Infinity and Beyond

Following the Battle of Wakanda and the Decimation, Steve, Wanda and the rest of the surviving Avengers return home to the United States to mourn their fallen friends. M for sexual content, mental illness and violence.
Other Pairings: Tony/Pepper, Clint/Laura
Rating: M
Disclaimer: I do not own the Avengers. Property of Marvel and Disney. Songs belong to their artists. Later excerpts will come from Avengers: Infinity War and Avengers: Endgame.

Okay, this going to be my biggest story yet since it is going to run from the end of Captain America: Civil War to Avengers: Endgame. I am seeing Avengers: Infinity War on Wednesday but I will be waiting a few months until this story gets to the film storyline.
Ever since the day her parents died, and she and Pietro were trapped with the Stark Industries shell, Wanda hated enclosed spaces. The feeling of not being able to move or breathe just caused a thrill of panic to invade every cell in her body. So, when she was sedated and strapped not only in a straitjacket but a shock collar, Wanda shut down. Every word being spoken by Sam, Clint and Scott was all murmurs to her. Even when Clint tried to speak to her, she would not respond. She couldn’t. The collar was pressing on her windpipe and it hurt just breathing let alone talking.
Once when HYDRA was done with their experiments, Wanda was locked in a room while the cells in her body mutated. No one could hear her screams. She felt the same about the Raft. Except no one was hearing her vocally, but in her head, she was screaming to die. Death was better than the rest of her life being tortured.

She missed all the commotion. She barely heard a sound of flesh being punched or cell doors opening. She only realised that Steve had come to save them when he appeared in front of her, asking if she was okay. They managed to get the collar off, revealing the bruised skin underneath and well as the jacket. Yet Wanda was so checked out that she barely remembered leaving the Raft. The exhaustion must have hit, because the next thing she knew, she was in some sort of medical facility and had a brace around her neck.

“Miss Maximoff, you’re awake,” the nurse observed. She had what sounded like a Central African accent which confused somewhat. She tried to speak but she was then interrupted. “Don’t try to speak. The shock collar put some pressure on your wind pipe so it might be difficult to talk. Do you understand?” Wanda nodded. “Good.”

The nurse explained that she was in Wakanda, which surprised Wanda even more because Wakanda was considered less developed than Sokovia, and yet she was in this advanced facility that was way beyond the imagination of any first-world country. Then it was revealed that she had been sedated for fifty hours in order to fully rest.

She still wanted to scream. Instead she turned away and looked towards the window.

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Steve did not know what to expect when he entered the Raft. He knew Clint, Scott, and Sam would be reasonably okay, but Wanda was the one he was most worried about. The way Ross had treated her in the aftermath of Lagos was disgusting; it was like she was a criminal for something that was clearly an accident.

However, nothing prepared him for what he found. Wanda was essentially in a comatose state, scared of what the guards would do next. He carried her to the jet, he made sure she got the medical attention, and he stayed with her at night. Bucky was in cryogenic freeze again. Wanda was his next priority. Clint and Scott had managed to return home, though they knew it would not be without consequences for them, and Steve trusted them not to reveal where they were.

Since Wanda could not speak to him, he had no way of knowing what was going through her head. The combination of Pietro’s death and her cruel imprisonment must have been weighing heavily on her mind, but she had no way of communicating it. Most days, she would stare vacantly into space.

“Do you reckon she’ll get back to normal?” Sam asked one evening when he and Steve were playing cards by Wanda’s bedside.

“I don’t think she has known normal since she was ten years old,” Steve responded.

He knew that Wanda probably could hear them but he did not know how much was registering in her head. She gave no indication that she did. It looked like other things weighed on her mind. It was a week after they arrived in Wakanda when Wanda was examined to see if her vocal cords had healed.

"Okay, can you say your name for me?" Shuri asked gently.

"Wan-da ... Max- Maxi-moff," Wanda stated. Her voice was so high-pitched and hoarse that Steve
felt a bile of anger in his throat. Wanda sounded broken. She sounded disappointed that she did not sound like herself.

"Okay, that was good. Just keep resting your voice and it should go back to normal. The pressure they pressed on your throat was quite severe."

Wanda nodded. The girl in front of her gave a sweet smile as she walked out of the room. Steve tried to give her a reassuring smile but Wanda looked down at her feet. That was when his heart finally broke. He had dragged Wanda into this mission to Siberia, and thus the fight in the airport. Maybe Tony had a point when he said he was protecting her by keeping her in the Avengers Compound. She needed protecting from him.

"This is all my fault," Wanda whispered.

"No it's not," he replied softly. "It's mine."
I keep a closed watch on this heart of mine.
I keep my eyes wide open all the time.
I keep the ends out for the tie that binds.
Because you're mine;
I walk the line.

Chapter One

Wanda sat up sharply as she woke up. It took a moment for her breathing to level out before she raked her fingers through her hair. She really needed a shower since her hair was greasy but she could not find the energy to climb out of bed and get into the shower. All she wanted to do was sleep or watch reality television. It was total trash in her opinion but watching the news was making her physically sick. The only news story there seemed to be was Steve, Sam and herself being declared war criminals. Wanda grew up during the Yugoslav Wars. Her grandmother had survived Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp. She knew what a war criminal was.

Since being checked out of the medical facility, she had been set up in a safe house in the centre of Wakanda with Steve and Sam not too far away. T'Challa had suggested keeping them in separate safe houses would not draw attention, though emotionally, Wanda hated it. While she was not really speaking to them, their presence made her feel safe. She had spent so much of her time finding ways to barricade the door that her nightmares were about her failing to do so. Even the slightest knock made her jump out of her skin and leave her hiding in the closet.

She almost did when her door knocked, only when she heard Steve's voice she went to the door.

"Wanda, I got breakfast," Steve announced. Wanda unlocked each bolt on the door and opened it to see Steve holding a bag up. "It's something called akara."

Wanda let him in but did not say a word. Steve grabbed two plates and split the bag of akara evenly between the two. Wanda sat at the breakfast bar, but when Steve pushed the plate to her, she started to pick bits off the battered food but not actually eat it.

"So," Steve began, "apparently the reason T'Challa has been MIA is because a cousin he did not know about turned up and tried to take the throne."

"Oh," Wanda said quietly. She had not really noticed that T'Challa had been missing.

Steve noticed how disinterested Wanda was in this conversation and decided to change it, "So, what happened on Keeping Up With the Kardashians?"

"Um, nothing much that I did not say last week." She did put a bit of the akara into her mouth, and it did taste delicious. Even then she still kept pulling bits off. "Where is Sam?"
"Well, he said he would venture outside since he figured he would 'blend in with the locals'." Wanda did attempt to smile, but just could not bring herself to do it. "You know, what do you think about taking a walk?"

"Outside?"

"Wakanda has a cloaking device that shields all the tech they have made from the outside world. We'll be perfectly safe."

"I need to take a shower first."

Steve nodded as Wanda moved away from the breakfast bar. Once she had turned the shower on and locked the door, Wanda stripped from her nightdress and took a hard look at herself in the mirror. Her face was breaking out, particularly around her forehead and chin. Her eyes had dark circles and her face looked so shallow that she looked like a different person.

She felt disgusting.

On the counter there was a pair of scissors. Wanda took one look between her face and the scissors before grabbing them and cutting a chuck out of her long stringy hair. She only cut it to just above her shoulders but she took a sharp bit of breath when she realised what she had done.

"Shit," she whispered in Sokovian.

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"You know if you wanted a re-style, you should have just come to me," the hairdresser commented when she looked at Wanda's hair.

"I don't know why I did it," Wanda replied softly.

"Well, what I can do is firstly clean it, and the cut it so it is even."

Wanda nodded and allowed the hairdresser to do what she needed to do. She took a glance at Steve before being led into the back room. In Steve's mind, he knew Wanda must be suffering some sort of post-traumatic stress. Expecting her to be over what happen in just two weeks was like expecting her to do quantum physics: it just was not going to happen.

Wanda remained silent the whole time they were in the salon.

The hairdresser managed to salvage the hair, cutting it to a bob cut. "Next time you want a haircut come to me first."

"Sorry, I don't know why I did it," Wanda repeated. Steve smiled and thanked the hairdresser for her help as he paid. Once they were out the salon, Wanda asked, "How does it look?"

"Suits you actually. Looks more... Mature."

"You mean I look less like a teenager," Wanda stated plainly.

Steve decided to keep quiet at that moment. The sun was beating down on them and Wanda instantly felt the heat go to her head and she had to sit down on some steps. Steve passed her a bottle of water and told her, "Here. Drink this."

Wanda took the water and sipped it. It did not cool her off but it made her less light-headed. "I should be used to this heat: Sokovian summers were awful for it."
"I can't say New York is much better. Spring was always better for me as a kid. Not too hot and not too cold. Played with my asthma less." Wanda took another sip and then splashed some onto her face. "Better?"

"A little. Maybe we should find Sam."

Given that it was nearly lunchtime, finding Sam was not hard. He was standing by a market stand that sold jaffle, which was essentially a toasted sandwich. From the smell of it, it looked like it was minced beef filling today.

"Tell you what, we should pack this whole whistleblowing thing and open one of these carts," Sam commented through a mouthful of jaffle. He then saw Wanda and then said, "You've cut your hair." Wanda looked down at her feet. "It looks good."

"You hungry Wanda?" Steve asked. In theory, she should be hungry since she had very little breakfast, but Wanda shook her head. The more he thought about it, he had not seen Wanda eat a proper meal in two weeks.

"I want to go back to the safe house," Wanda said quietly. "The heat is making me tired."

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"I think this is more than post-traumatic stress Steve," Sam commented when they were back Wanda's safe house. Wanda was asleep in the bedroom while the two of them were in the kitchen. "I think she's depressed."

"It makes sense; she has a history of depression," Steve replied.

Steve remembered what it was like after Pietro's death: Wanda ate very little, slept very little and was in a funk that no one seemed able to shift until Natasha had decided that Wanda needed to see a psychiatrist. It took a few weeks and anti-depressants for her symptoms to subside and for her to be cleared for active duty.

"True. Maybe we really should have done a full check on her mental health history."

"We'll never know the full extent though. The most recent medical records we could get was from HYDRA, and I don't think they care about the mental wellbeing of their test subjects."

"Point."

"I guess we could find a psychiatrist."

"We should, though maybe when Wanda feels ready."

Steve looked at the store cupboard and fridge, "I think I may cook some paprikash. It's her favourite dish so it may show her that we care."

"Do you know how to cook paprikash?"

"It isn't hard."

A couple hours later, Wanda woke up to the smell of spice, tomatoes and chicken. Curious about what the smell was, she walked out of the bedroom and towards the kitchen. On the stove there was a pot of paprikash stewing away.

Wanda felt a bile in the back of her throat.
The last time someone had cooked paprikash for her, she was manipulated into trusting him only for him to throw it in her face, calling her dangerous even if he did not see her as dangerous. He was complicit in her first imprisonment, and his apology meant nothing when he did nothing to stop her second, more inhumane imprisonment.

Wanda grabbed the pot and threw it on the floor. The crash caused Steve and Sam to run into the kitchen.

"What the hell Wanda?" Steve asked in shock.

"I hate him," Wanda uttered bitterly.

"Who?" Sam asked.

"Vision. He claimed to have feelings for me but did nothing to stop Ross from signing that order to put that collar on me."

"I don't think he had a choice..." Steve began but the look Sam gave him suggested that Wanda was not over exaggerating.

"After we were captured, Vision basically handed her over without question. He knew the details because he was in the room with Wanda and Ross when the order for her to be sent to the Raft was done. Surely somewhere in that head of his, he knew it was not right but the only thing he said to us after was that we broke the law and deserved what punishment we got."

Steve tried not to let his anger get the better of him, but it was proving difficult when he remembered everything that had happened in the last two weeks. Truth be told, Steve never felt at ease around Vision. The android reminded him too much of Ultron, and the fact he was the guardian of the Mind Stone - which they still did not understand the full extent of its power - made him trust him less, lifting Thor's hammer or no lifting Thor's hammer. Some part of Steve's brain knew that Vision probably did not mean to be so cold but if he had claimed to love Wanda, then he would not have done that.

Steve took a deep breath and rubbed his hands along his face. Eventually he said, "Okay. Maybe we should think of something else for dinner. Wanda, do you have any ideas?"

Wanda blinked like he had asked her to recite an obscure Shakespeare soliloquy. Eventually, she asked, "Do they do pizza here?"

"No, but I can make us some," Sam answered going straight to the cupboard.

Wanda took one good look at the mess on the floor and whispered, "I'm sorry guys."

"Hey, don't blame yourself," Steve said trying to give her a reassuring smile. "We'll help clean up and hopefully Sam is a better cook than he claims."

"Hey!"

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The pizza turned out to be surprisingly decent and Wanda ate a surprising amount of her pizza before setting it aside. Upon Sam's insistence, they decided to watch a movie. However, by the midpoint, Sam had fallen asleep and Wanda had checked out. They finished the film but by that point Wanda was barely noticing the credits rolling. Steve had to wave his hand in front of her face for her to come back to earth.
"You okay?" he asked.

"Yeah. Just tired."

"It's been a long day."

"I'm sorry about today."

"What have you got to be sorry about?"

"The haircut, the paprikash..."

"Do you even know what you were thinking when you chopped a chunk out of your hair?"

"I don't know. It just felt disgusting and I felt the need to remove it." Wanda pushed her hair from her face and announced, "I'm going to bed."

"Okay. Do you want us to go?"

"Actually, can you stay? I just feel safer with you both here."

"Okay. Get some sleep."

Wanda entered her bedroom and looked at the mess she had made of it. She hated mess, but she just felt so exhausted that tidying it seemed like pure torture at that point. Instead she stripped herself of her clothes and just climbed into the crumpled bed.

She spent most of the night staring at the wall.

Chapter End Notes

So.... I saw Avengers: Infinity War. *Deep Breath*

All I am going to say is that some gaps need to be plugged.
Chapter Two

One year earlier

"Maybe next time you feel the need to take your hand out on something," the medic began, "try a punchbag in the gym." Wanda had smashed her hand against the wall in a fit of rage and was now unable to use her left hand. "Do you know what made you lash out?"

"It's nothing," Wanda replied softly.

It was not nothing.

She lashed out because the person meant to be clearing her for active duty said that she was suffering from depression and was refusing to seek therapy or medication. Wanda did not believe she was depressed. The idea seemed bizarre. She had just lost her brother; one half of her soul. Her heart had been ripped out her chest and spattered. She just assumed it was normal for her to feel this way.

The medic wrapped her hand in a cast and told her to wait for it to heal before she started training again. That was the kick in the teeth. The training gave her something to do and take her mind off things. Without the training, she was reduced to just watching television. Most of the time she was just staring at the screen and not taking anything in.

After a week, Natasha had enough and turned the television off, much to Wanda's chagrin.

"You need to go to therapy," Natasha told her firmly. Wanda made a beleaguered sigh and sat back with her arms folded like a stroppy teenager. "You can't sit in front of the television for the rest of your life, and you won't be cleared until you go to therapy."

"So what I just turn up and I will be cleared?"

"No. You actually have to talk through your feelings. I'm not a fan of therapy either, but it does work."

Natasha held out a sheet with a booking for a series of sessions she needed to go to in order to be cleared for duty. Wanda took it, grumbling something about being treated like a child. On the sheet, it read, 'First session, Wednesday 17th June 2015 at 16:00 with Doctor J. Ahmed'.

"It's this Wednesday. You need to turn up."

"Fine."

Wanda kept looking at the clock yet she had barely been on the sofa for one minute. The woman in front of her did not seem so intimidating but Wanda was not budging. She was not here of her own volition so she did not have to speak if she did not want to. Instead, she sat back on the sofa and avoided eye contact with Doctor Ahmed.

"You know, I like to start a game with my patients so I can get to know them better," Doctor Ahmed explained gently.

"You want me to play Monopoly or something?" Wanda asked.
"No. It's just a series of questions." Wanda rolled her eyes but Doctor Ahmed continued, "What is your favourite movie?"

"I don't know. The Lion King I guess. I haven't really watched many movies but The Lion King was the only movie I saw in a cinema."

"Okay, and that was?"

"When it came out in 1994. I was four."

"So you are twenty-five and you have only seen one movie in the cinema?"

"Well, when the only cinema gets bombed not long after, it's sort of hard to go see a film."

"Right, makes sense I guess. So how did The Lion King make you feel?"

"Don't know. I haven't seen it in twenty-one years. I probably just liked the songs because my father managed to get a CD of the songs and Pietro and played it day and night. We knew every single word."

Wanda then realised that she was revealing more than she wanted. Her head dropped and then she looked at the clock; it was only five minutes past the hour. Fifty minutes to go.

"So, if I gave you a copy of the movie, would you watch it? See if there are other reasons you liked the movie?"

Wanda shrugged, "I guess."

"I'm sensing that you are resisting a little."

"I don't need therapy. I'm not depressed. I lost my brother; I'm still grieving."

"When I got you psych file, they said you have been in a low mood since your brother's death and have little motivation to do anything. There is a difference between grief and depression; most people when grieving find that the feelings of sadness come and go and have a bit more of a positive outlook."

"Who says I don't?"

"Well, what do you want in the future?"

The question stumped Wanda. In her head, the only thing she could answer was that she wanted a way to bring her brother back, but then that would drive the point home that she was clinically depressed. Which she was not.

"I don't know," Wanda eventually replied.

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"Oh, I just can't wait to be king."

Wanda had found a copy of The Lion King among the hundreds of DVDs that there seemed to be in the Avengers Compound, and she bet that this was the only one out of them she had watched. Rather than sit with everyone else, Wanda decided to watch it in her room. No one could talk over it, and she could take as much in as she wanted.
So far so good. Wanda found herself humming along to the music. She remembered some of these scenes being terrifying in the cinema but as an adult who had faced so much worse, the scene where Simba and Nala were chased by the hyenas was not so bad.

And then the punch in the stomach came: Mufasa's death.

Suddenly, all the emotions she had been holding onto for the best part of fifteen years came out. Her parents' death, HYDRA, Ultron and Pietro's death; it all was let out with anguished screams and sobs, and then she could not breathe. She felt trapped in her own body, her mind racing at eighty miles an hour, her heart felt like it was going to explode, and then she was hyperventilating.

"Wanda?" someone asked as they gently opened the door. It was Steve and as soon as he saw Wanda's sweaty and trembling state he immediately went over to her and tried to get her to use him to support herself and get control over her breathing. It took a minute or two, but the breaths eventually levelled out. "Okay? Good."

Steve got off the bed to grab some water for her while Wanda sat back and ran her hands over her face. Her heart was still racing and she felt very light-headed. After what felt like an eternity, Steve came back with the water. Upon instruction, she took very small sips.

"Thanks," she whispered.

"I guess you don't want to speak about why you had a panic attack?" he asked. Wanda took a moment to try to get her thoughts together. She was thinking loads about why she had the panic attack but it was causing her more anxiety and her eyes began welling up. Sensing this, Steve whispered, "It's okay," and rubbed gentle concentric circles on her back.

"I-" Wanda began. She still felt the lump in her throat and she took another sip of water. "I - um - I was holding a salad bowl. We were preparing for dinner: goulash. I was holding the salad bowl. That was when the shell hit. My parents fell through the floor. Pietro grabbed my hand but the shrapnel of the shell hit my leg. We hide under the bed and the second shell hits and it does not explode. Clear as day, I can still picture that Stark Industries logo. When we were finally saved, I suffering from septicaemia because of the leg wound." Wanda lifted her skirt up a little and revealed a large scar on her thigh. "You probably don't want to hear the rest."

"I don't mind if only you feel comfortable to tell me," Steve spoke but Wanda shook her head. She knew that the HYDRA experiments touched a nerve with Steve since she knew about his best friend Bucky and what HYDRA had done to him. "Okay, do you feel better at least?"

"Maybe a little."

"Where are your pills, Wanda?" Wanda grumbled and went into the draw of her bedside table and pulled out the orange bottle. "I know you don't think you are depressed, but I think your symptoms are more than just grief. I know because I have been where you are."

"You have?"

"After I was broke free from the ice, I found out that everything I knew was gone, but mostly my friends; and I just could not connect with anything and anyone. Then the Battle of New York happened and I think I worked out my place."

"Did they tell you to take meds?"

"I have a high metabolism so pills would not have helped. I'm not saying they are useless because that was just me."
Wanda looked at the orange bottle and thought about what the doctor said about medically clearing her: she would only do it if Wanda went to therapy and took antidepressants to stabilise her mood. The way she was at the moment made her think that she had no purpose in life; maybe Steve had a point by saying he found his purpose by being an Avenger.

Wanda unscrewed the cap, took out the white pill and swallowed it down with the water.

Two weeks later, Wanda was cleared for active duty.
So I have decided that I am making Monday my update day. I have gotten a fair bit ahead in this story so the updates should be regular for the foreseeable future. Hope you enjoy this update.

Chapter Three

Steve had debated for a couple weeks as to whether he should shave the stubble forming on his face, but as soon as he got the shaving foam on his face, he decided against shaving it off. They could not stay in Wakanda forever and he needed a way of not being instantly recognised. The issue was whether they could risk bringing Wanda given that she was still emotionally fragile at the moment. Her depression seemed different from last time. It seemed more unstable. He remembered the incident in the kitchen, and her speech patterns seemed more rapid. Depressed Wanda was not impulsive and she spoke far more slowly.

