“Adelyn,” Thor stopped her. “If you freeze the entire structure; there will be no survivors.” She was breathing hard, and it wasn’t until Thor moved his hands to rest on top of hers that she realized that most of the roof was already covered in a sheet of ice. “I know you want your vengeance for what they did to your lover; but killing is not the answer. If you want information; you have to let them live. Take them prisoner and make them talk.”

She looked up at Thor and took in a shaky breath. He was right. As good as it would feel to kill every last Hydra member – they had information that Fury and the Avengers still needed.

Thor lifted her hands off of the roof and clasped his own hands around hers. “We will go inside,
yes?” AJ nodded her head slowly, still trying to even her breaths. Thor helped her stand and moved his arm around her waist. She moved her arm around his shoulder and closed her eyes. She felt the impact of them landing on the ground but kept her eyes closed.

She was ashamed.

Thor set her down and moved so he was standing in front of her when she finally did open her eyes. “Adelyn, you are stronger than you believe.”

“Thank you.” AJ smiled and then instructed Thor to go in from the front and she’d take the front to try and find Andrew.

She ran into Clint and Natasha who were heading towards the basement of the factory when she came running over to them. “You got this?” Natasha asked, hearing gun fire coming from outside of the factory.

“Yeah, you guys go on.” AJ told them.

AJ searched the basement going through all the storage rooms but had yet to find Andrew. “Adelyn!” She heard Thor’s voice from behind her. He hurried over to her, “Every prisoner is gathered up – have you found your cousin?”

She shook her head, starting to feel dread. “Did you see him upstairs or outside?”

“No.” Thor answered.

Something clanked on the floor and AJ and Thor both looked in the direction where the noise came from. “Andrew,” She whispered before running forward.

There was only one room left that AJ hadn’t checked and the noise had come from that room – she had been headed that way before Thor had showed up. AJ pushed her legs harder than she ever had before until she was gripping onto the door to keep herself from falling forward.

“No!” She yelled.

“Jay?”

Andrew’s words were muffled by the stone that encased him. The Obelisk was on the ground next opened up with crystals inside of it. “No, no, no!” AJ ran forward only to have Thor yank her back.

“Adelyn, no!” He warned her. “You can’t go inside!”

The ground shook when the sound of a bomb went off from outside. Thor moved himself over AJ as the ceiling collapsed on top of them.

AJ could hear Clint and Natasha yelling their names – a piercing ringing in her ear and the pain of Thor’s body crushing hers from protecting her from the impact of the explosion and then suddenly she was being lifted out from the rubble.

Thor was standing in front of her, his mouth moving and she could make out from reading his lips that he was saying her name over and over again. But other than the ringing in her ears, she heard nothing.

Andrew.

AJ pushed past Thor, climbing over the rubble to get inside the room. It hadn’t suffered as much
damage as the outside of the room had, the ceiling had only partially collapsed. She looked to
where Andrew had been standing – he was gone.

She felt Thor grabbing at her as her hearing was coming back in patches of sounds. AJ yanked out
of his hold when she saw that Andrew was on the ground, still encased in stone.

“Adelyn!” Thor was shouted, chasing after her.

“Andrew?” Her voice was an echo as her hand moved the rubble off of him. The stone hadn’t
shattered – that was a good thing! It meant that he was like her! AJ saw that the Obelisk was on the
ground next to Andrew under some of the fallen roof. It was open – that meant that he was
transitioning. He wasn’t dead! Any person that wasn’t like AJ, or Kai, or Andrew (it appeared)
would turn to stone immediately after touching the Obelisk. But if it opened – that meant the
person would survive.

Thor yanked at her arm when she reached for it, “Don’t,” His voice went in and out, “Diviner!”
She used all her strength to pull away from Thor and grab the Obelisk. “No!” Thor yelled.

“-We need to get this back to Tony.” AJ said, her voice only sounding like a whisper.

She looked up at Thor only to see him looking down at her in shock. “Adelyn,” His voice came out
as a whisper, too. “You’re…Inhuman.”

_Inhuman?_

July 17th, 2014
Manhattan, New York
-Avengers Tower-

They were back in New York at the Avengers Tower. Steve and Sam were already there waiting
for them when they returned. No one was allowed to touch the Obelisk – _Diviner_. That’s what
Thor said it was called. Only AJ was able place it in a protective case to keep it hidden away from the rest of the world. Andrew had yet to come out of the stone so they transported his body down into the lab so that when he did come to; they’d be able to run some work on him to make sure he was okay.