Then again, he had not really processed what had happened over the last few weeks.

Peggy.

Bucky.

Tony.

He had never hated himself more than that moment in Siberia when Zemo played the video of Bucky killing Howard and Maria, and the look of anger, disgust and betrayal on Tony's face hit him like a punch to the gut. He should have been honest with Tony when he found out about the fact that Howard's death was not an accident; then again, he was only getting his head around the fact that HYDRA had taken his best friend, annihilated anything that was Bucky, turned him into a weapon and had him kill his other best friend. He guessed that he struggled to accept it himself.

Steve put the razor down and splashed water on his face to get the white foam out his facial hair. Once he had dressed, he decided to check on Wanda. The weather was particularly hot today and the sun beat down on his neck despite the fact that Wanda's safe house was literally across the street. He grabbed breakfast - today boerewors - but when he entered Wanda's safe house, something felt different.

Initially, he thought someone had broken into the safe house but he found Wanda - dishevelled and shaky - standing in the middle of the living room and looking between the couch and the window, muttering things under her breath.

“Wanda?” Steve asked apprehensively.

“The couch should be by the window,” Wanda commented. “It lets the cool air in.”

“Okay. Um, I can move it to the window if you like.”
“Yeah. Move it there.” Steve took one good look at Wanda’s face. It looked like it had not been washed in days, her hair was wild and there were clearly defined bags and dark circles under her eyes. “Okay, I have pumpernickel bread in the oven and I was thinking eggs for breakfast. Is Sam coming over?”

“In a minute. Wanda when was the last time you had a shower?”

“Um…” Wanda could not answer that. The last time she had her hair washed was at the hairdresser’s but she had not thought about getting in the shower since. “I should probably take a bath.”

“That’s fine. I can sort breakfast out. When does the bread need to be taken out?”

“Um… Ten minutes.”

“Oh, you get in the bath and I will sort breakfast out.” It seemed like an order, but Wanda obeyed and strolled to the bathroom. “Right, eggs.”

While Steve cooked some eggs for the three of them, the voice in the back of his head told him that Wanda needed to see a doctor. Her depression was one thing, but her sudden surge in erratic and impulsive behaviour suggested that there was some other underlying problem.

“Only me,” Sam announced walking into the kitchen area. “Where’s Wanda?”

“In the bath,” Steve replied. “She’s been up all night I think.”

“So a complete one-eighty from a few days ago. We should get her properly checked out.”

“That is what I have been thinking but… I don’t know. I have been hoping that it would just pass with time.”

“After breakfast, we take her to a doctor.” Steve nodded and went to take the bread out of the oven. “Isn’t that a bit burnt?”

“Pumpernickel bread is meant to be a bit dark.” At that point, they heard a crash coming from Wanda’s bathroom. Steve turned the hob off and slowly edged towards the bathroom door. “Wanda, are you okay?”

Through the door, he could hear her panting almost as though she was trying to regain air after being submerged in water. Steve knocked on the door gently and then he heard Wanda start to open the door.

She had wrapped herself in a towel, but her hair was dripping wet and she looked very spaced out. There was a large pool of water on the floor as though it had been thrown out of the bath.

“Are you okay?” he repeated.

“I thought I saw…” Wanda then shook her head. “Is breakfast done?”

“Yeah.”

“I’ll get dressed.”

Over breakfast, Steve and Sam watched Wanda as she cut all her breakfast into small pieces, but did not eat it. Instead, she seemed to push the pieces around, trying to separate the sausage from the eggs and the eggs from the bread. It was then Steve noticed that her hands were shaking, her foot was tapping rapidly against the floor and she was whispering something under her breath.
“Wanda,” Sam began softly only for a large alarm bell rang through the city. Wanda jumped out of her seat.

“What’s that?” she asked.

“Intruder alarm,” Steve answered. It was the same one he had heard a few weeks ago following T’Challa’s crowning ceremony when his cousin came bearing the gift of Ulysses Klaue’s body. “Sam, stay with Wanda. I’m going to check it out.”

“Are you nuts? What if it is Ross?” Sam asked, only for him to completely ignored as Steve walked out of the door.

Steve kept to the side streets so he could see what was going on but be able to make a getaway if needed. On the grasslands that went before the barrier to the city, the Dora Milaje were standing in formation with their spears pointed towards someone standing outside the forcefield. Someone with distinctive red hair.

“Natasha?”

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“Your new friends are clearly welcoming,” Natasha commented to Steve as she was led into a room by the Dora Milaje General Okoye. Okoye flashed her a look that did not look impressed with the comment as Natasha was made to sit at the table. “So, I take it that shaving has taken a back foot.”

Steve just sat back in his seat. It was not as though he was not happy to see Natasha but given she had let him and Bucky go to Siberia and betrayed Tony’s camp, he was not sure if he could entirely trust her.

“Okay. Um, well, I am now a wanted criminal,” Natasha explained. “I guess you have seen.”

“No. None of us has watched the news,” Steve replied.

“It is true,” Okoye imputed. “All I have seen them watching is some vapid American family.”

Natasha looked confused and then Steve clarified, “Kardashians.”

“Oh. You have to admit it is entertaining,” Natasha replied. “In a car crash type of way.”

Okoye thought about it for a moment and then nodded in agreement.

Natasha took a deep breath before she explained, “Because I let you both get away, I was referred to as a ‘typical commie whore’ by Ross. You know despite the fact that I was seven when the USSR collapsed. So now I am considered an enemy of the United States. Again.”

“So how did you know we were here?”

“Clint and I had words. Luckily none of Ross’ goons knows Latin. The thing is Steve, we need to stick together and we can’t stay here forever..”

“I don’t dispute that Nat but it’s not as simple as that at the moment. Bucky decided he wanted to go into cryogenic freeze, and Wanda…”

“I heard what they did to her on the Raft. How is she?”

It was then that he realised he and Sam had planned to take her to see a doctor, and that he had left
Sam with Wanda without informing him that it was a false alarm. “I need to get back.”

The pair of them walked - well ran - back to Wanda’s safe house where he found Sam trying to talk to Wanda through the bedroom door. “Wanda, it’s okay. The alarm has stopped,” Sam said, and from the tone of his voice, it sounded like he had repeated that phrase for the past twenty minutes.

“What’s going on?” Steve asked.

“She’s locked herself in the bedroom and I can’t hear anything.”

“Okay, stand back.” Steve then started to smash his arm against the door. It took two large shoves but then the door finally opened. Only when he did, he saw that Wanda was moving the furniture around in her room. “Wanda?” Wanda jumped out of her skin as she turned towards the door. “Sorry, sorry. You’re safe. It’s okay.”

“What’s she doing here?” Wanda asked when she saw Natasha. “She’s going to betray us. She’s going to get me sent back to the Raft.”

“No, Wanda, I’m not. I’m here because I don’t agree with Tony or Ross. I’m like you. I’m a criminal.” At that point, Wanda threw a hairdryer at Natasha, only Natasha ducked out of the way before it could hit her. “Maybe I should…”

“Yeah,” Sam said looking at Steve, both silently agreeing that Wanda needed to see a doctor now. “So you on our side now?”

Steve closed the door and picked up the hairdryer. “I know you don’t like being called a criminal, but legally that is what we are Wanda.”

“How can we be criminals when what they did to me violated very human rights convention?” Wanda asked angrily.

“I know.”

“No you don’t. You weren’t there. You did not feel every shock. Every finger being pushed into your skin as they held you down. You did not feel that collar on your throat.”

There was something about her speech that was so incoherent and shaky that Steve thought he had put the finger on what was wrong with her. “Wanda, I think we need to go see a doctor.”

“Why?”

“Because Sam and I are worried about you. We think there is something more serious going on here and we just want you to be safe.” Steve took the risk of taking her hand. “So will you come to see a doctor?”

Steve found it tricky to read Wanda’s thoughts on her face. It seemed like she was going from one thought to the next within half a second and her breath hitched. Finally, she nodded.
Chapter Four

Chapter Notes

To everyone who has left a review or hit the kudos button, thank you so much. Everything has been really lovely and I am really happy people are getting invested in this only after a few chapters.

Anyway, in slight departure from our regular schedule, we have a flashback sequence with teenage Steve and Bucky. Hope you enjoy.

Chapter Four

February 1932

Despite the fact he was now a teenager, Steve Rogers was still treated like a child compared to his best friend Bucky. Steve was about the same height as a nine-year-old while Bucky was at least a foot taller than him, which meant some entertainment for Bucky whenever the shopkeepers asked what his little brother would like. Then there was the fact that the girls in their school would immediately start flirting with Bucky while Steve may as well have been invisible. However, they considered themselves brothers, and since Steve was an only child and Bucky was the elder brother to three sisters, that was no bad thing.

“Filling your shoes with newspaper can’t be comfortable,” Bucky commented when he noticed the way Steve was walking on the way home from school.

“I did say to Mom but we don’t have the money. These were the best I could get,” Steve replied looking at his brown leather shoes. “So, what are we doing tonight?”

“Homework. Gotta keep that perfect GPA if I am going to get that scholarship to Cornell.”

“You do know that is years away right?”

“And what is your plan eh?”

“Don’t know. I can draw. Maybe some art college.” The two walked up the steps to the Rogers apartment, greeting Mr Konstipolis on the way up. “Right, what do you want to start with first?”

“I think since my biology test is tomorrow I should study for that. You?”

“Algebra.” Steve put the key in the door and announced, “Ma, it’s us.”

Sarah Rogers was in the kitchen wearing her nurse’s uniform and her blonde hair tied back into a bun. However, when she saw her son she gave the brightest smile. “How was your day Stevie?”

“Ma,” Steve groaned. Stevie was fine when he was five years old but now he was becoming the man of the house, he did not think people would take him seriously if he was referred to that way.

“I know, I know. So are you and James going to get on with your homework while I am at work?”
“I’ll make sure he does Mrs R,” Bucky replied.

“Good. Oh James. How is your Mom? I haven’t seen her around for a while.”

Sarah did not notice Bucky tense up at the mention of his mother, but Steve did. Which is why Steve did not believe his best friend answered, “She’s fine. Just been hit with the flu.”

“Okay, well give her the best from me and if she needs any medicine she knows where I am.” Sarah grabbed her back and placed a kiss on Steve’s cheek. “Bye sweetheart.”

“Bye Ma,” Steve replied. As soon as she left he queried, “Is your Mom actually sick with the flu?”

“Drop it Steve,” Bucky answered shortly.

Sensing it touched a nerve with Bucky, Steve did not approach the subject of Mrs Barnes for a few days. It remained in the back of his mind because Bucky’s mother seemed to have vanished. He passed the house on the way to and from school and he was tempted to knock on the door to see if Mrs Barnes was in and say hello. Bucky would not allow him into the house, and Steve was confused. The pair never hid much from each other, but Bucky just did not want to speak about his mother at all.

Then one afternoon, Bucky had to explain. As usual, Steve and Bucky took the fifteen minute walk from the middle school to Steve’s apartment, but on the way back they found Mrs Barnes yelling at one of the market stall holders. She seemed hysteric and furious. It was then Steve noticed the woman was being stared at by passersby. He then turned to his friend and noticed the look of horror as his mother laid into the stall holder for what seemed like a ridiculous reason.

Eventually, Bucky plucked up the courage to walk over to the confrontation, “Mom. Come on, it’s not worth it.”

“Don’t you tell me what’s worth it James!”

“Mom, come on. Please.” Since Bucky was around the same height as his mother, it was easy to pull her away. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t say sorry to him. That fish was there three days ago and he is charging a fortune for it!”

Steve could not take his eyes off the sight before him as Bucky practically dragged his mother towards the house. Mrs Barnes was yelling various profanities at the stall holder and the only thing Steve could do was follow them into the house.

The house was completely different to the last time he was there. The wallpaper looked as though it had been scratched at, the house was a complete mess and when inspecting the cupboards, Steve found very little food, but there seemed to be various dresses that had come from the market.

“Okay Mom. You sit here while I get you a drink,” Bucky ordered as he put his mother on the couch. He walked over to the sink and grabbed a glass of water.

“How long has this been going on?” Steve asked.

“A few months,” Bucky answered. “She started by moving all the furniture and then just…”

“Just what?”

“She spent all the money on clothes for herself. The reason I am eating at yours is because I know
“Why did you not say anything Buck?”

“Because if I tell anyone, they will take her to the nut house and we will end up in an orphanage.”

Bucky had three younger sisters, and Steve knew the last two years had been tough on the family. Mr Barnes had died in a factory accident, which then left Bucky the man of the house with a depressed mother and three dependable siblings. Steve looked over to Mrs Barnes and saw how spaced out she was. She seemed to be muttering things under her breath, which the few words that Steve could make out made no sense.

“Steve, promise me that you won’t say anything. Not even to your mom.”

“But Mom is a nurse -”

“Please Steve. I can’t lose her.”

Steve took a deep breath and nodded.

-o-

Over the next few weeks, the situation at the Barnes’ house descended into the worst state Steve had seen. Mrs Barnes’ mood went from completely erratic to practically comatose. She refused to get out of bed and worse still, there was no way of getting through to her.

By this point, Bucky’s sisters were starving and going to school in unclean clothes. Bucky was struggling to cope as well. For the first time in his life, he got a D on a test, but when questioned whether he had the time to study, he still did not reveal that his mother was not able to take care of them.

It was then that Steve had to intervene.

“Ma, there is something wrong with Bucky’s mom,” he stated plainly one morning.

“What is it Steve?” Sarah asked.

“She spent all their money on clothes. They have no food and Bucky is trying to take care of Josie, Jenny and Jodie by himself. Mrs Barnes won’t get out of bed.”

“How long have you known about this?”

“A few weeks. Bucky swore me to secrecy.”

“Okay sweetie. I’m going to go round to the house and see what is going on.”

“You’re not going to tell anyone are you?”

However, Sarah was already out of the door.

The next day, Bucky did not show up for school. It seemed that Sarah’s intervention meant that Mrs Barnes was taken to a psych ward and Bucky and the girls were put in an orphanage upstate. Steve felt bad about it; he had betrayed his best friend’s trust and it had cost him his only friend.

Bucky’s absence went on for weeks. Without Bucky to walk home with, it meant the bullies were not as afraid to start picking a fight with Steve. In the weeks since Bucky’s mother was taken to the
psych ward, Steve had lost his jacket, his backpack with all his sketches and his shoes.

It was only when the bullies tried to beat Steve to the floor that someone came to help.

“Bucky?” Steve asked in confusion.

Since Bucky was a boxer, hitting the bullies was no problem, though he did get a lot of verbal abuse regarding his mother. After the bullies ran away, Bucky helped Steve up.

“You’re back,” Steve commented as he brushed the dust off his jacket.

“Mom’s home,” Bucky explained.

“Oh… So you and the girls are back there?”

“Well, I am. The orphanage people want to make sure the house is fit before they come home.”

“How is your mom?”

“Better. They gave her shock therapy. She had something called manic depression, but they managed to fix her.”

“Oh. That’s good.”

“Listen, Steve. I’m sorry that I haven’t written to you.”

“Don’t. I betrayed you.”

“You did what you thought was right. If you had not intervened then we probably would have starved. You’re a good friend Steve.”

Steve gave a faint smile. “So, what’s your homework?”

“History. You?”

“Well, I would have had to do French if those punks hadn’t stolen my bag.”

“That’s fine. We’ll get it back. Fancy a little adventure?”
There seemed to be some confusion as to why I included that particular flashback in the last chapter. Primarily, t was to show how 'Steve thought he had put the finger on what was wrong with [Wanda]' which now leads into this chapter. So I hope that clears that confusion up.

Enjoy.

Chapter Five

"Are you cold Wanda?" Steve asked when he noticed that Wanda was shaking. Wanda nodded and he grabbed a blanket to wrap around her. Both were sat on a medical bed waiting for the psychiatrist to come to assess Wanda. She was very agitated and was unable to sit still. She felt like something was crawling under her skin and into her brain, and she wanted to stick a knife into her head to get it out. "It's going to be okay; we will get you help."

"What's wrong with me Steve?" she asked softly. "I don't like feeling this way. I feel like my head is going to explode. I can hear everything. I feel like I am going to throw up."

Steve pushed her hair out of her face; she looked terrified, mostly of herself. He took her hand and squeezed it tightly. "We're here for you no matter what."

"Miss Maximoff?" a woman's voice asked. "I'm Doctor Bankole. I'm just here to have a little talk with you. Is that okay?" Wanda nodded. "How are you feeling?"

Wanda ran her hands through her hair and tried to speak everything that came to her mind with spaced out eyes, "I don't know. I feel sick, I feel like my head is going to explode, I can't sleep, I can't eat, I think something is under my skin, my chest is going to burst open, I'm scared, and I don't want to feel like this. I'm scared of myself," Wanda explained with very little pause between each thought. She grabbed the glass of water Steve had gotten her and took three full gulps of the liquid, finishing the glass off.

Doctor Bankole wrote down some notes and then took a good look at Wanda's body language and facial expression. She observed, "I can see from your appearance that you seem agitated and have not slept. I can also see you've lost a lot of weight. You registered at sixty-three kilograms when you arrived, but you've dropped quite rapidly to fifty-seven kilos." At that point, Doctor Bankole sat in the chair in front of Wanda. "Can you describe if you have had a depressive episode in the last few weeks?"

Wanda nodded and replied, "It felt like just a few days ago. I didn't really want to get out of bed, but I just felt guilty for everything. Sokovia, Lagos. If it wasn't for me then none of us would be here. I just don't think we're ever going to get home."

"And have you had any hallucinations?"
Wanda became uncomfortable all of a sudden. She took a couple of deep breaths but eventually answered, "This morning. I was in the bath and I put my face under the water. When I opened my eyes I saw… In the Raft, one of the officers was called Lockwood. He was the one that hit me the most. I saw him, while I was in the bath."

Doctor Bankole and Steve looked at one another. "Okay, Wanda. What you are describing to me is the early signs of something called bipolar disorder. It means that your mood can have an extreme high and then an extreme low. Do you understand what I am telling you?"

Wanda nodded. Steve gave her hand a squeeze before asking, "So what do we do now?"

"We will set up a treatment plan for her. I think we should admit her overnight just so we can start stabilising her mood swings and ensure she gets a decent night's sleep. Also, it might be worth getting some nutrition into her since she has not eaten properly since she has been here. Would that be okay Wanda?" Wanda nodded. "Okay, I will inform the nurses."

Doctor Bankole left and Wanda looked at Steve. "Am I crazy?"

"No, you're just unwell, but we're going to get you better," Steve answered.

Then the nurse came to get Wanda and find her a private room to rest in. The room was spacious enough that Wanda did not feel so trapped, and was able to look over the jungle. The elderly nurse seemed friendly enough that Wanda did not seem scared of her. She gave Wanda the space to change into the blue hospital gown provided and then helped get her into bed. Wanda felt a little like a child since the nurse reminded her so much of her grandmother who usually looked after her when she was ill.

"Okay sweetheart. What do you fancy for dinner?" the nurse asked. "We have peanut stew."

Wanda nodded. As soon as the nurse left, Doctor Bankole and Steve entered the room. "Okay Wanda, I have your medicine here." The doctor pulled out an orange prescription container that reminded Wanda so much of the anti-depressants she took last year. "This is called lithium carbonate. This should help stabilise your mood swings. You need to stick to the dose because it can cause some adverse side effects."

The prescription container was put on the table in front of Wanda and she picked it up, looking at the instructions: three a day. Wanda undid the cap and took one of the pills out. She put it into her mouth and swallowed it down with water. She looked towards Steve and he gave her a soft smile in response.

"How long should these take to kick in?" Steve asked.

"It should not take longer than a week," Doctor Bankole answered. "After you've had something to eat, we will give you a low-level sedative and that should help send you off to sleep."

"Okay," Wanda replied.

"Are you okay to stay with her tonight Captain?"

"I will," Steve answered taking the seat next to the bed. "We can watch a film. Something lighthearted."

-0-

"Uh, we had a slight weapons malfunction, but uh... everything's perfectly all right now. We're fine."
Wanda was picking at her stew quite nervously, even though she was aware that it was decent. Her appetite just was not there, but she was trying to get it back. It reminded her of when she was a child and in the aftermath of her home being destroyed and her parents' death; she would not eat a thing. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that when they were about to have dinner when the shell hit.

They were just about to get to the scene where Luke, Han, Leia and Chewbacca were trying to escape the trash compactor when there was a faint knock on the door.

"Up for a visit?" Sam asked. Wanda pushed the stew away and looked to Sam. "So, what have they said?"

"Bipolar disorder," Steve answered. "They want to keep her in overnight just so she'll sleep."

"Well, I guess that explains the lashing out." Wanda looked down at her food. "Natasha's fine. They have her in a safe house."

"I'm sorry," Wanda whispered.

"I don't think you should be saying it to me, Wanda."

"Not the hairdryer; I think I scared you when I ran into my room."

"You know Wanda, I've seen vets with PTSD, depression and bipolar disorder. Nothing you have done has scared me; though I do think that throwing a hairdryer has to be one of the more unique things I have seen."

"Is she mad at me?"

"Nah. She's just as worried as we are. She actually said she probably deserved it."

"She didn't."

Now that she had the space to think, Wanda knew that throwing the hairdryer at Natasha was a reaction to the hallucination she had earlier and part of her paranoia of being sent back to the Raft. It was probably the association of Natasha being on Tony's arresting team that did it. In all the chaos of the fight in Germany, Wanda missed the part where Natasha let Steve and Bucky get away. The ringing in her ears from Rhodey's sonic waves knocked her out, and she was only aware of what Natasha had done when he overheard Ross screaming about it while waiting to be detained.

"Can you get her to come here?" Wanda asked.

Half an hour later, Natasha gently knocked on the door but kept a distance in case Wanda decided to throw something at her again. However, seeing Wanda look so small, and simultaneously child-like and ancient under the covers gave her some comfort that Wanda was not a threat.

"So, they said you have bipolar disorder," Natasha stated.

"Yeah," Wanda replied softly. "Explains why I have been lashing out for no reason."

"I wouldn't say it was for no reason. I didn't exactly help you guys out when they were taking you to the Raft. So what is the treatment plan?"

"This," Wanda answered holding up the orange container. "Lithium. Sounds like I am going to
"poison myself."

"Anything else?"

"Food and sleep." Sam and Steve looked at one another wondering where this was conversation was going. "I'm sorry about the hairdryer."

"I've had worse. Clint yanked my hair when he was under mind control. I then threw smacked him so hard he was knocked unconscious."

"But I am, you did not deserve it."

Natasha then noticed that Wanda was starting to drift off. "You okay?"

"She took a sedative half an hour," Sam explained. "I think we should let her sleep and continue this in the morning. Are you staying with her, Steve?"

"Yeah," Steve answered giving a small smile to Wanda, who gave a faint but tired smile in response. "I've got it from here." Sam and Natasha bid goodbye and Steve sat back in his chair. He looked at Wanda and he felt better knowing that there was something that was being done about her mental state, though whether they would be able to keep her moods stable was another thing. "How are you feeling?"

"Tired mostly. I think that sedative was a lot stronger than they said," she answered. "It makes sense. My head has always been a little f*cked up. If it is not nightmares it is anxiety. If it is not depression it is bipolar disorder."

"It's okay. I think a good night sleep will do you some good." Steve pressed a kiss to her forehead and pressed the button to lower the blinds. "Sleep."

Wanda lowered the bed so it was lying flat and curled onto her side. It took less than a minute for her to drift off into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

So the next chapter is another flashback to Wanda's childhood. That one is going to inform a lot more of the later chapters and it will be the last full chapter flashback I promise.

Until next Monday.
Chapter Six

July 1995

Wanda did not know what was going on as she watched the news. She did not get why this town in Bosnia was so significant given that people were dying in each of the Yugoslav states every single day. She heard the word genocide being spoken, though she had no idea what it meant. It was a big word for a five-year-old. She looked into the kitchen where her mother was trying to calm down her grandmother. Her grandmother was crying and rambling about it happening again. Wanda turned back to the TV. There were many women crying hysterically.

“Mummy,” Wanda called. “What’s going on?”

Marya then noticed what her daughter was watching - only because her mother had been watching the news and had not switched over to something more appropriate - and immediately went to turn the television off.

“Wanda, you are too young to be hearing about things like this,” Marya told her daughter.

“But…” Wanda did not get how she was too young. Wanda had known no different. Her earliest memory was a shootout between Sokovian rebels and the Serbian government forces. “I just want to know why-”

“You’re too young to understand.”

“Marya,” her grandmother interrupted. “I think it’s time for us to tell her.”

“No Mum. She’s only five.”

“And I was fifteen. Wanda, come here Iubirea mea.” Wanda walked over to her grandmother and her grandmother lifted her onto her lap. “You know that you are half Romani right?” Wanda nodded. “Well, when I was your age, a man who thought that some people were more pure than others, like the Romani, and they put the others in different houses and even in these places called concentration camps.”

“Mum,” Marya tried to intervene.

The older woman ignored her daughter and carried on with her story, “They sent me to one of those camps. They worked me to the bone. We had very little food and were kept like animals.”

“That’s really mean,” Wanda commented. Her grandmother blinked at her. Mean was an understatement. “The people on TV…”

“They were different to the Serbs.” Wanda did not get it; being different to someone did not mean they deserved to die. “I think you’ll understand better when you’re older.”

“Exactly,” Marya said taking Wanda off her mother’s lap and bending down to her daughter’s level. “Wanda, there are some people in the world who are evil. They believe what they do is right but it
isn’t right. I don’t know why but they do. I wish I could explain to you and Pietro but even I don’t understand why people hate other people because they live differently. The one thing you need to know is that you are not a bad person because of who you are.”

Wanda nodded, but still did not understand what her mother meant. In her little head, she could not get why a person would want to hurt another being, nor why anyone would think she would be a bad person when she had done nothing wrong.

“One broken arm coming through,” a male voice announced through the apartment. Django Maximoff came in with Pietro, who had a cast around his arm and a pitiful look on his face.

“Someone is not taking any trips down the stairs on a skateboard again. So what’s happened here?”

“Nothing dragă. Wanda was just watching too much TV.”

“You’ll get square eyes dušica.”

“Okay Daddy,” Wanda replied.

The news was the same over the next few days: the same town in Bosnia. Marya kept trying to keep Wanda and Pietro away from the awful details of what happened to the men and boys of that town, but given that it was everywhere it was near impossible.

Then the images started appearing in the newspapers and then Wanda saw something she should not have. That night, she had a nightmare and screamed the apartment down.

The night after she did the same, and the night after that and the night after that. Worse still, she had started to wet the bed again. She felt embarrassed. She was five and had not wet the bed since she was three. Her mother did not seem put out by having to change the sheets in the morning but Wanda could never escape the shame.

On the fifth night, Wanda refused to sleep. Everytime she shut her eyes, the image that she had seen in the newspaper was plastered onto her eyelids. Pietro was sleeping soundly in the bed on the other side of the room and the only other noise was the clock chiming to tell the apartment it was past midnight. Wanda’s bedtime was seven.

Despite the fact she had heard her parents go to bed two hours ago, Wanda could see a dim light from the living room through the crack under the door, and it made her worry that someone else was in the apartment.

She crept out of bed and gently opened the door so that Pietro would not be woken up. It sounded like the news again and then she realised it must have been her grandmother. It was confirmed when she saw the old woman sitting in the chair.

“Baka, why are you awake? Wanda asked.

“I could ask you the same thing young lady,” the woman replied. Wanda shuffled her feet the same way she always did when she was hiding something. “Is it to do with what you saw in the newspaper?” Wanda nodded. “Come here Wanda.” Wanda walked over and perched herself on the sofa beside her grandmother. “What you saw was not natural. That is not how most people treat each other. However, some people are pure evil.”

“Why?”

“I wish I knew. They just are. I witnessed the most evil thing that humans have to offer but I can’t explain why that happened. No one can.”
Wanda then noticed the tattoo on her grandmother’s arms: it was a series of numbers that Wanda did not know its significance. The numbers just seemed random, and her grandmother seemed to not want to ever look at it, which made Wanda wonder why she would get a tattoo like that if she hated looking at it.

“I’m scared Baka. I think people are going to come in and take Daddy and Pietro away.”

“Is that why you’ve been having nightmares?” Wanda nodded. “Did I ever tell you I had a twin brother?”

“No.”

“When the Nazis invaded Romania, we had heard what was happening to the Jewish people, and we knew the Romani were next. We knew that they were taken during the night and it did happen to us. We were taken to be deported, my brother and I were separated. I haven’t seen him since 1944. I think he died because he never came to find me.”

“Do you think about him?”

“Every day. Listen, Iubirea mea. I don’t imagine anything happening to your father and Pietro the extent it happened to me and Alexandru. You and your brother are joined at the hip so I know you will always look out for one another. If anyone tries to take him, I doubt you will let them.”

“I won’t.”

“It’s hard to explain to you now when you are still so young, but you are a smart little girl.”

“Am I?”

“You are very emotionally smart.” Wanda did not what they meant but she took the compliment. “Just remember that you can be anything you want to be, and no one should hold you back, especially yourself.”

When Django and Marya woke up at six in the morning, Wanda was curled up on the couch next to her grandmother, sleeping soundly.

Chapter End Notes

Like I said in the previous chapter, this flashback is going to inform some of the later chapters in this story.

The next chapter is the last one in Part One so there is going to be a little more action.
Chapter Seven

“How have you two coped with being stuck in the same place for three weeks?” Natasha asked. “I feel like I am going to lose my mind with boredom and I have only been here a day.”

“I think it is because we’ve both been so occupied with Wanda that we haven’t had a chance to be bored. She had kept us on our toes,” Sam replied. Both had returned to the medical facility to visit Wanda and hopefully get her and Natasha on the same page now that Wanda had the chance to sleep. “Problem is Nat until we’re sure she’s stable, we can’t leave Wakanda.”

“I know. As I said, we have to stick together now there is only the four of us.” They turned into Wanda’s hospital room where Steve was fast asleep in the chair but Wanda was wide awake, eating her breakfast of mandazi, and watching a bad sitcom where it seemed like she was paying attention. “Hey, how’s the patient?”

“Bit better I think,” Wanda replied with a soft smile. “I think Steve has been awake half the night so I did not have the heart to wake him.”

“Trust me, he did not sleep for four days straight when S.H.I.E.L.D collapsed. He only needs power naps. So, do you still want to throw something at me?”

“Not really, but we’ll see.” There was a mild smirk on Wanda’s face and Natasha smirked back. Wanda then grew serious and said, “I don’t think you’re going to betray us. Yesterday, I had a hallucination that I was back in the Raft and it triggered some sort of paranoia that made me think that I was going to be sent back there.”

“I get it. I wasn’t hurt; I was just worried because I have never seen you that irrational before. You being unwell made sense.”

Sam, whose eyes were flicking between Wanda and Natasha like he was watching a tennis match, finally felt like he could relax between them and sighed, “Okay, now we’re all cool, what are we going to do now?”

Wanda turned her head to Steve, who was still sleeping in the chair. She answered, “It’s up to Steve really. I think I can stay in the safe house on my own but I don’t know if he will want to keep an eye on me.”

“Do you think you will be well enough to leave Wakanda eventually?”

“It depends on what Doctor Bankole says.”

“I would say wait until we’re sure the meds have kicked in properly,” Natasha suggested. “That way we know that you’re stable enough.”

“I guess.”

“Where would we go, though?” Sam asked. “We’re wanted fugitives everywhere.”
“We can work that out,” Natasha imputed. “Not now, but we will work it out.”

“Did you at least bring me some clean clothes?” Wanda asked.

“You sure they are going to discharge you today?”

“Doctor Bankole said I only had to be in overnight.”

“Then it is a good thing I bought some choices for you then.” Natasha opened up the small duffle bag. The first outfit was a t-shirt and shorts and the other was a simple grey cotton dress. “So which one?”

“The dress,” Wanda replied. At that point, Steve’s eyes began fluttering open and he had to blink a few times for his eyes to adjust to the light. “Morning.”

“How long have you been awake?” he asked rubbing his eyes.

“An hour. You looked so peaceful that I did not want to disturb you.”

“Have you eaten?”

“Yes, and have taken my medication.”

“How are you feeling?”

“A little better now I have slept and eaten.” Wanda gave him a small smile. Steve’s heart gave a squeeze because she seemed so much brighter and calmer than she had been for the last few weeks. “We’ve just been thinking about moving on.”

Steve looked between Wanda, Sam and Natasha, wondering what they had discussed without him. “You mean leave Wakanda?”

“We have to Steve,” Sam began. “Now that the country is opening up, there are going to be delegates from every country coming in. If they catch us then it’s going to get back to Ross sooner or later.”

“He’s got a point,” Natasha added. “I’m not saying today, but we need to leave in two weeks maximum.”

Steve stood up and stretched the cramping muscles in his back. Sam was right about the delegates, but he was still unsure if Wanda was well enough to leave, especially since they would have to find ways of getting her medication. If she slipped into an episode of mania, it could draw more attention to them than they wanted. Then there was the logistics. They needed fake passports and a way of disguising themselves and taking their kits with them.

“If we do this, we will need to plan it to the last letter,” he said.

“We will. It’s not as though we don’t have the backup,” Natasha replied. “I made a list last night: first thing to do is sort out the fake passports and get money transferred from our accounts. Someone in this country should be able to help us out.”

There was a knock on the door and they all turned to see Doctor Bankole standing in the doorway with a clipboard. “I can see that you are going to be well looked after Wanda.”

“She will,” Natasha responded.
“How are you feeling, Wanda?”

“How’s it going?” Wanda replied softly.

“Do you still feel agitated?”

“Not as much.”

“Well, I can see that your speech has slowed down a little. I think you should be good to go back to
the safe house so long as you have someone with you for the next week.”

An hour later, Wanda was formally discharged and back in her safe house. It was clear that Natasha
and Sam had made the effort to clean and tidy the place while she was in the hospital, and she was
grateful for it. It helped her head feel clear and less stressed out. She still felt nervous though. The
hallucination still played on her mind and she was very apprehensive about going into her bathroom.

Steve, Sam and Natasha stayed with her all day. Partly to ensure that she took her next two doses of
lithium, ate and slept, but also to show that they were going to be there for her. Wanda felt some
relief at that.

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Three days later, Wanda’s mood had mellowed enough that Steve and Sam could finally relax and
let her do her own thing, but there was still the question of what to do next. Steve had come around
to the idea of leaving, though his concern over how they were going to keep Wanda’s bipolar
disorder at bay was still in the back of his mind. It was still very early days and Steve was worried
that if she stopped taking her lithium then the depression or mania (whichever came first) would be
more intense.

“I think we should head east,” Natasha suggested. “They’ll be looking in places in Europe. Not so
much Japan or South Korea.”

“You sure about that?” Sam asked.

“They’re not as smart as they think they are. They’ll think we’ll be in Moscow or Berlin. East Asia is
our best bet to start off.”

“And then what?” Steve asked.

“Depends on how bored Ross gets.”

“He won’t get bored,” Wanda interrupted. She had been reading a book while the others talked, but
she had been listening “He’s still after Doctor Banner’s blood. Literally.” Sam and Steve looked at
one another confused where Wanda knew this from. “I looked into his head. He was involved in
why Banner can turn into the Hulk.”

“Did you know about this?” Sam asked Natasha.

“Vaguely. Ross was in Harlem before Banner ran to India. I think whoever was in charge of the
clear-up took Ross’ word that he had no idea where the Hulk had come from, or else he would have
been put in prison a long time ago,” Natasha explained.

“Surely Banner would have told you,” Steve replied.

“Bruce always insisted that the Hulk was purely him. I think it might have to do with his ex-
girlfriend being involved in the experiment as well so if he implemented Ross, he would have had to implement Betty as well. It doesn’t help that she’s also Ross’ daughter.”

“Fair enough, I guess, but Wanda is right. If Ross is still after Banner nearly ten years later, then he’s not going to stop until we’re arrested.”

“So we head east?” Wanda asked.

“If you're up for it. We need to consult the doctor though. See if she can give you a decent supply of your meds.”

“So now we know where we’re going, we need passports and money,” Steve instructed.

That was actually easier than they thought. They found someone who could arrange the passports and fake names to be made as soon as possible. Though the next step involved asking for help to hack into everyone’s bank accounts and take all the money that they had acquired over the years. He did not have a great deal before he crashed into the ice, but Howard must have insisted the account be left open because when he woke up, the interest combined with the money S.H.I.E.L.D put in to help him rebuild and some veteran benefits were enough to live a comfortable retirement. Natasha and Sam had decent savings as well from their salaries and in Sam’s case his veteran payments. Wanda thought her contribution would be a fraction compared to the other three but was shockingly enough to see her through. It was a combination of some inheritance she and Pietro earned from their grandmother (Pietro’s share going to her after his death), some compensation from the shell attack and Pietro’s death, and some earnings from the year she was a part of the Avengers. Between the four, they managed to acquire at least $1,000,000.

“That has to be more than enough to cover flights and hotel rooms, as well as food,” Natasha commented when she saw the number on the shared account. “$250,000 each.”

“So, we have passports and money, and Wanda is clear to go,” Sam explained. “When do we go?”

“Tomorrow. I think to prevent suspicion we should head to another country first and then get a flight to Tokyo,” Steve answered.

At that point, the phone on Steve’s wall began ringing. It was Shuri, the young scientist who was helping try to fix Bucky’s brain. Steve looked confused but answered the call.

“Captain, I think I have got it!” Shuri exclaimed.

“Got what?” Sam asked.

“I have found a way to fix Sergeant Barnes!”

“So, you’re telling me you can just reset his brain like a computer?” Steve asked.

“The human brain is the best computer in the world, but it can also be invaded by viruses. Think of his brainwashing like a computer virus. It attacks everything. So if we reset his brain from scratch, then Sergeant Barnes should be able to remember who he is without the Winter Soldier!” Shuri explained excitedly. Steve blinked but took her word for it. Shuri then became serious as she explained, “However, he will need to stay in Wakanda to recuperate. It is a very delicate process. The scans showed years and years of brain damage so doing this is going to add to that. He needs to rest his brain before he can be back to himself again.”
Steve understood that bit clearer. He did not like the idea of leaving his best friend behind again, but Shuri was right in saying that Bucky’s mind needed to rest. “Okay. Do you know how long it could take?”

“As I said, the damage is extensive. It could take months or even a few years for him to be back to where he was in 1945.”

“Thanks for letting me know.”

“Your welcome. So, are you leaving?”

“Tomorrow. Delegates are going to want to look in on Wakanda now your brother has opened up to the world. If they get a glance of any of us then it’s not just us that is going to be in serious trouble. You could all be arrested for harbouring fugitives.”

“Yeah, we’ll be in deep shit. Is Wanda okay to leave?”

“She’s better, and with the money, we should be able to get her medication.”

“I just remember seeing her when you brought her in. What they did…”

“I know.”

“They very nearly choked her to death. I have never seen so much damage to the windpipe of a living human.”

“Do you know much about bipolar disorder?”

“A little. I know that genetics is a huge factor. It can take just one thing to trigger it and become ill. Maybe what happened on the Raft triggered it in Wanda.”

Having heard that, it made sense why Wanda developed bipolar disorder, and it made more sense why Bucky’s mother became mentally ill after the death of Bucky’s father. He turned to look at Bucky and then back of Shuri. He held his hand out to shake Shuri’s and she shook it.

“Thank you for everything Shuri.”

When Steve returned to Wanda’s safe house, he found Natasha with a towel around her head and dabbing what looked to be hair bleach into Wanda’s hair.

“We need to find ways not to be recognised too easily, and my hair would make me stand out in the crowd,” Natasha explained. “Wanda, here, is going to be a redhead.” Wanda did not look too sure about this, or the smell of the bleach was really off-putting. “At least I won’t have to cut her hair. I, on the other hand, am cutting this whole thing off once it’s done.”

“As in a pixie cut?” Steve asked.

“It’s easier than Wanda and I having the same haircut.”

While Natasha washed the dye out of her own hair, Wanda was expected to sit and wait for the bleach to develop. To pass the time, she switched on the television and an episode of Friends came on the screen. Steve joined her, though rather than watching the television, he kept glancing at Wanda but did not know why. About halfway through the episode, Wanda turned her head towards him and gave him the softest smile that instantly melted his heart.

“You okay Steve?” she asked.
“Yeah. How are you?”

“Honestly, I’m worried about leaving. Natasha and Sam are right, but if we make one wrong move, then we could be back where we started.”

“I know. I can’t say I’m not worried too. Nat was always better at undercover than I was.”

“So what did Shuri say about Bucky?”

“Shuri can reset his brain so that whatever HYDRA put in there will be gone.”

“That’s great.”

“But we have to leave him here. He needs time to really get back to himself.” Wanda could sense a tinge of guilt in Steve for having to leave his best friend behind. “But it is the best thing for him at the end of the day. He needs to take the time to find himself rather than me just telling him who he is.”

“I guess that makes sense.” Wanda placed her hand on top of Steve’s and her thumb stroked the rough skin. “I don’t think I ever said thank you for getting me the help I needed.”

“There is no need to. I care about you, and I don’t want to see you hurt.”

He gave her a gentle smile and laced his fingers with hers. Steve’s breath was caught in his throat and his mouth felt suddenly dry. Before he could dare make a move closer to her, Natasha came bursting out of the bathroom, her hair now cropped and bright blonde.

“Wanda, come on. You need to wash that bleach out before it starts burning through your scalp,” she ordered. Wanda removed her hand from Steve’s and got up from the couch and went into the bathroom. Steve’s eyes could only follow her.

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The next day, Steve, Wanda, Sam and Natasha were standing on the fields of Mount Bashenga, looking out at the wilderness they were about to trek through to get to Nairobi and make the connection to get to Tokyo.

The four of them looked back to find T’Challa, Shuri, Okoye and the other tribes of Wakanda standing on the steps looking out to the mountains. T’Challa moved forward and held his hand out to shake Steve’s.

“Are you absolutely certain that you have to leave?” T’Challa asked as Steve took it.