AJ remembered what is was like to wake up feeling like every cell in her body had changed, but she had also been heavily drugged so that Dr. Reinhardt could experiment on her. Either way, she didn’t want Andrew to be alone when he woke up.

Steve sat next to her in the lab as Thor explained how he knew what the Obelisk (Diviner) was and what exactly an Inhuman was. Kai Palani was there as well; he deserved to hear what Thor had to tell them.


“Who are the Kree?” Steve asked.

“A hateful, deceitful race of savages.” Thor said next. AJ frowned, looking down at her hands.

“And…I’m one of them.” She said in a whisper.

“We’re one of them.” Kai said, sounding just as upset as AJ.

_Hateful, deceitful, savages. That’s who they were?_”

Thor grabbed AJ’s hand, surprising her. “You are not one of them.” He assured her.

“Dude, you just said we were.” Kai argued with Thor only to have the God of Thunder narrow his eyes at him. Kai backed off, raising his hands in surrender so that Thor could continue on.

Thor dropped AJ’s hand and stood up, walking over to the window in her room and looked up at the dark sky. “During one of their many wars, the Kree found themselves faced with far too many casualties, so a group of Kree known as the Reapers sent their scientists across the nine realms to experiment on alien races in order to create weapons for them to win the war, as well as gain more soldiers to fight.”

AJ and Kai looked to one another, both frowning. Steve moved his hand on top of AJ’s as her fingers tapped rapidly against her knee. She had spent so long wondering what she was – how she got her powers. And now Thor was telling her it was because of the Kree, an alien race who were worse than the Chitauri, apparently. Steve saw she was scared, he could always see it, so he grabbed her hand to hold it still while Thor continued his story.

“-They came to Midgard long ago.”

“Midgard?” Kai said in confusion.

“Earth.” AJ said quietly.

Thor turned around and glared at Kai before looking back at AJ, “The Kree scientist saw that humans were the most successful subjects to be experimented on. They gave the humans whom they were experimented on their blood, Kree blood – and created a new race known now as Inhumans. They wanted to change the genetic makeup of the humans and by doing so, they hoped that the humans who were experimented on would gain abilities that no other human could possess. But before they could complete their work, a new fraction of Kree came to Midgard and shut down their experiments and left your world after believing that the experiments were
unsuccessful.”

There was nothing in the world that hinted at an alien race coming to earth – when had it happened? AJ had looked everywhere for information on her blood, surely someone would have found some sort of information that would go back to this time Thor was talking about.

“...However, throughout generations, the descendants of those who were first experimented had been passed down the altered genes.”

AJ breathed out in relief, “Okay, so Andrew is like me. He has the same genes so he should wake up soon, right?”

Thor looked to AJ, his face showing remorse. “It does not affect each family member, Adelyn. It is rare that two family members would have the Inhuman gene.”

“But you don’t know that for sure.” AJ protested the idea of Andrew not being like her. “-There’s still a chance!”

“Jay.” Steve said her name softly, but Kai cut them off from saying anything by asking Thor a question.

“The Diviners, the ones that hold the Terrigen Crystals – how did they come to be?”

“The Kree left them behind on earth.” Thor answered Kai. “The Diviner is a weapon of mass destruction to anyone one who is not Inhuman. It’s no wonder why Hydra had wanted it.” Thor looked to Steve and AJ.

“Is there a way to destroy it?” Steve asked.

“Not that I know of.” Thor said with a sigh, “Though, if you allow me,” Thor looked to AJ. “-I can take it from Midgard so no other human can be affected by it ever again.”

“Why are you asking me?” AJ looked at Thor in confusion.

“You’re Inhuman. The Diviner unleashed your Inhuman powers, it is a part of your history-”

AJ interrupted Thor, “-I don’t want it.” She told him. “Take it.”

“-Wait,” Kai said, “Why does she decided if it stays or goes? I’m Inhuman, too.”

Thor glared at Kai again, “Because she is my friend who I trust. You? I don’t know you. And I don’t care for you much either.”

AJ bit the inside of her lower lip to keep herself from laughing. She then looked to Kai, “It’s too dangerous, Kai.” She told him. “-Having it on earth – it puts too many people’s lives at risk.”

“Yeah, but it’ll also help us know who is like us, Frost.” Kai argued, “-Don’t you want to know if there’s any more of us out there?”

“No.” AJ said, her answer had even surprised her. “For so long I felt so alone because of these powers – because I didn’t know what I was. But I’m still me. And you’re still you, Palani. Our powers don’t define us, you said that.”

“-But,”

“Take it, Thor.” Steve cut off Kai and stood up, grabbing the case and handing it to Thor. “Get it
“Dude!” Kai raised his voice as he stood up. AJ grabbed at his arm, yanking him to sit back down. He let out a low growl but sat back down. “-Look, you might not want to know if there’s anyone out there like us – but I do. You might not be alone – but I am! My only friend died because of what I am. The man you love killed him!”

“Son,” Steve walked towards Kai and AJ, “You better choose your next words carefully.” Thor followed behind Steve and AJ knew that if she didn’t intervene, the AJ Frost support squad was going to go after Kai.

“You guys, it’s okay.” AJ said, pressing her hand to Steve’s chest and looking up at Thor who was standing behind Steve still. “Thor, take it.” He nodded and walked out of the room. But Steve stayed. AJ looked at him, she looked at him, a look that said she didn’t need his help. But he still stayed. AJ turned back to face Kai, Steve right behind her. “I know you want to know if there are more people like us out in the world – but you have to understand how dangerous the Diviner is. Do you really want to risk people's lives because you feel alone?”

Kai looked away from her, his jaw tensing. “No.”

AJ smiled, glad that he was starting to see reason. “And for the record – you do have friends. Bruce, Tony…even me.”

She saw the way Kai’s twitched up into a smile, “You wanna be my friend?” He looked back at her.

“Oh God,” AJ said, rolling her eyes, already regretting her words.

“-Hey, AJ,” Maria walked into the lab while looking down at her tablet, “Tony wants you to come upstairs after-” She stopped speaking abruptly when her eyes landed on Kai. “Holy shit.” She walked over to where AJ and Steve were standing, “I know I was in London for a while – but is there a new Asgardian in town?” She said quietly, her eyes still glued to Kai who smirked at her in return. AJ had to roll her eyes again, repressing a gag.

“-Maria, this is Dr. Kai Palani. He has been working with us.” She explained, looking to Maria who had yet to look at her. “He’s not an Asgardian, he’s-”

“Inhuman,” Kai moved to stand in front of Maria. “And very pleased to meet you.”

Maria looked to AJ briefly, “In-what?”

“I’ll explain on the way to see Tony,” AJ said. She looked at Steve, “Stay with Andrew, okay?” Steve nodded his head, letting AJ know that he would stay with her nephew. “Let JARVIS know if anything happens.”

“I will.” Steve smiled. “He’ll come through this, Jay.”

“I know.”

He had to.

AJ left Steve in the lab with Andrew and Kai, “Get along boys. And Kai, show Steve your power.”

She had to forcibly pull Maria out of the room when Kai picked up the refrigerator with his pinky and she uttered yet again; holy shit.
“What is an Inhuman?” Maria whispered as they walked over to the elevator. “Why haven’t I been properly briefed?”

“It’s a long story, Maria. But, I’m Inhuman.”

“Oh,” She drew the word out. “…Yeah, I still don’t know what the hell an Inhuman is. But that guy is hot. Like, Thor hot.” AJ chuckled and shook her head as they walked into the elevator that took them up to the top floor where Tony was waiting for AJ. She got off the elevator and Maria stayed inside to go back down to the lower level where she worked.

“Hey,” Tony said as she walked over to him. “How are you?”

She smiled, “Really? No witty comment? Really, Stark?”

He frowned, “Adelyn, I’m really sorry about Andrew – I should have listened to you.”

“Tony, it’s fine.” AJ tried to assure him, “He’s like me. Otherwise when the stone hit the floor it would have broken – but it didn’t. And the Diviner opened so he’s going through transition.”

Was she trying to assure Tony or herself?

Tony nodded his head and pulled something out of his pocket, “Here.” He placed one of the wristbands that protected whoever wore one from AJ’s powers. “For uh, for Barnes. When you find him.”

All of her emotions from everything was finally hitting her. She put the wristband in her jacket coat and forced a smile, “Thank you, Tony.” He must have sensed how she was feeling because before AJ could tell him that she was going to leave; he was moving forward and pulling her into a hug. AJ pressed her lips together in a thin line as she tried not to cry, but in the end, her emotions got the best of her.