“It’s for your safety as much as ours,” Steve answered. “You’re in the United Nations now; harbouring their enemies is going to bring ramifications on you and you don’t need it, Your Highness.”

“Well, I hope the four of you know what you are doing and wish you the best.”

As a mark of respect, T’Challa crossed his arms: the ‘Wakanda Forever’ symbol. Shuri, the Dora Milaje, and the tribes that made up the people of Wakanda followed suit. For a nation that was so isolationist only a matter of weeks ago, the fact they opened their arms to five outsiders when they did not have to made Steve indebted to T’Challa for the rest of his life.

“Thank you for everything,” Steve said.

“If you ever need our help, you know where we are.”
Steve turned back to his friends and took a deep breath as the four of them took their first steps into a world where they were fugitives.

End of Part One

Chapter End Notes

So lovely readers, we are now entering part two. Expect unresolved sexual tension and girl bonding. Are you ready for it?
Part Two: ...Ready for It?

In the middle of the night, in my dreams,
You should see the things we do, baby.
In the middle of the night, in my dreams,
I know I’m going to be with you
So I take my time.
Are you ready for it?

Chapter One

Surprisingly, Tokyo was the one place that Steve had never been to in his missions. He guessed it was because there was nothing really significant for them to go after but even seeing it in all its splendour was more than he ever imagined. He had learnt some Japanese from Jim Morita but his Japanese was clearly not as good as Natasha’s as demonstrated when they walked into a nice hotel and went up to reception.

“Kon’nichiwa, eigo o hanashimasu ka?” Natasha asked.

“I can,” the receptionist replied. “How may I help you?”

“We need two twin rooms for a week.”

Wanda leaned her forearms against the reception desk as she observed how Natasha haggled for two twin rooms. For the sake of money, they agreed that they should share rooms, which then meant that Natasha could keep an eye on Wanda. Steve and Natasha signed the forms for each room under their fake names, showing the fake passports and they got the key to the rooms. Luckily they were adjoining so they could go in between the rooms. Wanda put her backpack on the bed and began to dig for her medication, just so she knew where it was when she needed to take it.

“So since we’re pretending to be tourists, I suggest we take the day to explore the city,” Natasha told Wanda.

“Can I have a shower first?” Wanda asked. “I feel a little stiff from the flight.”

“Yeah, you go freshen up while I tell the boys.”

Wanda took out a red plaid shirt, black jeans and underwear, and rested them on the bed before going to the shower. It took a couple minutes for her to work out what the controls on the wall were for but eventually, she found a temperature that was perfect enough to release the tensions in her back but not scald her. She grabbed the complimentary shampoo and lathered it into her hair. It felt so much lighter than it had been. Cutting it was the best idea she ever had, even if it was her bipolar disorder that dictated that she should cut it.

Once she washed her body from top to toe, Wanda turned off the water and grabbed one of the
towels. Looking at herself in the mirror, she really noticed how different her hair looked. It was not
the same red as Natasha’s had been; it looked more strawberry blonde. Yet she could not say she
hated it. It was just so different from her natural hair colour. She left the bathroom and went straight
to the bed where she had laid her clothes out. Just as she unwrapped the towel, the door adjoining the
two rooms opened and Steve came in.

“Wanda - oh God, I’m sorry.” Wanda quickly wrapped the towel back around her. “I should have
knocked.”

“No, it’s fine Steve,” she replied. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. We were just thinking of grabbing something to eat before we went to look around the
city.” Steve could not make eye contact with her and his cheeks were pink. “I should go.”

Wanda nodded and tried not to smile at his embarrassment, though he looked so adorable. Once she
was dressed, Wanda went into the other hotel room, giving Steve a reassuring smile. He still tried to
avoid her eye contact.

“So where are we going to eat?”

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Sam was convinced that they must have gotten their times mixed up because the meal in front of
them had Miso soup and rice. Natasha did not seem to care what time of day it was and was digging
into some grilled fish. Wanda had taken small helpings of everything, mostly in a bid to actually
expand her food horizons since Japanese food was something she had never encountered before.

“Where is the bacon?” Sam asked.

“This is a traditional Japanese breakfast, Sam,” Natasha told him. Sam just shrugged and took what
he could.

Steve, on the other hand, did not appear to be eating much. He was still thinking about what
happened in Wanda’s hotel room. It was only a few seconds but Steve glimpsed at every single inch
of Wanda’s body from her full breasts to the dark brown curls at the apex of her legs, and the image
was seared into his brain.

“Are you okay Steve?” Wanda asked snapping him out of his thoughts.

“Yeah… I just…”

“Steve, don’t worry about this morning. You did not know that I had only just gotten out the
shower.”

“Seriously Rogers, you can’t still be a prude after all these years,” Natasha added jokingly.

Steve rolled his eyes and returned to his soup. He was not a prude. The fact that Wanda was naked
before him was not the issue; the issue was that he could not get the image out of his head.
Combined with the night before they left Wakanda, Steve’s head was a little confused about why he
could not get her out of his head.

“So, now that we have fed ourselves, what are we going to do today?” Sam asked.

“Look around the city,” Natasha answered. “We’re here for a week so we should make the most of
the time we have. I think Wanda and I should spend the day in Ginza.”
“What is Ginza?” Wanda asked.

“Most affluent shopping district in Tokyo.”

“Nat, we need to save the money for food and hotel rooms,” Wanda protested.

“We’re not going to buy anything, I just think it would be good for us to spend some time together. You’ve been hanging out with these two idiots too much.”

“Charming,” Sam commented.

“I guess that sounds like a good idea,” Wanda replied. “We get out of the hotel at least.”

After they finished breakfast, the women split off from the boys and made their way to Ginza. Wanda felt her throat become dry. She had never really shopped at any expensive shop before, not even in New York, but everything looked so pretty that Wanda was instantly drawn to it. Natasha watched as she felt all the dresses like she was a kid in a sweet shop. It was probably the first time Natasha had seen Wanda look so happy.

“This one would look really pretty on you,” Natasha commented holding up a red silk dress.

Wanda turned to look at the dress and she tilted her head. “I don’t know Natasha. It’s very out there.”

“Wanda, you can’t hide in baggy clothing for the rest of your life.” Wanda looked down. The plaid shirt she had on was twice the size of her actual waist. “You have to embrace the fact that you have a rack that women can only dream of having.”

“What would I wear it for though? I can’t imagine we’re invited to the Stark Industries Gala this year,” Wanda pointed out.

“I suppose you have a point, but for the sake of making you feel good about your body, can you at least try it on?” Wanda grumbled and took the dress from Natasha. Natasha smiled as they walked towards the changing room. When the attendant smiled at them, Natasha began, “Watashi no yūjin wa kono doresu o tameshite mitai.”

The attendant let them through and Wanda went into a stall to change. She grumbled under her breath as she stripped off her plaid shirt and jeans and slipped on the red silk dress. Natasha had a point that the dress made her breasts look really good. Wanda was not exactly confident about her body since she was always too skinny and sickly looking for her to put a thought in how to emphasise the one curve she had. She did weigh more than she did during the Battle of Sokovia, but her rapid weight loss in the last few weeks meant she had lost any curves she had developed.

She opened the door and showed Natasha the dress. Natasha gave a small smiled and commented, “See, you look great.”

“I do, I think.” Wanda looked in the mirror and did a small twirl. “Actually, I look really good.”

“Would you like me to wrap this dress up for you?” the attendant asked.

“We’re not buying, unfortunately,” Natasha replied.

“Actually…” Wanda interrupted. “How much is this dress?”

“43,900 Yen,” the attendant answered.
“That’s about $400,” Natasha clarified. “Not bad for a designer dress.”

“$400 though,” Wanda wondered. She loved the dress and if she was off her medication, she would have bought it and the whole store without question, but it was $400 that they needed to live off for the foreseeable future. “I’m sorry, but I can’t buy this today.”

The two left the shop after returning the dress, Wanda feeling a little disappointed. Natasha wrapped her arm around Wanda and said, “Hey, the purpose of today was for you to get your confidence back.”

“Thanks, Nat. That was actually really helpful.”

“Now, I suggest we get lunch.”

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“Dude, I have always wanted to go to one of these,” Sam exclaimed as he and Steve walked up to a sumo wrestling arena. Steve was not sure what the appeal of wrestling was. Despite the number of times Clint and Tony tried to get him into WWE was in double figures, Steve could not understand the appeal of twenty minutes of verbal abuse and maybe five minutes of action. Not that he assumed that WWE and sumo wrestling had much overlap since the latter was more rooted in tradition, but he did not get it. “Come on Steve. I know that you feel a load of guilt over this morning, for some reason, but try to look like you are interested.”

“I’m not feeling guilty about this morning,” Steve retorted. “I just don’t get wrestling.”

“What’s not to get? The guy gets pushed out of the ring and they lose. Are you sure it isn’t something to do with the fact that you walked in on Wanda while she was changing?”

“Absolutely certain.”

“Good, because I don’t get why you’re so hung up on it since Wanda said she was okay with it.”

The two entered the ring where two men were attempting to push each other towards the white line. The one on the left seemed to be winning in this regard but the one on the right was putting up a good enough fight. “You said Barnes was a boxer right?”

“If you say so. I think he might have enjoyed this.”

“I think he would have too.”

“So do you think running was a good idea?”

“I can’t say that worry isn’t in the back of my mind. Wanda is still very… But as much as I trust T’Challa, she needs to be with us.”

“I think having Nat here puts less pressure on us to keep Wanda happy. She probably gets Wanda more than anyone.”

“Is that because she’s a woman?”

“No, I just think both of them know what it is like to be changed by an evil force. Natasha knows how to handle trauma so having that stabilising influence, that just so happens to be a woman, is going to be good for Wanda.”
Steve could only nod in agreement. “So how are you holding up?”

“Well, as much as you can do in a situation like this. Compared to you three, I’m not exactly the first person they’ll think about.”

“What about your mother?”

“Oh she will be pissed, but I guess I want her to yell in my face just so I know she’s okay.” Steve felt a lot of guilt for dragging Sam into this whole mess knowing that Sam’s mother was really unwell. From the sounds of it, Mrs Wilson did not have a lot of time left, and he had taken away any chance of them being reunited before she died. “I know what you’re thinking and stop feeling guilty for things that you are not guilty of. I was in the right place at the wrong time, and I made the choice to join you, knowing that we were probably going to get into some trouble along the way.”

“Did you think you would be branded a war criminal though?”

“No. I think that has Ross written all over it because he is the type of guy to brand people snowflakes because they demand to be treated as people.” Steve was not sure what snowflake meant as a derogatory. “Look, I hate that I can’t go back to New Orleans and see my mother. I don’t even know if she is still alive, but that is not your fault. I made the choice to join you.”

Steve nodded and returned to the match in front of him. The wrestler in blue had the one in red just on the white line, but the one in red was standing his ground. “Ten bucks says that the red is going to bounce back and win.”

“Oh, it’s on.”

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When the boys returned to the hotel, they found Natasha and Wanda had returned to their room and watching some sort of Japanese soap opera. Only there did not seem to be any English subtitles.

“Do you two even know what is going on?” Sam asked.

“I think the woman in the black dress is having an affair with the woman in the blue dress’ husband,” Natasha answered. “So, what have you two been up to?”

“We went to a sumo wrestling match,” Steve replied.

“Nice, Wanda and I had a very productive day.”

“We haven’t bought anything but I tried sushi for the first time,” Wanda added. “It was kind of gross.”

“I should have taken a picture of your face.” Wanda chuckled a little bit and Steve felt his heart drop. That was the first time she had laughed in front of him in weeks, and it was like music to his ears. “You okay there Steve?”

“Yeah, I just need a shower.”

Steve excused himself and went through the adjoining door. He sighed and ran his hands over his face. This was bad. This was really bad.

“What is the big deal? There is nothing stopping you from asking her out.’

‘How about the fact she is still emotionally fragile and toying with her is going to make her worse?’
The angel and devil on his shoulder confused Steve’s head even more than it was already. He took a deep breath and made his way to the shower. Once under the hot water, he leaned back against the tiled wall, inhaling the steam in a bid to clear his senses. Steve wondered whether his new feelings were a result of their close proximity and the fact that he had been beside her through everything in the last few weeks. He was emotionally invested in her happiness, but he wondered if he could ever truly be a part of that happiness.

Once he felt fresher than he had done in a long time, he stepped out of the shower and grabbed the pair of pyjamas he had set aside for himself. Dressed and ready, he went back to the girls’ room where Wanda, Natasha and Sam were perched on the bed watching a film with Japanese subtitles.

“Come on,” Wanda ordered. “You’re going to miss the film.”

Steve nodded and sat on the bed beside Wanda. He tried to keep a sizeable distance between them, but then Wanda decided she wanted to shift closer to him. Steve could only take a deep breath as Wanda leaned against him with her head on his shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Kon'nichiwa, eigo o hanashimasu ka - Hello, do you speak English?

Watashi no yūjin wa kono doresu o tameshite mitai - My friend would like to try on this dress please.
Chapter Two

Steve had hoped that whatever he was feeling towards Wanda would have gone in the week they were in Tokyo. However, every little thing she did only kept adding to it. There was the wonder in her face when they saw a kabuki puppet show in the middle of the street. Then there was the way she slept, her mouth slightly open and her hair partly covering her face. It sent his heart racing every time.

Wanda seemed completely oblivious. She seemed to be enjoying Tokyo so much that taking notice of Steve’s longing stares was not on her radar. Natasha had noticed. Sam had also noticed, though was of the mind that if he left it then whatever Steve was feeling would fizzle out. Natasha on the other hand…

“You know that there are farmers in Peru who can notice your sad little puppy look,” she commented as she and Steve were shopping for a laptop they were going to need in able to go on the run in other countries.

Steve felt sweat on the back of his neck and his cheeks went pink, “I don’t know what you are on about Nat.”

“You have feelings for Wanda. I’ve noticed the way you have been looking at her for the last few weeks. It’s quite pathetic really.” Steve sighed and rubbed the corner of his eyes. “Steve, I am only going to tell you this once: be careful. We’re in close proximity and we can blow up at one another at any moment, and Wanda’s probably not emotionally ready to handle it if it all goes wrong.”

Steve knew Natasha was right. He still was not entirely sure what he felt, so telling Wanda how he felt would only be playing with her emotions if they ended up fading over time. Once they had found a laptop powerful enough for what they need, it was time to leave Tokyo. Wanda did seem down about it but only because she loved the city so much. However, they had to keep on the move or else people would get suspicious.

The flight to Seoul was only two and a half hours but the wait in the airport seemed three times as long. They managed to get past the check-in desk with their fake passports, and then through security. Despite the fact that there were posters on the walls, no one seemed to notice who they were.

“Wow, I guess these disguises are better than we thought,” Natasha commented.

“You think?” Wanda asked. “I still feel like I am being stared at.”

“Don’t look so worried and everything will be okay.”

“So what are we going to do for two hours?”

“Duty-free?”

“What do you need to get from duty-free?”

“Saké. One of the best drinks in the world.”

“I can’t really drink alcohol since I am more likely to misuse it.”
“Seriously?”

“Alcohol abuse is a symptom of mania.”

“Huh, maybe we should get you some Japanese chocolate.” Wanda snorted a little. “You know, you should smile more often. It suits you.”

Wanda looked down at her feet. “I guess I have never had much to smile about.”

“Do you still miss Pietro?”

“Every day.” Wanda felt her heart sink. She had not spoken about her brother for a long time, given everything that had happened in the last month and a half. She wished he was there with her; he always was after their parents’ deaths. “If I could turn back time, I would not have played with Stark’s head. No Ultron. No Battle of Sokovia. No Pietro dying. No Sokovia Accords.”

“You know that Tony and Bruce had the plans for Ultron long before you even messed with Tony’s head? If it wasn’t you then it would have been something else. Ultron probably would have gone rogue anyway.”

Wanda tried to work what Natasha told her within the narrative she had told herself. Ultron was her fault; if she had not messed with Tony’s mind then Pietro would still be alive. What goes around comes around. It had been such a horrific consequence of her actions that Wanda refused to use any of her telepathic powers around the team since she felt like she could not be trusted. She barely understood what her psionic powers were let alone her telepathic. She’d taken out a whole bunch of Ultron bots in the anguish over feeling Pietro die, but that was about as far as she knew the full strength of her powers. She had managed to take control over the Mind Stone when escaping the compound; everyone assumed that Vision was the most powerful so the fact she could overpower him scared her.

“Do you honestly think that?” Wanda asked eventually.

“Bruce told me about Ultron long before we even knew that Loki’s sceptre was in Sokovia. You cannot blame yourself for everything Wanda. Sure you had a part in what happened with Ultron, but you only prompted Tony to push forward with the creation. You had no control over what happened next.”

“I could have walked away from that church though. I would not have messed with your head and exposed that wound.”

Natasha sighed heavily. She had to admit that the nerve Wanda exposed back in South Africa hit her like a ton of bricks. The way she was dehumanised. The way her right to choose had been taken away. She had felt a lot of bile and anger towards the younger woman, even going as far as to almost outright rejecting her during the Battle of Sokovia. Then she saw how broken Wanda was on the Helicarrier and it did soften her anger towards her a little. When Natasha presented Wanda with the booking confirmation for her therapy sessions, it was less so out of anger and more down to frustration.

“You know, I debate with myself sometimes as to whether I really wanted kids if I had the choice,” Natasha told. “Sometimes I think I do, but I’m not exactly the most maternal person. I’m much better at being Aunty Nat.”

Wanda nodded in understanding, then responded, “I think I do want children, but with everything that has happened, I don’t know how I would be able to take care of myself let alone a child.”
“You seem much better than you were when we left Wakanda.”

“It’s not just that. I am a fugitive at the end of the day; being on the run with a baby is not a good idea.”

In the meantime, Steve and Sam were waiting with their bags and keeping their heads low in case anyone would recognise them. Steve was trying to hack into the old S.H.I.E.L.D Intel, mostly in a bid to track down some old safe houses that the authorities would not have thought of checking.

“There’s one in London that has just been checked out,” Steve told. “Should be clear by the time we get there.”

“Should we be going to a place like London where they are on high alert for us?”

“Well, we’re not exactly making our way there in a hurry so hopefully the search will have died down.”

“You say that.”

“I know, but given that Natasha managed to get to us under their nose, I think we’re in a good position.”

“Yeah but Nat is Nat. The woman once swiped a piece of steak off me to prove a point while I cutting the damn thing up.”

“What point was she proving?”

“That I am not as quick-witted as she is.” Steve blinked and returned to the computer. “So, you still thinking about Wanda?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” Steve lied.

“Dude, every night for the last week you’ve been making googly eyes at her. Steve, I’m your best friend, and I want to see you happy. However, you have to be sure about your feelings because if you lead Wanda on then it is going to reverberate onto all of us and we can’t turn on one another.”

“Exactly. I don’t know what this is so I am not going to pursue it.”

“So you admit there is something.” Steve then glared at Sam. “Look, a few weeks ago you were kissing Sharon Carter. Now, you have needed some action, and I am proud of you for it, but it’s a little weird. She’s your dead ex’s niece. It’s not healthy.”

Steve had no idea why he had kissed Sharon. In a sick twisted way, it was probably trying to get on last bit of closure but that was not fair on Sharon. He would always be looking at what he could have had with Peggy. Sharon did not seem to mind but the look on her face knew that they could never be anything because, at the end of the day, he could have very easily been her uncle. However, Steve was unsure why Sam was bringing Sharon up in the first place.

“I’m not sure what your point is Sam,” Steve commented.

“You lost your first love, you probably deflected some regrets onto Sharon, you may be doing the same to Wanda,” Sam answered. “Look, if you two want to be together, great. I’m just saying that Wanda-”

“Is still emotionally all over the place. I know Nat as already given this talk to me, as has my
“conscience.”

“So are you not going to do anything?”

“Not until I know it’s genuine.”

Sam nodded and said, “Good.”

“Hey,” Natasha announced her presence while holding up a duty-free bag, “anyone for saké?”

Steve looked at Wanda standing beside Natasha and the back of his neck felt sweaty. She had a small smile on her face and when she pushed some of her hair behind her ears, Steve could only think, “I am so screwed.”

Eventually, he spat out, “I’m good thanks, Natasha.”

Sam rubbed his eye and shook his head at his friend’s awkwardness. He said, “I think I may need it on the flight.”

It was only when they got to the gate that Steve realised that he and Wanda would be sitting together, and he had a sense that someone - possibly Natasha - was messing with him. Wanda, on the other hand, seemed happy to sit by him. With Natasha and Sam sitting in the seats behind them, Steve shook his head at them and sat in the aisle seat. Wanda was looking out of the window as the plane began taxiing and she quickly grabbed his hand.

“Sorry, I just don’t do well with take-offs,” she said.

As much as his pulse was racing, Steve was not going to let her hand go if it caused her distress. Instead, he stroked his thumb over her knuckles and attempted to give her a reassuring smile.

“It’s a just a couple of hours,” he said, mostly to himself.
Chapter Three

Steve, Wanda and Natasha were in Seoul only a year ago and yet it felt like a completely different world. The train that Wanda had to stop had been completely removed for a start. That alone took a lot out of her at the time. For Steve, it was actually the first time they properly met. Before their encounters had resulted in Wanda throwing Steve down the stairs or entralling him. The more Steve had thought about it, the vision that Wanda had given him in South Africa probably explained his feelings for Sharon, and that made him angry at himself for using her.