AJ hugged Tony back tightly, burying her head into his shoulder as she let the tears flow.

Andrew as going to be okay, right? He’d come out of this – he had to. Because if AJ lost him…she wouldn’t survive it. Not when Bucky was running around the world to avoid being found by AJ and Steve, not when Andrews twin brother had already died to save her life.

Andrew was the only family she had left – she couldn’t lose him.

It would break her.

So, she would wait until Andrew came out of the stone.

No matter how long it took.
“What are you even writin’, Barnes?” Dugan asked as they sat in the back of the plane that would take them to the train Arnim Zola would be on. “Love letter to Frost?”

He rolled his eyes at Dugan’s comment. “Pipe down!” Bucky hollered over the loud noise of the engine. “I’m tryin’ to concentrate!”

Steve chuckled from the seat next to Bucky, “You do realize that you’re gonna see Jay in a few days.” He reminded his friend. “I really doubt she’d be mad that you didn’t write her.”

“It’s not a letter to A.J.” Bucky admitted, trying to keep the pen steady as the plane shook. “It’s uh,” He cleared his throat, the sweat from his hand making it hard to hold the already shaking pen still. “I’m writing a letter to her Dad.”

“Her Dad?” Steve said back, probably confused as to why Bucky was writing to Mr. Frost. “Oh,” There it was, it finally clicked for Steve. “Oh, wow!” He laughed, clapping Bucky on the back. “That’s big, pal. How are you going to ask?”

Bucky couldn’t help but laugh, “I got no idea, Steve.” He admitted. “I don’t even know if A.J. has ever told them about me – what am I supposed to say? Mr. Frost, I don’t even know if you know who I am but I wanna marry your daughter. And I honestly don’t care if you say no – I’m still gonna marry her because I don’t want to live my life without her.”

Steve chuckled, “Well, I wouldn’t write that. Just...tell him who you are and how much you love Jay. It doesn’t have to be a sonnet, Buck, just write how you feel. And then ask his permission to marry her at the end.”

“And what if he writes back and says no.”

Steve grinned at Bucky, “A.J. loves you, Buck. I don’t believe it would matter to her whether you got her father’s permission or not. It’s a curtsey to ask the Dad – but ultimately, it’s up to Jay. And she’s gonna say yes.”

Bucky chuckled, his leg bouncing up and down as he tried to contain his excitement over the prospect that A.J. might want to marry him. That someday she’d be his wife and he’d be her husband. “You really think she’ll say yes?”

“Come on, Buck.” Steve shook his head and laughed. “She probably won’t even let you finish asking her before she says yes!”

Bucky grinned again, knowing that Steve was right. A.J. loved him, and he loved her. He wished he would have told her that sooner – he wished he would have told her it right after their first kiss. But when he asked her to marry him; he would tell her he loved her again. And again, and again, and again and he wouldn’t stop until the day he died.

He loved Adelyn Juliet Frost.

Nothing would ever change that.
Bucky’s eyes opened, his chest moving up and down as he laid in the uncomfortable bed in Austria. He was remembering more and more each day – more about himself, but mostly about Adelyn.

So much time had passed and so much had changed – but he still loved her. And he would continue to love her until the end of time. Bucky had loved her through everything, even when he was the Winter Soldier. That’s why he had never been able to go through with killing her. It didn’t register in the Soldier’s brain why he couldn’t kill AJ. But Bucky understood now. It was his heart screaming at his mind to remember.

He’d had this dream before. It was a memory from the day he fallen off the train. Bucky had been planning his proposal with Steve for the rest of the train ride.

Bucky sat up in the bed, grabbing his small notebook off of the beside desk. He grabbed the pen out of the book and started to scribble down what he remembered from the letter he had been writing to Adelyn’s father – he needed it to be written down so that if it were ever safe for him to be around AJ, he’d give it to her and tell her; I love you. I never stopped.


Dear Mr. Frost,

My name is James Barnes and I am in love with your daughter...

Chapter End Notes

Kudos/comments/feedback is always appreciated! I hope you guys enjoyed reading this story as much as I enjoyed writing it! COMING SOON...Part 3 of the AJ Frost Series...

---&gt; follow me on tumblr for more AJ Frost content! @ohhitherekate

End Notes

What’d you guys think? Comments and Kudos are always appreciated!

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