Wanda was still completely oblivious to the fact that Steve might have feelings for her. It probably drove home the fact that Steve should really do his best to let his feelings go because it was unlikely that she would ever reciprocate them. She had her own head to sort out without getting romance in the way. And yet the little things were still getting to him.

“Here we go,” Sam announced as he held up some trays of meat that smelled delicious. “Authentic Korean barbecue.”

Wanda took hers and immediately started to dig in. Korean food was her favourite cuisine outside of Eastern European comfort food. Natasha was next to grabs hers while Steve took his food carefully.

“Hmm, this is so good,” Wanda commented between mouthfuls.

“Well, it looks like your appetite is back,” Natasha replied.

“Maybe we should have gotten T’Challa to bring some back for us when he went to Busan,” Sam pointed out. “That would have done the trick.”

Steve was not entirely paying attention to the conversation because he noticed Wanda had sauce in the corner of her mouth. It seemed such an odd thing to be hung up about but the combination of her smile kept making his stomach sink lower and lower.

“Steve, you’re staring at my face,” Wanda told him, thus snapping Steve out of his thoughts.

Oh, um, you have sauce in the corner of your mouth,” he replied handing a paper napkin to her.

“Oh, thanks.” Wanda took the napkin and wiped the sauce away. “So what now?”

“I suggest that we get into a hotel and work out a plan on how we are going to get to London.”

“Why London?”

“There is an old S.H.I.E.L.D safe house. They have just checked it out and it passed so they are unlikely to come back.”

“Well, we can’t do it right away,” Natasha imputed. “They’ll still have some agents there looking out for us.”

“Exactly, so we slowly make our way across Europe.”
“That depends on how this whole Brexit thing is going to go,” Sam commented.

“Nothing can happen until the Prime Minister triggers Article 50 and then that takes two years,” Natasha explained. “Am I the only person who has done research into this?”

“Clearly.”

-0-

Much like the hotel in Tokyo, the four split themselves into two twin rooms, and after they dumped their bags, Wanda and Natasha went to the men’s’ room to see what the plan was to get to London. Steve was sitting on the edge of the bed with the laptop on his lap and Sam was hovering over him and writing some notes on a pad of paper. Wanda went to sit by Steve, though the weight of him shifted her closer than he would have liked.

“Well, I wish we could just hop on a plane and go straight there but we have to go through Europe to avoid the stragglers in London,” Steve commented as he pointed at the hacked mission reports from the CIA raids on the S.H.I.E.L.D safe houses.

“Are we not just walking straight at them?” Wanda asked.

“No, they would have gone in two teams east and west,” Natasha replied. “They would meet in the middle around Berlin, so we will need to avoid the major German cities.”

“I take it they never thought to check Africa,” Sam added. “So do we go by foot or do we hotwire a car?”

“Depends if you want to trudge through Siberia.”

“Point.”

Sam handed the notepad over and Steve looked at all the locations Sam had taken note off. After a minute, he managed to come up with a plan, “Okay, so the plan is get a plane to Beijing, get a car from there to drive into Russia, leave the car in Saint Petersburg, get the ferry to Helsinki, fly over to Copenhagen, drive through Northern Germany and The Netherlands, stop at Calais, get the ferry to Dover and, finally, we arrive in London,” Steve explained looking at the map. The other three looked at him, surprised at how easily he breezed through that explanation. “Did I miss something?”

“That sounds long,” Wanda replied.

“It is our best bet, Wanda. I don’t think they will be smart enough to look in Helsinki or Copenhagen.”

“It’s like Scandinavia is the nicest place on Earth,” Natasha commented through gritted teeth.

“So do we at least agree that those are the main destinations to get to London?” Steve asked. “It’s going to take weeks.”

“Weeks is better because at least the hype will have died down.”

“Are you okay with that Wanda?” Steve asked.

“If you think it is the best idea I am willing to go along with it,” she replied. She gave a reassuring smile. “So how long do we stay here?”

“Two, maybe three days.”
“Right, great plan. Now I suggest that we hit the pool,” Sam interrupted.

Given that Wanda was up for that idea, Steve thought that Sam was trying to torture him. He replied, “I’m good just staying here.”

“Steve, we have three days. You need some time to relax,” Wanda insisted. “Come on. There is a hot tub.”

“You’ve already seen her naked so where is the harm? ’

‘Because you are a messed up pervert.’

Despite his conscience wrestling with itself, Steve gave in. He nodded and Wanda smiled brightly. “Okay, we’ll go get changed.”

When Wanda and Natasha left to change into their bikinis, Steve flopped on the bed in frustration. “Dude you got it bad,” Sam commented. Steve reached over to the pillow and threw it at his friend. “Ow.”

The hotel pool area was so bright and open that Wanda wondered whether they would be too exposed to the public. There was only a handful of people but they looked to be leaving soon. Sam, on the other hand, could not care as he strutted up to the pool edge and jumped right in.

“Sometimes I wonder whether you are the youngest person here,” Natasha told Wanda as she climbed down the ladder. “Joining?”

“I’ll pass. I think I might just go to the hot tub,” Wanda answered. Wanda was not a confident swimmer and would usually stick to the shallow end of the pool in the Avengers Compound.

“Oh, enjoy the bubbles.”

Wanda headed for the hot tub on the upper platform that overlooked the pool. The bubbles looked so inviting and a tip of her toe in the water confirmed it was the perfect temperature. Steve had only just come into the area when he saw Wanda by the hot tub. He looked at the pool and wondered whether he should sit and watch Sam and Natasha or actually stop trying to avoid Wanda and join her in the hot tub. Eventually, he realised that if he left Wanda alone, she would be wondering why he was avoiding her.

“Need some company while the children play?” Steve asked coming up beside her. He was also wrapped in the white dressing gown that he was little too big for in contrast to Wanda’s gown which practically swallowed her.

Wanda turned around to see Natasha and Sam flicking water at one another. Wanda rolled her eyes and answered, “That would be nice.”

Wanda undid her gown and revealed her slender body in a black bikini. Steve looked down though he did take a peak in the corner of his eyes. The black material was rather modest, though it did emphasise the fullness of Wanda’s breasts. She did not seem as thin as she was a couple weeks ago. She looked well for the most part. Healthier. Happier.

“Can’t go into the tub with a robe on Steve,” she informed. Steve then realised he still had his white robe on and then untied the knot. The shorts he was wearing came up to the knee but that was not
Wanda’s focus at that moment. She was a little more interest in Steve’s chest and torso. Her cheeks flushed pink a little. She had seen him shirtless before. The night they came back from Sokovia, she had walked in on Steve taking a shower. She had not blushed back then. Now, she could feel her cheeks burning. “Come on. Let’s get into the water.”

Given how stiff their bodies were from the flight, the hot water massaging their bodies was a massive relief. Wanda felt the tension from her spine and shoulders release and she sighed in content. “I’m not going to lie, if being branded a war criminal meant this I would have done it years ago,” she joked. Steve had to smile because it was so rare to see Wanda display any sort of humour. She did have a sense of humour but she was not too great at communicating it. “Are you missing Bucky?”

“A little, but I think we did the right thing leaving him Wakanda,” Steve replied.

“It just felt like you went through so much effort to get him back…”

“Honestly, the only way to get him truly back is to let him rest. Maybe once he gets better, he can join us in London. So how is your head?”

“I think the lithium is working. I heard some people feel worse on the meds but it’s actually given me some clarity for the first time in years. It’s making a lot of sense now: my poor judgement when Strucker told me he could enhance me, trusting Ultron… It had to be the earliest signs of bipolar disorder, or maybe I am too trusting of people.”

Steve moved his hand over to Wanda’s and laced his fingers with hers. “I think you and I should… We should go out just the two of us… As friends.”

“Oh… Um… okay. That sounds nice.”

-0-

“Okay, so I was thinking either this nice white summer dress or this magenta dress that does wonders for your curves,” Natasha said holding up the two options for Wanda’s dress.

“Nat, it’s not a date,” Wanda told her as she applied some mascara. “It’s just an outing between friends, like what we have been doing.”

“Which he asked you to attend when you were both half-naked.”

Wanda rolled her eyes and looked at the two dresses. “I think I like the white one with this hair.”

“Okay, we have a good choice, but I do think that you should take advantage of the fact you have a decent rack.”

“Like I said, it is between friends.” Wanda went over to take the dress and got changed in the bathroom. Looking at herself in the mirror, Wanda noticed how the dark circles under her eyes had faded. The colour in her cheeks was back and she looked more alive than she had done in years. Whether it was the lithium, Wanda was not sure. There seemed to be something else that seemed to be improving her mood. After a minute she went out to show Natasha the full look. “Well?”

Natasha smiled and replied, “You look great.”

“Thanks. So, I don’t think we’ll be too long but don’t wait up.”

“Just keep yourselves safe.”
When Wanda stepped out of the hotel room, Steve was completely blown away. The white dress showed off her shapely legs and made her smile all the brighter. He had told himself that it was a night between friends, but now he was not so sure.

“I did not know what you had planned, so I went with what was comfortable,” she explained.

“I just thought we’d take a walk,” he spluttered. “Get some air, and maybe something to eat.”

“That sounds nice.” Wanda hooked her arm through his as they walked down the corridor.

Sam and Natasha popped their head out of the hotel door and looked as their friends disappeared into the elevator.

“How long do you think it will take him to crack?” Sam asked.


-o-

Wanda never really got to see a lot of Seoul the first time since she was mostly restricted to Helen Cho’s lab while the scientist was under control of the Mind Stone in order to create a synthetic body for Ultron. Even when she was free of Ultron’s grasp, there was no time for sightseeing once she found out Tony had the synthetic body that would become Vision.

It felt like a million years ago to Steve, sensing that Wanda was thinking the same thing.

Steve strutted over to Wanda and Pietro. It seemed that the running to get civilians out of the way had taken it out of Pietro and his sister was hovering over him, almost like she was his mother and he had scraped his knee.

“The Cradle,” Wanda began when she saw Steve. “Did you get it?”

“Stark will take care of it,” Steve answered, confident that whatever Ultron was planning with The Cradle was in safer hands.

Wanda looked at him with a face of horror and fear, “No, he won’t.”

Steve seemed confused by this, but then remembered that while the twins may have let their guard down with him, Tony was still considered to be the man responsible for their parents’ death. However, Tony was still his friend, “You don’t know what you’re talking about. Stark is not crazy.”

“He will do anything to make things right,” Wanda argued fiercely.

Steve turned around and tried to get through to Tony via the communication devices, “Stark, come in. Anyone on comms?”

Wanda sighed and said firmly, “Ultron can’t tell the difference between saving the world and destroying it. Where do you think he gets that?”

The words pierced Steve’s mind like a knife. Tony never mentioned making Ultron in the first place so Wanda may have a point. He turned back to the twins and asked, “Do you really want to stop Ultron?”

“I don’t think we have a choice,” Wanda replied.

“Ultron wants to destroy the world,” Pietro began as he wheezed, “we’re not standing by.”
“We helped make this mess so we’re going to help fix it,” Wanda added.

Steve nodded. “Come on. If you’re right then we need to get to New York before Tony does something stupid.”

“You know, I still wonder whether Tony creating Vision was entirely stupid,” Steve commented once he finished his reminiscing. Wanda’s lips went thin. “Sorry. I thought…”

“It doesn’t matter,” Wanda replied. “I’m still angry at him. That part has not changed, but I doubt we would have beaten Ultron without him.”

“It’s the Mind Stone more than anything. I’ve seen it possess good people so I don’t know how much the Mind Stone controls Vision.”

“Did you ever find out the details of how I was changed?”

“It did not make for comfortable reading.”

“When Pietro and I found out who HYDRA was, we tried to escape so many times, but as far as I remember, I was strapped to a table, the sceptre pointed at my chest and then thrown into a room where I would either die or the experiment would work. I’m not sure why Pietro and I survived but no one else did.”

“Pure determination and stubbornness?”

Wanda gave a soft laugh, “I guess. I just don’t get what this power is, or even how strong I am. I can control the Mind Stone and that scares me.” Steve took one look at her face and noted the mixture of regret and vulnerability. Gently, he wrapped his hand around hers and she laced her fingers through his. Wanda looked up and gave him a heartbreakingly soft smile. “You know I could do with some food.”

-0-

“Do you ever miss the 1940s?” Wanda asked as they ate their dak-galbi in a busy restaurant in the middle of the city. Given the number of people, it was easy to blend in.

“You know, now that Peggy has gone, I don’t,” Steve answered plainly. “With everyone gone, I don’t have a reason to want to go back. I guess I just missed what could have been. The question bugs me though. People - mostly people who cannot accept change - seem to refer to it as ‘the good old days’. The good old days of the Great Depression and racial segregation.”

Wanda chuckled but then grew serious, “I can’t say my childhood was much better. There was at least one dead person on our street a week. I love my country but it was never a utopia.”

“Nostalgia is overrated.”

“Cheers to that,” Wanda held up her water and Steve tapped his bottle of beer with her glass. “This is really nice. I don’t know why we have never done this before.”

“I guess we have not had much chance with everything that has happened in the last year.”

“You know, sometimes I think this is all a dream. I’m still in the compound and you are about to wake me up.”

Tentatively, Steve reached over and put his hand over hers. Wanda smiled and laced her fingers with
his like in Wakanda.

“Annyeonghaseyo ladies and gentlemen,” the host announced as she stood on stage. “Tonight we have a special guest who is here to sing for your entertainment. Please give a warm welcome, all the way from England, Mr David Rose.”

Wanda broke the hand holding and gave a small clap (out of politeness) as a man with dark hair mounted the stage with a guitar. Walking up to the mic, he said, “Annyeonghaseyo everyone. Hope you are having a nice meal. Tonight I am going to sing a few songs from my hometown of Manchester. The first one is called ‘Wonderwall’.”

“Oh I like this song,” Wanda commented as the guitar began strumming away. “My father went to England in the mid-nineties and brought back this CD. I think it’s Oasis.”

“Today is gonna be the day that they’re gonna throw it back to you. By now you should’ve somehow realised what you gotta do. I don’t believe that anybody feels the way I do, about you now.” As Wanda swayed along with the acoustic guitar strums, Steve was relating too hard to the lyrics, especially when it got to the line, “There are many things that I would like to say to you but I don’t know how.”

Wanda looked over and smiled at him, and it was at that point that Steve knew exactly how genuine his feelings for Wanda were.

After two more songs David Rose - which when questioned turned out to just be his stage name - left the stage and Wanda had finished her dinner. Steve requested the bill and they left pretty swiftly afterwards. As they made their way out of the restaurant, Wanda laced her hand with Steve and his heart started to pound into his ears.

“That music was quite nice,” she commented.

“It was… good,” Steve replied. “I’ve never really listened to enough modern music to judge the quality.”

“So I take it you prefer the music you grew up with.”

“I suppose. Ever heard of Annette Hanshaw?” Wanda shook her head. “Ma used to play her all the time. I think her favourite was ‘Daddy Won’t You Please Come Home’. I guess it spoke to her.”

Wanda sensed a bit of sadness in his voice. She counted herself lucky that she got ten years with her father whereas Steve had nothing but a photograph and his mother’s stories. “Do you wish that you had met your father?”

“It’s always been there. I always felt like I had to live up to him. I wonder how much of my upbringing would be different if my father was alive. Then again, I don’t know whether it would be like Howard. Howard was a great person and I thought he would be a good father, but I guess when I went down into the sea something changed and the result was… well, Tony.”

“You don’t know if The Great War would have changed your father if he survived?”

“It happened. My mother said that she knew men before they went out to war and they never came back the same.”

Wanda gave his hand a slight squeeze and tried to give him a small smile. It was then that Wanda noticed that Steve was trying to avoid her eye contact again, and this time she was not just going to let it slide.
“Steve, come on. You’ve been acting strange since we were in Japan. What’s going on?”

‘Come on, tell her. The worst that could happen is that she rejects you right out.’

Steve took a deep breath and turned to face her, “Listen, Wanda, I-”

“Gabangjuseyo!” a voice shouted behind Wanda and she froze when she heard a gun click.

Steve looked over Wanda’s head to see a boy, probably about sixteen holding a gun up to the back of Wanda’s head. The gun seemed to be pointing to Wanda’s bag, which despite the language barrier, Steve understood to mean to give him the purse.

“Okay,” Steve said calmly as he gently took the bag off Wanda’s shoulder. Given the boy could not speak English, Steve gently held the bag out. “Here is the bag. Please leave us alone.”

The boy was shaking as his hand went out to grab the bag, which proved to Steve that he was just a desperate kid. Before he could grab the bag, what looked to be a police officer shouted, “Dodug-eul geuman!”

Wanda could only squeeze her eyes shut as the bang of the gun echoed off the walls surrounding them. Her heartbeat was pounding in her ears, sweat dripped down her neck and she dared not open her eyes in fear that she would collapse from the shock of the blood loss. However, when she did open her eyes, she found herself completely uninjured. She felt a sense of relief for the briefest of moments. Then she looked at Steve and everything felt like it was in slow motion as he fell to the floor, blood pouring from his thigh.

Chapter End Notes

I think if I am correct the translations should be:

Annyeonghaseyo - Good evening
Gabangjuseyo - Give me the bag
Dodug-eul geuman - Stop thief
I do apologise if I have gotten that wrong.
Also, please don't kill me.
“Do you have any threes?” Sam asked. He and Natasha were sitting on his bed playing with cards while they waited for Steve and Wanda to return.

“Go fish,” Natasha answered. Just before Sam could pick up a card from the deck, Natasha’s disposable phone rang. Natasha saw it was Wanda and picked it up. “Hey, how is it going?”

“I need help! Steve-”

“Whoa, okay. Where are you and we’ll come to get you?”

Wanda told her where she and Steve were in a voice that was clearly panicking. Natasha then was really worried but in no time, both she and Sam had found Wanda and Steve, with Steve (who was slipping in and out of consciousness) propped up against the wall and what looked to be Wanda’s cardigan, stained with his blood, wrapped around the wound. Wanda’s hands and some of her dress were covered in blood as it had looked as though she had tried to control the injury herself.

“I just wrapped it around to try to stop the bleeding,” Wanda explained in a rush.

Natasha immediately went to examine the wound and Steve’s general state. She went to open the cardigan but did not risk going any further when more blood started to pour out.

“You did the right thing, Wanda,” she said looking to her friend.

“What do we do? Take him to a hospital?” Sam asked.

“I would usually say yes but that will take too long, and we can’t fix it because he’ll get an infection.”

“So what can we do?”

Wanda looked around trying to find anything that they could take Steve to get his leg fixed. Then she saw the sign for U-Gin Genetics. Once her head recovered from the shock, she announced, “I think I have an idea.”

-o-

Doctor Helen Cho was just about to sign off for the night. It had been a long frustrating day but now the Avengers had all but disbanded, she was finding more time to get on with her own projects. Before she could scan her card to be let out of the building, she caught sight of three people trying to carry another man with a bloody cardigan wrapped around his thigh. Upon closer inspection, she recognised them as the four fugitives wanted by the United Nations.


“Agent Romanoff, what-”

“We’ll explain later. Do you still have the Regeneration Cradle?”
Helen looked between the four people in front of her, annoyed that they were trying to make her an accessory but they did save her life a year ago. The least she could do was help them save Steve.

“Come with me.” They managed to reach the lab and lay Steve on the table while Helen got The Cradle ready to fix the bullet wound. Natasha grabbed the nearest pair of scissors to cut the fabric of Steve’s jean leg so they could get a clearer image of what they were working with. “Did you get the bullet out?”

“I think it went straight through,” Wanda answered standing back from the examination bed. Sam had his hands pressed against the wound in a bid to stop the bleeding. “Is he going to be okay?”

“Agent Romanoff, there should be a blood bank on the other side of the lab. It might be worth giving him a transfusion.”

Natasha nodded and ran to get the blood needed since she knew Steve’s blood type. Once she got it and Steve was set up, Sam released the pressure and let Helen unwrap the cardigan. The bleeding had not completely stopped but it was not as profuse as it was so they could at least clean it out before attempting to fix it.

It took only minutes for the wound to completely disappear without a trace of it being there. Wanda sighed in relief as the bleeding had stopped and the scan showed the tissue repair on the inside. Natasha looked at Wanda and put her hand on her shoulder.

“Are you okay?” Natasha asked realising that they had forgotten about Wanda’s mental state in the chaos.

“I think so,” Wanda replied softly. “I did not see who it was but it sounded like a kid who panicked.”

“So what do we do now?” Sam asked. “We can’t head out the city with him like this?”

“Well, hopefully, he will have fully recovered in a couple of days,” Natasha replied. “We just have to keep our heads down.”

“Steve was going to tell me something,” Wanda realised. “Before the robber came up to us, he was going to tell me something and it seemed important.” Sam and Natasha looked over at one another, probably already knowing what Steve was going to tell Wanda. “Do you two know what he was going to say?”

Natasha stroked her thumb on Wanda’s shoulder and answered, “It would not be our place to say even if we knew.”

Wanda nodded as though she understood.

“Okay, he is stable at the moment. We should just let the transfusion complete and he should be good to go to wherever you are off to next,” Helen told them.

“Thank you, we owe you so much,” Natasha replied.

“I won’t tell on you if you are worried about that. I think we’re even.”

Sam looked confused at this but Natasha understood, “Don’t worry. We won’t be in Seoul for long.”

They heard Steve groan as his eyes adjusted to the bright lights of the lab and the three of them went over to him. Wanda took his hand and she gave it a squeeze.
“What happened?” Steve asked groggily.

“Some kid shot you in the leg,” Sam answered. “We brought you to Doctor Cho’s lab and she’s fixed you right up.” Given how disorientated Steve’s brain was, the best response he could muster was a thumbs up. “Are we good to take him?”

“In a few minutes,” Helen answered.

“Doctor Cho,” Wanda began, “thank you, again.”

Helen nodded in appreciation and Wanda turned back to Steve with a small relieved smile.

-o-

They managed to get back to the hotel without anyone questioning what had happened to Steve for him to look out of sorts as they helped him hobble to the lift and to the room. They let him sleep for the night, only Wanda kept walking between the adjoining rooms to check if he was breathing. The third time that she did it, Natasha told her to stop and get some sleep. She did get a few hours sleep, only it was rough as her dreams were filled with Steve bleeding on the floor.

When she woke the next morning, Natasha and Sam had gone out to grab some breakfast. She took a deep breath and went to check if Steve was okay. When she entered the room, Steve was sitting up in the bed, looking brighter and healthier than he was the previous night.

“Hey,” she said softly. “How are you feeling?”

“Okay, I think.” Wanda came over to him and sat on the bed next to him. “I’m not a hundred percent sure what happened last night. I remember the pain in my leg and blacking out a lot.”

Wanda swallowed hard and explained everything from the mugger pointing a gun to the back of her head to getting his leg fixed by Helen. After she finished, she chewed the inside of her mouth as she waited for Steve’s response.

“Jesus, Wanda, you must have been terrified,” he exclaimed.

“A little. I thought you were going to bleed out all over me,” Wanda replied. Wanda pulled the covers off, exposing the leg that had been shot. “No sign of anything.” Wanda’s fingers went over that patch of skin and Steve’s hairs stood up at the touch. “Strange, it feels so soft. I thought it would be like touching a Barbie doll.”

Steve chuckled a little, “I don't feel different.”

“It’s a shame. Last night was lovely up until…”

“I know, but I am okay now so nothing to worry about.”

“We do need to stay here for a couple more days just to be sure you’re really okay. Hopefully, the authorities haven’t cottoned onto anything that happened last night. I don’t think the police officer really took notice of us since he went straight after the kid. I pulled you out of the way so that no one would see us.”

“By yourself?”

“Well, you’ve been slacking on the working out so you’ve lost quite a bit of muscle. Made it a little easier, even if you are a bit of a lump.” Steve snorted. “Last night, before you were shot, you were
about to tell me something.”

Steve had forgotten about that and he cringed. He had gotten caught up in the atmosphere of the date that he was going to blurt out his feelings without thinking it through. He took a deep breath and said, “It was nothing.”

“Really? I was asking you what was going through your head since Japan because you have been a little weird around me lately. Is it because of everything that has happened in Wakanda?”

“No.”

“Is it because I have bipolar disorder?”

“Absolutely not. Don’t ever think that.”

“Then what is it?”

Steve looked directly at Wanda’s face; her face was confused and a little hurt by Steve’s avoidance of the question and it broke his heart. The other part of his brain was frustrated at himself for hurting her. He sighed as he cupped her face, stroking his thumb along her cheekbone. Wanda looked into Steve’s eyes and found herself getting lost in the sea of blue and green. The expression in his eyes appeared to be one of care and desperation. She put her hand on his chest and could feel it beating so rapidly that Wanda thought it could explode at any moment. Her own heart was beating like a drum, as though it was building up to something.

“Wanda…” Steve whispered. Before he could say any more, Wanda kissed him.

It might have been an exaggeration, but Steve swore he could hear fireworks as he felt her dry lips move against his. Wanda pulled away for a moment but then shifted closer with her hand on his face, her hand being tickled by his beard and then kissed him again. Wanda moaned a little as Steve’s hand touched her waist, his strong touch setting her skin on fire. As Wanda deepened the kiss, her hands went to his hair and Steve pressed his body up against hers.

Before Wanda could deepen it further, the door handle rattle and the two broke apart breathing heavily before Natasha and Sam came in bearing some takeout containers.

“Hey, we all good here?” Natasha asked, not taking notice of the two of them looking as though they have been on a long sweaty run.

“Yeah, I think so,” Wanda replied. She gave Steve a sweet smile, but then found her own head was confused.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, a quick announcement: I have another one-shot fic going up on this week to celebrate Steve's 100th birthday. It is going to be a Steve/Wanda fic so do look out for that. It's also going to be a little happier than this because after Infinity War - and in my case, if England is knocked out of the World Cup - we could use a boost of happiness. It should be up about 4pm BST on Wednesday.
Chapter Five

Well, today has been fun trying to wait for the site to come back online.

Anyway, some M-rated content starts this chapter so you have been warned. Actually, the M-rated content really starts here for the rest of the story. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Five

Wanda was breathing deeply as she slept. She was lying on her back, her purple tank top hanging halfway up her stomach and her grey sweatpants hanging off her hips. Her hand was stroking along her bare stomach and she was making some soft moans in her sleep. Her head began to twitch and her hand started to move towards the waistband of her sweatpants. Her breathing became heavier and her head tilted back as though she was allowing someone to kiss her neck. She moaned a little as she imagined the feeling of facial hair rubbing against her sensitive skin.

“Steve,” she whispered as her other hand began to tug at her tank top and she lifted it up to expose her breasts to the air. Her hand massaged the breast, tugging slightly at her nipple. In her mind, Steve was rolling the breast as he kissed down her body, his lips sucking on her skin.

She let out a slightly louder moan as her hand slipped into her sweatpants and underwear and she touched her clit, rolling it with her index finger. Her breaths became shallower as her hips elevated as she slipped two fingers inside herself, her thumb pressed against her clit.

As her fingers pumped in and out of her core, the hand on her breast moved to grip the sheets. Her thumb pressed harder against her clit and she began to pump her fingers in faster and faster until the knot in her stomach loosened and she let out a strangled gasp. Her eyes suddenly opened and she realised what she was doing. She pulled her hand from her sweatpants and she sniffed her fingers. She looked over to the other bed where Natasha was sleeping, though there was no indication that Natasha was awake or knew what Wanda had done. She sat up and ran her hand through her hair.

“Fuck,” she whispered.

Since their kiss the week before, Wanda’s head had been trying to straighten out how she felt about Steve. She had only ever kissed two people before Steve: Kova Majik and Novak Kellmen. The former was when she was seven and was on a dare. The latter was more serious, one could say her first love.

Yet Steve felt different. It felt mature. Kova and Novak were childhood crushes and thus Wanda considered her feelings for them to be childish. In addition, Steve had managed to get under her skin the way those two had not. The problem was that since Steve was shot, Natasha and Sam had not let Wanda and Steve have a moment alone for them to discuss the kiss and what it meant for the two of them, which Wanda really wanted to do.

She pulled down her tank top and looked at the clock: 06:17. There was no chance of her getting back to sleep. Wanda pulled the blanket over and went to look out of the window. She could just about see the Beijing National Stadium and today was the day they were going to get a car to drive
to Saint Petersburg. It was going to take days so they planned their resting points carefully: one town in Mongolia, then Novosibirsk and Yekaterinburg in Russia with small towns in between. Days being stuck in a car sounded like a nightmare but it was better to tread slowly through the puddle than it was to jump in and get wet.

Sensing how sticky she was, Wanda decided to take a shower. However, when she got out of the shower, she noticed she had forgotten to grab a pair of clean underwear and she went out to grab a set from her bag. Only Natasha was sitting on her bed with her arms folded.

“It smells of sex and shame in here,” Natasha commented.

“I don’t know what you mean,” Wanda responded, her cheeks burning so much she could probably cook breakfast on them.

“I have no qualms about you having some me time, but save it for the shower.”

“I did not exactly plan on it,” Wanda muttered as she grabbed her underwear.

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“That is barely going to get us to the border,” Sam commented when he saw the car that Steve bought for the journey to Saint Petersburg.

“The engine is in good condition,” Steve argued. “So I suggest that we take it in turns to drive.”

“We do at least get bathroom breaks right?”

“No, you have to hold it in until we get to Saint Petersburg.” Steve rolled his eyes and looked at the map. “If we leave in ten minutes then we should be at our first rest stop by sundown.”

“Okay, well we just need the girls’ and we should be on our way.” As if they were all telepathically linked, Wanda and Natasha showed up with their duffles. Steve and Wanda exchanged small but knowing smiles at one another. “Are we ready to go?”

“Absolutely,” Natasha answered as she popped the trunk open. Once the duffle bags were in the trunk, they got in the car and Steve began to drive. “To Saint Petersburg we go.”

It took only half an hour until Wanda and Sam fell asleep in the backseat leaving Steve focusing on the road and Natasha reading the map for him.

“Okay take the next left,” Natasha instructed. “Hopefully it should be a smooth ride once we get past the border.”

“Excited to go home?” Steve asked.

“Totally,” Natasha replied sarcastically. “How is your leg feeling on that peddle?”

“Not too bad. Not as stiff as it was.”

“Well let me know if you get tired and I’ll take over.”

“I think I’ll be okay all the way to the border.”

Natasha nodded and gave some further instruction from the map. “So, have you told Wanda how you feel?”
Steve took a deep breath and replied, “Not verbally.” Natasha squinted her eyes in confusion. “We may have… kissed.”

“And definitely not in a way you would kiss your sister?” If Steve did not have to look at the road, he would have given her look as if to say why she asked that question. “Go Cap. So are you two…”

“I don’t know. We haven’t had any time alone to talk about it.”

“Well, I think Wanda needs an answer soon or she is going to acquaint herself with many shower heads.” Steve thought about asking but thought better of it. “Is she a better kisser than me?”

“I’m not answering that Nat.”

“So yes then?”

“Context is key. You kissed me so we could hide from Rumlow.”

“That is true. It felt like I was kissing my brother.”

“Oh, so I wasn’t a bad kisser?”

Natasha laughed a little, “Considering your lack of experience, it was not too bad. And Wanda clearly thought you were a good enough kisser.”

“She told you?”

“No, I can just tell by the way she has been looking at you the last week.”

Natasha let out a knowing smirk that Steve did not know what to say in response, and so they kept quiet for the rest of the journey into Mongolia.

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When they arrived in the Mongolian capital, Ulaanbaatar, Wanda did not feel the need to sleep since she had slept practically the whole journey. With Steve and Natasha equally tired from the driving, they were not so willing to look around. Given it was quite late, there would not be much to look around anyway so the best they could do was to get some rest in a motel - this time not so lucky to get separate rooms so they had to draw straws to see who was getting the two beds (Sam and Wanda) and who was sleeping on the sofa (Natasha) or the floor (Steve).

“You know since you two slept the whole way we should the comfortable beds,” Natasha commented.

“Have you felt these beds?” Wanda asked pushing the mattress with the palm of her hands. “I’ve laid on more comfortable metal tables.”

Steve and Sam were not complaining since they had slept on far worse surfaces during their times in the army. They took to their sleep spots like a duck to water. Sam and Steve dropped off immediately while the women stared at Sam with some judgement since he had slept the whole journey.

“It’s a good thing he is in driving duty tomorrow,” Natasha said. “Anyway, I am beat. Night Wanda.”

“Night,” Wanda replied. Given that she was not tired, Wanda spent most of the night wide awake and alone with her thoughts. That morning was playing on her mind a bit. Why had she had a dream about Steve touching her sexually when they had only shared a kiss? Admittedly, it had been a pretty
good kiss. A kiss she had initiated.

That was another question: why had she been the one to kiss him first? She guessed it had something to do with the shock of the night Steve was shot and her appreciating that he was alive. Yet, she felt as though she had wanted to do kiss him for a while.

It had been Christmas the previous year.

Wanda stared up at the giant tree that had decorated the party area of the Avengers Tower, her heart sinking at the thought of spending her first Christmas without Pietro. It had never been a great time of year for them, especially in the last fifteen years, but they always tried to make the best of it.

She was attending the Avengers Christmas Party, and in the distance, she could hear Clint and Sam drunkenly belting ‘Fairytale of New York’ while Natasha and Laura were sitting by the bar trying not to laugh with the embarrassment at the display.

“Champagne Miss Maximoff?” the waiter offered. Wanda took it, though she could not say she was much of a drinker.

She looked around to try to catch a glimpse of everyone else. She noticed some tension between Tony and Pepper but did not think it was her place to ask what was going on. Rhodey was chatting to some old MIT friends. The only person she could not see was Steve. She then took a glance out the windows and saw Steve on the balcony looking over the city. She thought it was a bit odd that he was missing out on the celebrations so she went to see if he was okay. Only Vision - dressed in a suit which Wanda did not have the heart to tell him that he looked ridiculous in - blocked her way.

“Wanda. I just wanted to exchange a seasonal greeting to you. I have a gift,” he said.

“That’s… nice. Only you are meant to wait until Christmas Day. It’s only the 22nd.”

“Oh do excuse me. Listen, I heard this tradition regarding mistletoe-”

Wanda looked a little horrified at the suggestion but tried not to express it in her words in fear of insulting him when he clearly was not understanding how strange it was to suggest it. “Sorry, Vision, but I was just about to go out to the balcony to grab some air.”

“Oh. Sorry. I will let you pass then.”

Wanda sensed a bit of disappointment in his voice but she did not know what he was expecting from that suggestion. Still, she gave a polite smile and walked past him. Once Wanda got onto the balcony, she found Steve staring out to the tree in the Rockefeller Centre. She took a deep breath and walked over to him.

“Needed some peace from Clint and Sam’s singing?” she asked.

Steve chuckled, “No, just needed to think. You?”

“Just wanted to see if you were okay. You looked lonely.”

“I was just thinking. You know my friend Bucky? He’s out there and I have no idea where to start looking.”

“Is there anywhere he would be?”

“I guess Romania. His father was from there.”
“So was my grandmother, before she was deported by the Romanian military in World War Two because she was Romani. She survived if you can’t tell.”

“What was her name?”

“Milena. If I ever have a daughter, I want to name her after my grandmother.”

“It’s a pretty name.” Steve gave her a faint smile. “How are you feeling?”

“I don’t know. It’s hard to say how I really feel because I thought I was going to be okay but it just feels like there is an empty space. I miss him. I thought that feeling would have gone and I would be able to move on.”

“I don’t think it ever goes Wanda.”

Wanda looked directly at Steve’s face and put her hand on top of his, “Thank you, Steve.”

Steve gave her small smile. They looked at one another for what felt like a hundred years, and Wanda was not sure whether it was the alcohol going through her blood but her heart began to beat quicker than it had done in years. Her throat felt dry and before she could say anything, there was a crash as a tipsy Tony came through the balcony doors.

“Have I missed something?” he asked.

“Just getting some air,” Steve replied. He gave a soft smile to Wanda before returning to the party. Wanda returned that smile and it was still on her face when Steve had gone inside.

“Earth to Wanda,” Tony said waving his hand in front of her.

“Sorry, I should go inside too.” There was a look on Tony’s face that she could not quite read. It looked somewhat amused as something. “What?”

“Nothing. It’s just nice to see you smile.”

“Thanks?” Wanda asked confused as she walked past him and back into the building.

Combined with the time he came into her room in the middle of a panic attack and when he comforted her after the incident in Lagos, Wanda realised that they always had a connection. It made sense: both were born in wars, both had lost their parents to unnatural circumstances, both lost a brother - both biologically and figuratively, both were enhanced by German scientists. They had a shared life experience that no one else could intrude on. And most of all, Steve had been nothing but kind to her, even when they were technically adversaries. He was there for her after Pietro’s death, a moment when she thought that she had no one in the world. Steve had been there when Wanda needed someone the most, and her stomach instantly filled with butterflies every time she looked at him.

There was no question of it; Wanda had fallen for Steve hard.

Chapter End Notes

So, Wanda has come to her senses at last, but how long am I going to keep them apart? Who knows. ;)

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Chapter Six

Three days later, they arrived in Yekaterinburg and found an abandoned house to rest for the night. There were still some beds that spared them from the hard wooden floor, though everything was dusty from weeks, if not months, of lack of care. While it would have made sense to leave the bordered windows up, they needed to let some air in just to be able to breathe without choking.

"It's a good thing I don't have asthma anymore," Steve commented as he put his bag under the bed and swatted some of the dust from his face. "It's only one night at least."

"You say that but I think my bed has an exposed spring," Sam replied pointing to the other bed in the room. "Good thing there is twenty in the house."

"Does that mean I can avoid your snoring for one night?"

"Haha," Sam laughed sarcastically as he strutted out of the room to find another bed.

Steve went over to the window to look out on the city. There was The Church on Blood in Honour of All Saints Resplendent in the Russian Land ('Try saying that when you're drunk,' Steve thought) in the distance. Yekaterinburg was notorious for being the city where the Romanov family were assassinated - nearly a hundred years before in fact. It kind of dawned on Steve that he himself was pushing a hundred, even if he looked to be in his thirties at least. His mind certainly felt a hundred.

"Steve?" A voice broke his thoughts and he turned to see Wanda standing in the doorway. His heart skipped a beat when he saw her sweet smile. Wanda, on the other hand, felt as though her heart was going to burst out of her chest.

"You okay?" he asked, or rather blurted.

"I was checking you were okay," she answered, though she did not seem to be a hundred percent certain about what she was saying.

"Just had a realisation of how old I am but other than that not too bad."

"I was thinking of taking a walk. Mostly to get out of the dusty air but we need to talk."

With all the driving and hiding out, Steve had forgotten that they needed to speak about that kiss in South Korea. It felt like a lifetime ago despite it only being a week and a half ago. "Sure."
Before they could dare make an exit, Natasha and Sam invited themselves to take a walk with Wanda and Steve. Wanda pretended to be happy but in her mind, she was screaming for them to leave her and Steve alone for five minutes so that they could air their feelings for one another. The kiss was still playing on her mind and unless she and Steve spoke about it, it was just going to eat at her. Steve was feeling just as frustrated as Wanda was. He understood the need for them to stay close, especially after the incident in Seoul. However, he was missing opportunities for him to express how he felt about Wanda and if he did not say anything soon then he was going to burst.

"So the church is where the Romanovs were shot?" Sam asked as the four reached The Church on Blood in Honour of All Saints Resplendent in the Russian Land. Wanda felt a shiver fly up her spine. She had seen a few mass executions and being near the sight of one of the most famous mass executions was throwing her off-kilter. One of her earliest memories was a group of Sokovian Muslim boys being shot by Bosnian Serb forces.

"The church is only thirteen years old," Natasha replied. Being the resident Russian, it seemed Natasha was the go-to person for all Russian history. "It's built on the site of the house where the Romanovs were killed. The house was demolished in the late 1970s."

"Without being one of those people, but wasn't it Nicholas' incompetence as a ruler that led to the Bolshevik revolution?"

"Martyrdom in the Russian Orthodox Church is not about personal actions; it's about how and why they died."

"I'm just saying that I get the kids being made saints…"

This discussion over the canonisation of the Romanovs went on for the best part of fifteen minutes, and Steve and Wanda had tuned out after the first five minutes. Both were exchanging glances at one another while the other had their attention diverted. With every glance, Steve was noting the definition of Wanda's cheekbones, the way her hair was complimenting her forest green eyes and the fullness of her lips - those he was longing to kiss again. Wanda, on the other hand, was taking note of the detail of Steve's eyes and hands, as well as his beard. She had to admit the beard suited him and she was not much of a fan of facial hair. Yet knowing the feel of it against her skin slightly aroused her.

"Oi, Dolly Daydream," Natasha called snapping Wanda out of her thoughts. "Fancy something to eat?"

Wanda nodded but then glanced back at Steve. Over lunch, Natasha was attempting to give Sam a condensed history of the Russian Revolution, however, he kept injecting questions like he was a sixteen-year-old schoolboy in a tenth-grade history lesson.

"So Lenin was not involved in the revolution that overthrew the Romanovs?" he asked.

"Yes Sam," Natasha replied, her tone now completely exasperated. "Also, Anastasia is a work of fiction. There is no evidence to suggest that any of the daughters survived."

"I like that film," Wanda imputed. "It was the one movie that Pietro and I had as kids. The other was The Sound of Music."

"Really? They had that in Sokovia?" Sam asked.

"It was on TV once and my father recorded it on a videotape. One summer our cousin Katarina, Pietro and I watched it every day, at least twice. I could recite the whole movie if I think about it hard
"I feel for your parents," Natasha commented.

Wanda snorted, "It was the only film we had in the apartment. Besides, my parents were at work and it was my grandmother who looked after us. She was usually asleep by the time Maria got to Captain von Trapp's mansion. She was convinced at one point that the movie was six hours long."

Wanda glanced at Steve and noticed the way he was looking at her. He was loving these little details about her life. It showed that she did have a happy life despite everything that had happened. The utter glee she had in her voice why recounting this anecdote made his heart grow three times the size of what was normal.

"You okay Steve?" she asked.

"Perfectly fine."

-o-

Later that night, Steve was lying awake with his thoughts filled with everything that had happened over the previous few months. He had been doing it a lot lately, in times of stress where he needed to rest but realised how messed up everything was at that moment. He really wished for the simple life.

In the room across the hall, Wanda jumped awake from a dream, and it was not one of the pleasant ones she had been having of late. It was the image she saw in the newspaper when she was five. She thought that she had forgotten it but clearly, it was embedded into her subconscious. She did not know why it had suddenly came back to her. Maybe it had something to do with the fact they were near the site of another infamous mass execution and given her uneasiness around the church, it was not too surprising.

Having decided to splash some water on her face, she got out of bed. However, when she left her room, she saw the dim light through the crack under the door to Steve's bedroom. Steve must be awake. Finally an opportunity.

Wanda knocked on the door and gently asked, "Steve, you awake?" She heard movement and within ten seconds the door was open. Steve stood there wearing just his pyjama bottoms and Wanda instantly felt a pounding in her core. She licked her lips and said by way of explanation, "Bad dream."

Steve moved aside to let her in and closed the door behind them. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"It's hard to explain. It's a dream I have had since I was five." She gave a sheepish smile and she looked down at her feel. "It's silly really.

"Let's sit on the bed and talk about it. It might make you feel better."

Steve was right. Everything Wanda revealed about the dream and why it had happened lifted the elephant resting on her shoulders. It was the one thing she never talked about with her therapist back in the United States, but with Steve, who knew her history of mental illness better than most people, it was so easy to explain.

"The last time I had the dream was after my grandmother died. She was the only one who got what was going through my head," Wanda finished. She was lying on the bed propped up on her left elbow while Steve sat with his back to the headboard. "Remember when I said that my head has always been fucked up? That was example number one. Also, reason number one why I doubt
anyone would want to be in a relationship with me."

"Because of a nightmare?" Steve asked.

"Because of everything. I have bipolar disorder and the information I was given by Doctor Bankole was a little scary for me let alone someone who would have to take care of me if I do relapse."

"You think that everyone is going to see your bipolar first?"

"Pretty much."

"I don't. I see the determined young woman who fought what she believed in, loves her family and is a genuinely kind and bright person."

"That's because you have known me before my illness."

"I'm serious, Wanda: you are more than your illness."

Wanda gave a sad smile and said, "Thank you."

Steve put his hand on her cheek and wiped away the tears forming in her eyes. Wanda shifted closer so she was resting her head against his shoulder and Steve pressed a kiss to her forehead. The feeling of his beard brushing her skin sent a shiver down her spine and her fingers went to his bare chest. She drew random patterns on his skin with her fingertip causing Steve's heart to start pounding at each brush.

"Do you mean every word you just said?" she asked softly. She knew that every word from Steve's mouth was honest, but given the last time someone told her something similar, it was under the guise of manipulation, and Wanda needed to be sure.

"Absolutely."

Wanda broke the tension and placed a soft kiss on Steve's lips. Steve wrapped his other arm around her waist and pulled her closer. Wanda could taste his mint toothpaste on his lips and she sighed softly. Her hand played with his hair as she straddled his hips. Steve broke the kiss for a moment, his eyes asking if she was sure she wanted to do this. Wanda gave a sweet smile and nodded. This was the one thing Wanda had been absolutely certain on in a long time.

Steve initiated the kiss again as his hands wandered to the hem of her tank top. Wanda lifted her arms up to allow him to remove the fabric and expose the pillows of her chest to the air. Steve had only seen a glance at them back in Tokyo, but now he had the chance to look at the details. They were full and flushed dusky pink around her nipples.

"Steven, my head is up here," Wanda joked. The use of his full name snapped his attention back to Wanda's face.

"Sorry, I just need to see all of you," he whispered.

He kissed her again and shifted to roll her onto her back. Steve broke away and moved his lips to her jaw, placing small kisses along the line before it hit the spot just under her ear. The feeling of his rough beard against her skin was better than she imagined, and when it dragged against the skin of her neck, she had to bite back a moan. Steve found a spot on her neck that caused Wanda to moan softly in response, signifying to him that this was her most sensitive spot. Steve pulled away from her neck and his fingers traced over her throat, remembering how bruised it was only a few weeks before. Wanda's mouth went thin.
"It's a little sore sometimes," she whispered. "But it is getting better."

"Good. Um, Wanda how much do you want to do?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I don't want to rush this but I want you to be comfortable and safe. I'll go as far as you want me to."

Wanda absolutely did not want to rush this. Her first time was exactly that, and she had gotten little pleasure out of it. Now that she was with Steve, a man who cared about her well-being and happiness, she was going to take her time. It was going to be their first time, and she wanted to hold onto this memory.

"Steve, if you are offering everything then I want it."

Her hand went to his cheek and she pulled him down again for a kiss. Steve, having gotten the reassurance he needed, broke away and kissed back down her neck to meet her breasts, her nipples slightly erect in response to cold air. Finally, he put his hand on the one while his tongue came out to bath the other nipple with his saliva. Wanda's breath hitched at the sensations as each massage and lick sent a pulse down to her core. She whispered something in Sokovian that Steve was not sure was a curse but it was a sign that Wanda was enjoying his ministrations. The hand that was on her breast moved down between them and slipped under the waistband of her sweatpants. He groaned a little when he felt a pooling heat within her knickers.

"I have barely done anything," he commented with a smirk as he planted a kiss on her sternum.

"You do something to me I guess," she replied as she played with his hair.

Steve chuckled and his warm breath on her skin sent a shiver down Wanda's spine. Steve kissed down further until he reached her sweatpants. He looked into Wanda's eyes, double checking she was okay and did not want to step back. Wanda nodded and elevated her hips so Steve could remove the items of clothing. Wanda's legs were stubbly since she had not had the chance to shave them but it did not put Steve off.

He hooked her left leg and planted kisses all down the inside of her thigh as the scent of her clinging to his nostrils. It was quite musky and it enticed him even more as he drew closer. Wanda sat up a little so she could see Steve and her hand went to his hair. He glanced up at Wanda one last time before his head dipped down and pressed a kiss to Wanda's centre. Wanda's breath hitched as Steve's tongue circled her entrance and she gripped the sheet tightly as he made gentle ministrations that clouded her mind.

Steve was not entirely sure what he was doing. His first time had been pity sex from a girl Bucky had set him up with, but that was basic and unromantic. He promised himself after that to save it for a woman who would see his worth. However, Bucky was not exactly short on tips. The only thing he remembered was something called the alphabet trick which Steve only remembered because it sounded so ridiculous. However, Steve was quite good at being instinctive so he would let Wanda's reactions guide his next move.

When he finally attached his lips to her engorged clit, Wanda very nearly let out a noise between a moan and a scream but she held it in just in case she woke Sam and Natasha up. At that point, Wanda pushed Steve's head closer, identifying the right spot where she wanted to be pleasured, and Steve's hand reached up towards her breast and began to pinch her nipple. Wanda gasped hard and felt the tight knot in her stomach waiting to be loosened.
"Steve," she breathed. "I think…" Suddenly the wave of pleasure washed over her and she had to hold back the scream she wanted to let out in fear of waking up their friends. Steve continued licking until he was sure the orgasm had passed and lifted his head up to see Wanda breathing heavily and her hands were wiping the sweat away from her forehead. "Bože moj." Steve wiped his mouth and moved up to her lips and pressed a kiss to it. "Are you sure you have only slept with one woman?"

"Glad to see you appreciate it," Steve chuckled. He brushed the damp strands of hair from her forehead and stroked her flushed cheek. It was only then that he realised how much he was straining in his pyjama bottoms as he pressed up against her. Then he realised something and it was too important not to mention. "I don't have a condom on me."

Despite her head still being hazy, Wanda managed to understand what Steve was concerned about. Wanda was aware that Steve had a higher chance of being fertile than other men and given the situation they were in it was too risky for her to fall pregnant. Smiling she told him, "I have a contraceptive implant, and I have been tested and I don't have anything; we're perfectly safe."

Steve nodded in understanding relief. Wanda cupped his face and pulled him down for a kiss. Steve's hands went to his pyjamas and pulled them down, freeing his erection. Wanda parted her legs to allow Steve to position himself on top of her. With his member positioned at her centre, Steve eased his way into her, and Wanda groaned at the sensation despite how gentle he was. However, Steve had frozen because the bed had made an incredibly loud squeak.

"What?" she asked in frustration.

"The bed made a noise and I don't know if Nat or Sam are awake." Steve listened out in case either Sam or Natasha made a stir. Thankfully it was silent. "Okay, I think we're good."

Wanda laughed a little because it was incredibly awkward. He was inside of her and he was only now listening out for signs of Natasha and Sam being awake. Steve shut her up by kissing her again and then he began to move at a slow, leisurely pace. She was so tight around him, and the last thing he wanted to do was hurt her.

Their moans mingling in the air, both were in a state of bliss. The initial discomfort had worn off and Wanda practically wrapped herself around Steve's body; one hand was on his neck, the other laying on the small of his back, and her legs hitched up and wrapped around his waist to keep him in place.

"I love you," she gasped. It rang in Steve's ears and his chest exploded. He had been wanting to say those words for weeks and hearing Wanda say it first was like being presented with the highest honour in the world.

Steve kissed her and replied, "I love you too."

As Steve picked up the pace, his head was buried in her neck and Wanda's eyes squeezed shut as the familiar feeling in her stomach began to bubble. Her body began to tense and Steve was not too far behind her as his spine felt like it was going to snap at any moment.

Wanda did not have to tell him to speed up; Steve knew what he needed to do and if he had woken Sam and Natasha up with the bed creaking with every thrust then so be it. Everything in that moment was perfect.

The closer Steve got to the brink, his thrusts became less coordinated, and Wanda's nails began to dig into his skin. Her toes clenched and then she trembled and let out a strangled gasp. The tightness and wetness that suddenly enveloped Steve's throbbing member just about tipped him over the edge and he spilt inside her, shaking and groaning.
It took a lot for him not to collapse on top of her but being aware he was way heavier than she was, Steve tried to keep his upper half up as he tried to regain his senses. Wanda's head was filled with a white space, she had no feeling in her legs and the pair were dripping with sweat. The only energy she could muster was when she planted a kiss in his hair.

Steve planted a kiss on her lips and rolled to the side. Both were too spent to speak. They could only stare at each other as it dawned on them that their relationship had changed forever. Steve rubbed his hand along her arm with a small smile. Wanda shuffled closer to him and touched his bicep and moved her hand down until it intertwined with Steve's.

Her forehead pressed against his and Steve pulled the rumpled blankets to cover them. Steve watched as Wanda drifted off to sleep with a contented smile on her face. He could not help but smile as he took in all the small details of her face. Her striking cheekbones, the fullness of her lips, the length of her lashes and the smooth curve of her nose. Steve had seen some beautiful sights in his lifetime but Wanda's sleeping form, coated with peace, was among the best. He gently kissed her forehead and settled into a peaceful sleep of his own.
Chapter Seven

Wanda woke up the next morning, and she instantly smiled at the feeling of Steve’s warm and solid frame spooning her. His arm was wrapped around her waist and his breath (deep and slow meant he was still sleeping) was tickling her neck. The previous night had been spectacular and her body instantly tingled at the thought of Steve’s hands and lips upon her body. Wanda had only been with one other man, but Steve seemed to be in tune with her. He listened to her and put her welfare about his pleasure. He may have been a little too considerate but after everything they had been through, she was not going to complain about gentleman courtesy. She rolled over and the shifting of the bed stirred Steve awake. Wanda thought she had never seen anything as beautiful as his glazed blue eyes.

“Morning,” he said hoarsely and blinked to adjust his eyes to the light.

“Hey,” she whispered as she put her hand on his cheek. “How are you feeling?”

“Good. You?”

“Bit sore but it’s not unpleasant.” Wanda kissed him and then started to pull the sheet off herself. “I should get back to my room before Natasha wakes up and finds I’m not there.”

“Should we keep this a secret from them?”

“I don’t know. I guess not. Since there is only the four of us, they are going to guess sooner or later. Maybe just for a few days, because I would like to spend some time with just you.”

“Deal.” Steve pulled her closer and kissed her again. The feeling of her naked body pressed against his led to his manhood twitching and it was starting to press against Wanda’s thigh. Wanda chuckled at the feeling and pushed Steve onto his back with her thighs bracketing his hips. “I thought you were sore.”

“Well, the more practice we do the less sore I am going to be.”

Wanda leaned down to kiss Steve. Steve chuckled as his hand went to her hip and the other went to her breast. Wanda gripped him and aligned herself with his erection. However, before Wanda could slide down his length, the door opened.

“Steve, Nat and I - whoa!” Sam yelled and shut the door as fast as he could after seeing Steve and Wanda in their compromising position.

Wanda groaned and dropped her head to Steve’s shoulder. “That went well,” she commented.

Feeling his erection start to fizzle, Steve pressed a kiss to her head and said, “Let’s face the music.”

By the time they cleaned up, threw on some clothes and emerged from the bedroom, it appeared that Natasha was already in the loop and was standing with a look on her face that was somewhat amused. Sam looked as though he had just walked in on his parents having sex and was trying to avoid mainly Wanda’s eye contact since he had seen far more of her naked body than Steve’s.
“Well, it seems you two had a good night,” Natasha commented. Wanda looked down at her feet and shuffled them awkwardly. Steve’s hand snaked down to hers and they interlocked them in a bid to pass reassurance onto one another. “Look, if you think we’re angry, we’re not. We’re actually kind of relieved given that you both have been pining after one another like sad puppies. We just want to be sure you know what you are doing.”

“Definitely,” Wanda replied. “I love Steve. It’s the only thing I have been sure about in weeks.”

“Same here,” Steve added as he wrapped an arm around her. “I love her and maybe it is not the best situation but we can make it work.”

“And what about… you know,” Sam inputted, still trying to avoid their eyes. “Do you at least have precautions?”

Sam would not have asked the question if they were in the Avengers Compound but given the circumstances, he had to be sure that there was not a chance they would put someone else (who would not be able to defend themselves) in danger.

“I have an implant that does not need to be changed until June 2018,” Wanda replied. She knew the date because she had talked through it with the Avengers gynaecologist. They had decided it was the best option since it meant that Wanda would not have to stress about remembering taking the pill while on a mission. Even now, it was the best option. She looked between Natasha and Sam and stated, “I’m fine. Okay? I am fine. I am more than fine. This is the finest I have been in years.”

Wanda got where they were coming from but she got the impression they thought her bipolar disorder was informing this, which it was not. Her mood and judgement had been stable for weeks.

Natasha unfolded her arms and her face relaxed. She said, “Good. Just as long as you are both happy.”

“Though two rules: one, keep the PDA to the bedroom, and two, lock the door,” Sam insisted.

“Deal,” Steve responded quickly.

“Now I am going to see if I can bleach my eyes.”

“Drama queen,” Natasha mumbled.

During the two day journey to Saint Petersburg, Steve and Wanda at least managed to restrain themselves from jumping on one another at any given moment. Since Sam was driving between Yekaterinburg and Neya (their final rest stop before Saint Petersburg), Steve took the back seat with Wanda and mostly she slept against him. Sam tried to argue that was a public display of affection but given he still had the mental image of a naked Wanda about to ride his best friend, even he admitted he was being hyperbolic.

They did not have sex that night. Wanda mostly wanted to enjoy the feeling of Steve’s presence beside her, and that was among the best things about their new relationship. They spent the night lying on their sides and looking at one another. She felt so much security next to his strong frame and Steve was happy to see her so happy over the simple things. It was only up close that Wanda noticed a small crescent-shaped scar under his left eye and she was curious how it had gotten there.

“Bucky was heavily brainwashed by HYDRA and we were trying to bring down Project Insight. He smashed his fist into my face so many times he could have killed me with one final blow,” Steve
answered.

“What stopped him?” she asked.

Steve took a sharp breath, “I reminded him of something he said to me after my mother’s funeral. Somehow it must have clicked in his head because he pulled me out of the Potomac River after I fell in.” Wanda’s hand went to her own scar on her thigh. She could still feel the shrapnel like it was yesterday. “What was your mother like?”

“She was kind. She was protective. She was everything a good mother should be. I wish I will be like she was when I have kids.”

“You want kids?”

“Well, not right now, but eventually. If we ever get out of this situation.”

There was a pause between the two. Steve had wanted children a long time ago. Back in the forties, when he thought he would see the end of the war, he thought he would settle down, marry and have children. Since being freed from the ice, however, those thoughts had gotten less and less. Being on the run had squandered those desires for the foreseeable future.

“Maybe one day,” Steve whispered. Wanda rested her hand on her belly for a moment, dreaming that she was heavily pregnant with Steve’s baby but then shook her head. It was too soon and too unlikely, even if it was a nice thing to hope for. “Wanda, I just need to say that being in a relationship is sort of new to me. I may get some things wrong so forgive me if I am not too good at being a good partner.”

Wanda smiled and rested her hand on his cheek, “This is new to me too, so maybe we can work it out together.”

She pressed a kiss on his lips and snuggled closer to him. He smiled and wrapped his arm around her as they both fell into a deep sleep.

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The next afternoon, they arrived in Saint Petersburg and immediately went sightseeing. The city was larger than what Wanda imagined, but there was a bus tour and their tour guide explained that because the foundations of the city were built on a swamp, the buildings could not go higher than a certain level, meaning that the city had to expand out.

“How many freaking palaces did the Tsar need?” Sam asked when they stood across the river from the Hermitage Museum, formerly known as The Winter Palace.

“Yeah, you know serfdom was still a thing in Russia long after everyone else outlawed it?” Natasha countered.

“So, did the masses storm that whole building?”

“That was just Soviet propaganda. The Bolsheviks basically walked through the front door and declared themselves leaders.”

“Did you ever read Animal Farm Sam?” Wanda asked.

“Isn’t that the one with the pigs?” Sam asked. “Anyway, we should get to the hotel and see what ferries are heading to Helsinki.”
It took a quick Google search to locate what ferries were heading to Helsinki and that the next one would be in two days time. It was cheaper for them to get a cabin for the four of them than it was to split between three cabins, so Wanda and Steve agreed to no ‘funny business’ (Natasha’s words) on the boat.

While they were in the hotel, however…

“Jesus Wanda,” Steve groaned as the feeling of Wanda’s hot, wet mouth coated his shaft. His mind was being scrambled with each roll of her tongue on the tip. His eyes clenched with his abdominal muscles and his hand went to stroke her hair.

Wanda was making some small moans against him and the vibrations set his nerves alight. Her other hand was dancing over Steve’s chest and abdomen and eventually it slid down his side and then cupped one of his ass cheeks, squeezing the muscle.

“Fuck…” he whispered as a spasm went through his body. He was shaking as he felt the tension in his spine begin to unravel and despite how desperate he was to keep a hold of his senses, he failed. He released with a tremulous groan, his eyes squeezed shut and the hand on Wanda’s head fell to the side.

Once Wanda was sure she had gotten every last drop out of Steve, she unwrapped her lips from his flagging member and kissed up his hypersensitive body to his lips. “I will take that as a thank you.”

Steve’s mind was still clouded so the best response he could muster was a kiss. Wanda rolled off him and pulled the sheet up to cover Steve. Wanda was covered by Steve’s shirt and boxers. Her head perched on his shoulder and he wrapped his arm around her so her leg was draped over his thigh and her arm lay across his chest.

“That was great,” Steve eventually spluttered.

“I take it that your mind had not caught up with reality yet,” Wanda commented with a chuckle.

“Not really.”

“I will also take that as a thank you.” Steve pressed a kiss to her forehead as Wanda drew patterns on his chest. “When did you know?”

“Know what?”

“That Father Christmas isn’t real.” The sarcasm in her voice made him laugh. “When did you know you loved me?”

Steve’s brain was still slightly frazzled from his orgasm that he struggled to think of a coherent thought. Eventually, he answered, “That night in Seoul where I took you out to dinner. It was when that musician was playing that song you liked and you looked so happy that my heart exploded. Also, the lyrics spoke to me a little.”

Wanda went through the lyrics in her head and smiled when she hit, ‘There are many things that I would like to say to you but I don’t know how.’

“I was going to tell you before… well before I was shot.” Wanda’s lips thinned and her fingers caressed the skin that had been patched up. Given the lack of a scar, no one would have known he had been shot not too long ago. “So what about you?”

“I realised in Ulaanbaatar, but I think those feelings have been there longer.”
“You think.”

“The more I look back, the more moments I see where we could have gotten together. I guess you being shot knocked some sense into me. Though I really do not want to see you hurt again.”

“I don’t intend to.”

Wanda smiled and pressed a kiss against his lips. While there was the doubt in her head over how long they could keep on the run, she had no doubts about her relationship with Steve. Little did Wanda know, however, that someone had been watching the hotel building as though he was waiting for her especially to emerge in the daylight. It was half an hour later when she and Steve came out of the hotel and his target was in sight.

*End of Part Two*

Chapter End Notes

So lovely readers we are entering Part Three. Trigger warnings for stalking apply from here.
Part Three: Every Breath You Take

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Part Three: Every Breath You Take

Every breath you take,
Every move you make,
Every bond you break,
Every step you take,
I'll be watching you.

Chapter One

“You know Sam, you don’t half give people heart attacks,” Natasha commented as they bordered the ferry to Helsinki. Sam had lost his exit visa and the only reason he managed to get through security was due to a large queue of people waiting behind them.

“I swear I had it in my passport,” Sam responded. “What are they going to do, send me to the gulags?”

“First of all, the gulag was the organisation that ran the labour camps. Second, don’t joke about that.”

“Okay, sorry. Just trying to lighten the mood a little.”

In the meantime, Steve and Wanda had gone to collect the cabin key and they looked back at their bickering friends.

“We have a whole night of this,” Wanda commented. Steve smirked and laced his fingers with her. “Is it too late to buy a separate cabin?”

“Given how many people are on this ship, yes,” Steve replied. “It’s just one night. However, if you really want to get away from them for a little bit, there is an Italian restaurant where we can have dinner.”

“Are you asking me on a date Captain?”

“Well, we can’t spend time just having sex. There is more to being in a relationship.”

“But it is a major perk,” she purred in his ear. Steve smiled goofily as they walked to Natasha and Sam, who were still bickering. “You two going to do this all night?”

“Depends,” Sam answered.

Natasha rolled her eyes and ordered, “Come on, let’s get to the cabin.” However, the cabin was incredibly tiny. Wanda and Natasha could probably get around okay, but Steve and Sam were not small people and they really struggled to get around the room. “Why did we agree to one cabin again?”

“Because it was economically cheaper,” Wanda answered as she climbed up to her bunk. “It’s only
for one night. Just be sure that you both don’t need to pee during the night.”

“Funny,” Sam commented. “So, what are we doing this evening.”

“Wanda and I were going to check out this Italian restaurant,” Steve replied.

“Thanks for the invite, we would love to come,” Natasha said sarcastically.

Wanda took a deep breath, and, having missed Natasha’s sarcasm, stated, “It’s just between Steve and me. You know, like a date.”

Natasha tried not to show Wanda her disdain for missing what she thought was obvious sarcasm and replied, “Oh. Well, I heard there was karaoke on in the main bar.”


“I never said we had to partake. We just watch and listen.”

“That’s just as bad.”

Later that afternoon, Wanda had dressed in a smart grey dress and Steve was in smart jeans and t-shirt as they entered the restaurant hand in hand. It looked a little fancy for how they were dressed, however, there looked to be a group of touring students that were dressed in crumpled shorts and t-shirts so they were not completely out of place in the room. The waitress showed them to a table by the window that gave a brilliant view of the sea.

“Anything to drink?” the waitress asked.

“Just water for me please,” Wanda replied.

“I might have whatever beer is on tap,” Steve added.

The waitress went to get their drinks and Wanda glanced at the menu. She did not fancy pasta. She needed something doughy and cheesy but the pizzas were quite large by the look of them. “I don’t think I could eat a whole pizza.”

“We could share one. You know that I can eat loads so anything you don’t eat, I’ll finish.” Wanda smiled and chose the spinach and ricotta pizza. “So this is different from last time.”

“Well, you haven’t been shot yet so…” Steve snorted and reached over to take her hand. Wanda laced her fingers with Steve and squeezed it. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Go ahead.”

“When I was younger, I thought I was in love with this boy called Novak. It felt different from the love I feel for you. I know that you were in love with Peggy, but is it different to how you feel about me?”

Steve blinked at her, “What had brought this on?”

“I was just curious. I am new to this. I’ve never been in a relationship before so…”

“Well, Peggy and I were not exactly in a relationship so it is new to me too. I guess there is little difference in how I felt towards Peggy and me how I feel towards you. How did you feel towards Novak?”
“Well, I never had the connection with Novak like I have with you. I guess it was because he was attractive and I was sixteen… Feels a bit stupid to talk about it now. I don’t think he reciprocated those feelings either, so it was really stupid.”

“It’s not stupid. I thought I felt the same way about a few women when I was sixteen. However, I knew what genuine love was once I met Peggy.”

“Do you still love her?”

Steve had to think about that for a moment. He knew that a part of him would always hold Peggy dear to his heart, however, he had spent years forcing himself to realise that he had no future with Peggy. Now she was gone, those feelings had dissipated. He was heartbroken when he heard the news that she had passed away, but it was healing better than he thought it would. He guessed his attempt to distance his feelings was responsible for it.

Eventually, he replied, “I think I have left those feelings behind a long time ago.”

Wanda felt some doubt in his words. She remembered his vision when she enthralled him back in South Africa. The fact that Peggy was front and centre of the vision said a lot, but that was a year ago and things had changed. Then again, the other interpretation she had taken from the vision was that Steve felt like he was still unable to connect with the modern world.

“Do you still think that you still feel out of place?” she asked.

“If you woke up seventy years in the future and everything you knew was gone, would you not feel out of place?”

“You woke up from the ice four years ago. You have - well you made a life in the modern world. I wondered if you still feel the same now?”

“I would not say I made a life. A life is something outside of work. I don’t think I ever stopped working. Until now. Maybe this is the kick I need to make a normal life.”

“Can we have a normal life in this situation?”

“I don’t know.”

Wanda gave a small, soft smile. At least he was honest that the situation was not the best to make a ‘normal life’. After they had their pizza (Wanda had around two and a half large slices), they made their way to the bar area where Natasha and Sam were sitting and listening to the karaoke. On the stage, a woman was belting a terrible rendition of Whitney Houston’s ‘How Will I Know’. Sam was trying to not cringe with every off-key note while Natasha seemed to be enjoying herself.

“I’m surprised that you two did not go back to the cabin,” Natasha commented coyly.

Steve rolled his eyes and asked Wanda if she wanted anything to drink. She asked for a diet coke. While Steve went to grab their drinks, Wanda sat down and asked, “Still bickering?”

“Not since we boarded,” Sam answered. “How was dinner?”

“It was really nice.”

“You know if you and Steve want some space, you could ask. We’re not going to be put out. We get the need for privacy sometimes,” Natasha added.
“It was not so much the lack of space, it was because you two have not stopped bickering since we left the hotel in Saint Petersburg.”

“Look, the only reason we started bickering was that I was afraid that we were going to have to leave Sam behind. We can’t split up.”

“I know, but I am afraid there will be something that will split us up and I don’t want it to be because of a fight.”

“Well, we’ll make sure it does not go that far,” Sam reassured. “Right now, I need to go back to the cabin before my ears bleed.”

“Agreed, I think we should take our drinks back and spend time together,” Natasha suggested.

Wanda looked to the stage and saw the next song was a rendition of ‘Baby’ by Justin Bieber and she had to agree to go back to the cabin.

“You sure this is entertainment?” Steve asked holding the two drinks in his hand.

“We’re going back to the cabin,” Wanda announced.

“Good idea,” Steve winced as the singer hit a high note badly.

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Wanda could not get to sleep that night. It seemed the closer they approached Europe, the more unsettled Wanda felt. Given that they were getting close to the area that was likely to be heavily patrolled, she knew that there was an increased chance of being caught.

She spent most of the night tossing and turning on the bunk above Steve’s. Steve could hear her and he was a little worried. She only usually tossed and turned if there was something weighing on her mind, or if she was having a bad dream. Eventually, he heard a touch turn on and Wanda picking up her book. It seemed like she was unable to sleep.

He pretended to get up to use the bathroom and took the opportunity to check she was okay.

“It’s the rocking of the boat,” she answered.

“You sure?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

She gave a small smile as he walked towards the bathroom. She hated lying to him, but she did not want to worry Steve. The next morning she felt like rubbish. The lack of sleep was making her feel irritable and she struggled to make it through breakfast and immigration.

“Are you okay?” Natasha asked when they stepped out of the port.

“I’m fine. I just did not get much sleep last night because I could feel the boat rocking,” Wanda answered quickly.

“You would say if something is bothering you right?”

“Of course I would. Trust me, I’m okay.”

The four walked over to the Sparakoff Pub Tram since it was the best way of getting all the main
sights of the city in a short space of time. Natasha then ordered three Finnish Long Drinks and some water for Wanda.

“What the hell is this?” Sam asked taking a sip.

“So for the 1952 Summer Olympics, Finland liberalised their state-controlled alcohol policy for foreign visitors by introducing pre-mixed bottled drinks. The Long Drink is gin with grapefruit juice or soda,” Natasha explained.

“Quite refreshing,” Steve commented.

“Wanda you are missing out here,” Sam added.

“Well, unless you want me to descend into alcoholism,” Wanda replied, her voice filled partly with annoyance and bitterness. She would not have been so snippy if she had actually slept but it was a bit insensitive for Sam to say that.

Steve, Natasha and Sam looked at one another, a little worried about Wanda’s snappy behaviour. Eventually, Steve asked, “Have you took your lithium today?”

“I took it this morning. Why?”

“You just seem a little…”

“I’m fine, honestly.” The three looked at each other again, all doubtful of Wanda’s claim. “So what are we doing next?”

“Our flight to Copenhagen is this evening,” Natasha replied. “We should be able to grab a car there and drive through to London from there.”

“You certain it will be clear by now?”

“It should be. We just have to be careful.”

Wanda ran her fingers through her hair and looked out of the window. She saw the Helsinki Cathedral. She spotted a man standing on the steps, and she wondered whether he was warm in his blue jumper and jeans. The fact it was the height of summer and the tram was really warm, made her feel tired and a little delirious. She must have been. When she blinked, she thought the man on the steps had disappeared.

“ Weird,” she whispered.

Once the tour had finished, the group walked towards the seafront and Wanda took a deep breath. She looked to Steve a moment and then leaned into him. Steve wrapped his arm around her and pressed a kiss to her head.

“Sorry, I think it may be the lack of sleep,” she whispered.

“You sure?” he asked.

“Yeah. Maybe I should sleep on the flight and that might settle me.”

“I think the car may be a better option.”

“I guess.”
“Right, three countries to go,” Natasha announced as they drove through the German border. “We’re making good progress.”

“But now we are in the lion’s den,” Steve commented. “Hopefully we should be in London in two days.”

“We are very close to The Hague,” Sam pointed out.

“Maybe we should go tell them about the human rights violations on the Raft,” Wanda replied bitterly. Steve looked at Wanda with a concerned look on his face. She had not slept the previous night either. He had put it down to the fear of her being captured again, but it just seemed odd that she had gone from being relatively happy to anxious and snappy in only a few short days. Granted, even with the medication, Wanda’s bipolar disorder could still be having an influence over her moods. “It’s really hot in this car.”

“The windows are cranked down,” Natasha replied. “I think it may be just you Wanda because I am fine.”

“Are you okay, Wanda?” Steve asked.

“Like I said I am just hot.” When they hit a rest stop, Steve asked Wanda to take a walk with him so she could cool off but also get anything that was on her mind out in the open. “It’s nothing, honestly Steve, I just don’t like being nervous at everything.”

“Is that why you haven’t slept in two nights?” Steve asked.

“Has it been two nights?”

“You barely slept on the ferry to Helsinki and last night, you spent most of it pacing around the hotel room.”

“Like I said, I think I might just be anxious.”

“I know,” he whispered pushing her hair from her face. He leaned down to kiss her and she reciprocated. Her hands clasped his shirt and her nails scraped his chest. “Listen, Wanda, there is nothing I can say that will calm your nerves, but I am not going to let them take you without a fight.”

“Me neither.” Wanda was just about to kiss him again when Steve felt his disposable phone ring. “That can’t be Tony can it?”

Steve looked at the display name and shook his head and said, “No. It’s Sharon.”

“Who’s Sharon again?”

“Peggy’s niece,” Steve answered the phone with a very confused look on his face. “Hello?”

Five minutes later, Natasha and Sam noticed Steve looking very spooked as he walked quickly to the car, with a very worried Wanda rushing behind him.

“Whoa, Steve, where is the fire?” Sam asked.

“Sharon needs our help,” Steve answered.

“With what?” Natasha questioned.
“I don’t know. Sharon is meeting us in Amsterdam to give us all she knows.”

As they all got in the car, Wanda felt a wave of dread go through her. It was almost as though her fears of getting caught and being sent back to The Raft were becoming reality. She knew it was completely irrational, but she did not know Sharon, and for all they knew, Sharon could be being used as bait to catch them.

Chapter End Notes

Sam's missing exit visa is based on a true story about when I went to Saint Petersburg in 2014. My friend and cabinmate lost his exit visa but was still allowed out of the country. It sounds ridiculous but it did happen.

Anyway, before people start freaking out, no Sharon is not the stalker.
Wanda tapped her fingers nervously against the table in a bar as she and the others waited for Sharon to arrive. Sam and Natasha were watching out of the window while the best Wanda could do was look at the television screen. On the screen, she could see a news report about the Staten Island Ferry being torn apart, and then a bunch of Iron Man drones pushing the parts back together. Tony Stark saves the day once again. Steve, who was also watching the screen, put his hand across hers and gave it a squeeze in reassurance. However, it was not just Wanda that was nervous.

"How do we know this is not a trap?" Sam asked. "What if the CIA has Sharon acting like bait?"

"I think we just need to keep our heads clear and make sure we don't draw attention to ourselves," Natasha replied. Just then, Natasha noticed a blonde woman walk in wearing a pair of sunglasses

"This is her."

Sharon lifted her sunglasses and saw the four of them sitting around a table. She gave a small smile and sat with them and commented, "So, you guys clearly put some effort into your disguises."

"How have you been?" Steve asked. The last time he saw Sharon was in the airport car park where they had shared a kiss but surprisingly Sharon did not seem particularly fazed at seeing him again.

Wanda blinked at Steve in confusion at his sudden eagerness to greet Sharon. She took a glance at Sharon, and while she knew she was being ridiculous, she could not help the stab of jealousy hit her in the chest. Sharon was incredibly beautiful, much more conventionally than Wanda perceived herself to be.

"Well, apart from being on suspension pending further investigation, not too bad," she answered. The tone was more humoured by the statement than bitter-filled, which meant that she was not blaming them for landing her in this situation. "Listen, I need to make this quick because if we are all caught then I will be definitely be sent to prison. I need your help."

"What with?" Natasha asked.

"Someone at work has informed me that they keep spotting a man in places like Seoul, Beijing."

"Basically every step we have taken," Sam interrupted.

"You've been to the places that I am about to show you? South Korea, China, Russia, Finland and Denmark?"

"Yes," Steve answered realising that it had to be more than coincidence. "Do you know who he is?"

"We do not know who he is or whether he is dangerous. There does not seem to be a paper trail
either." Sharon put the CCTV footage stills on the table and they all went through them. The man looked to be tall, white, and light-haired, wearing what looked to be jeans and a jumper. Outside of that, no one could imagine who it could be. They did not recognise him for a start, though there was something about the image outside the Helsinki Cathedral that was ringing a bell in Wanda's brain. "The reason I called you was because I need you to report anything to me so I can inform the CIA - my test to see if I can be trusted I guess."

"He seems to be wearing the same clothes," Wanda observed. "Or maybe he has multiples of the same outfit?"

"But at least we know whom to look out for," Natasha commented.

"Just be careful." Sharon got out her chair and Steve decided to follow her outside, "Steve? What are you doing?"

"I need to say sorry," he blurted. "About that kiss in the airport"

"Why would you be sorry about that?" Sharon asked confused.

"I think I deflected some of my regret over Peggy onto you, and that was not right. You're her niece but also your own person."

Sharon's mouth twisted from corner to corner, as though she was processing what Steve had told her. After a moment she nodded and gave a relieved smile. "You know, the more I think about it - and I have thought about it - the more I believe that I did something similar. You're literally the only person alive who can tell me what Aunt Peggy was like as a young woman. You're a good man Steve, but you and I together is not a good idea. It's actually kind of weird."

Steve chuckled, "Okay, good. Glad that I haven't hurt you in any way."

"You never did. I think our heads were confused and we probably would have regretted it if we pursued it."

Steve nodded and she bid goodbye to him with a small smile. Steve reflected that smile and turned back to the bar, only to find Wanda standing there with a look of hurt and confusion painted across her face.

"You kissed her?" she asked.

Steve rubbed his hand across his face and answered, "Yes but that was before I ever had feelings for you."

"You said you were deflecting your feelings for Peggy onto her. Are you doing it to me?"

"Absolutely not."

"I don't believe you!"

"Wanda," he began, cupping her face, "I am telling you the truth. I love you for who you are."

Wanda, still not able to believe him, pushed him away. "I need to take a walk."

"Wanda, there's a potential stalker out there." Wanda completely ignored him as she stormed away. Steve ran his hand through his hair and tried to follow her but she was soon gone with the crowds. "Fuck."
At that point, Natasha and Sam walked out of the cafe looking completely confused over what they just witnessed.

"Please tell me that Wanda felt irrationally jealous of Sharon," Natasha ordered.

"I don't really know how to explain this…" Steve began but could not find the words.

"You were speaking to Sharon about that kiss in Germany, Wanda overheard and she freaked out?" Sam asked.

"That, and she thinks that I may be deflecting what I felt for Peggy onto her because that is what I did to Sharon."

"And are you?" Natasha asked.

"No, of course not. It was just the emotions of the week when I kissed Sharon. My feelings for Peggy are long gone."

"And I guess Wanda did not believe you. You're an idiot."

"I know."

"Give her some time to cool off. You know her head doesn't process stuff rationally," Sam told them.

"I think we have a bigger problem: you know how you said that the guy had been in the same places as us at the same time? I think we may have a stalker."

"You think we have someone stalking us and you just let her walk off?" Natasha all but yelled.

"I know Nat, I tried to tell her," Steve insisted.

"Look she cannot have gotten far so I suggest that Natasha and I go look for her and see if we can calm her down," Sam suggested. "Steve, you go back to the hotel because we don't need a scene with her screaming at you."

"I need to speak to her," Steve said firmly.

"Which you can do when we get her back to the hotel. Stuff like this only works in private," Natasha retorted "We'll find her."

Steve could only agree to this even if he knew he should be out there looking for his girlfriend. However, Natasha was right, and he did need to think through what he would say to Wanda in case he hurt her further.

He let them walk away. Half an hour later, Natasha was stumped at where Wanda could be and it was nearing dark. Then she had a realisation, "Anne Frank."

"What about Anne Frank?" Sam asked.

"Wanda's grandmother would have been in Bergen-Belsen at the same time as Anne Frank, and the Anne Frank House is just up the street."

"But it should be closed for the day."

"Doesn't mean she will not be standing outside somewhere. Come on." The two walked towards Prinsengracht 263-267, hoping to catch a sign of Wanda, eventually catching a sight of her bright red
hair sitting beside the canal. They walked up slowly to her, and Natasha asked, "You going to stay out here until it opens again?"

"Doesn't sound like a bad idea," Wanda replied solemnly. "If you're trying to get me to go back-"

"Wanda, come on. You cannot possibly believe that Steve is using you."

"It makes sense though. He used Sharon."

"Well, Sharon used him as well. Grief makes people do stupid things. You should know that."

"If this is you trying to make me feel better then you are doing an incredibly shit job."

Natasha's hands rubbed down her face and she turned to Sam, wondering if he could offer anything to the conversation. Only over his shoulder, she could see someone in the distance. A tall, white blonde man wearing jeans and a blue jumper.

"Hey!" Natasha yelled as she made a run at him, only for him to start running away. However, Natasha was in hot pursuit and she disappeared around the corner.

"You should go after her," Wanda commented to Sam.

"Nat can take care of herself. Listen, Wanda, Steve loves you. Genuinely loves you. He had feelings for you for weeks but he did not say anything because he wanted to be sure. He did not want to hurt you," Sam explained to her. "Okay, I was there when they kissed but trust me when I say the way he looks at you is completely different to the way he looked at her. Scout's honour."

"It's not the fact he kissed Sharon. It's that he kissed her because he still had feelings for Peggy."

"And you're worried he still has those feelings." Wanda nodded and ran her hands through her hair. "Honestly, Wanda, the only way you are going to know is if you speak to him. I don't think he does."

"I can't even look him in the eye at the moment."

"You don't have to look him in the eye. You just have to hear him out."

"Well, the bastard got away," Natasha announced walking back up to them. "Hopefully now he knows we know he is watching us he'll disappear for good. So, what are we doing? Are we going back to the hotel or are we staying here for the night?"

Wanda thought about Sam's words. On the one hand, she was still mad and concerned that Steve was deflecting his feelings for Peggy onto Wanda, making her a replacement. However, another part of Wanda's mind wondered what Steve had to gain from it.

"Okay, I'll come back," she said softly.

-o-

Steve had spent the last hour devising a list. He had to think through everything he loved about Wanda, and then circle everything that was different to what he loved about Peggy. Somehow, almost effortlessly, he managed to circle a lot more than he feared he could. There was a knock at the door and he went to open it. Wanda was standing there, her face neither happy to see him but not angry enough that he should be worried.

"Hey," he whispered. Wanda walked past him and stood in the middle of the room with her arms
folded. Once Steve closed the door, he said, "I'm sorry. I should have told you about Sharon. I guess I did not think it was important."

"Well, you were wrong," she retorted. "You can't just kiss one woman because she's your dead lover's niece and then suddenly fall in love with another woman without some of those feelings lingering."

"I know, but you have to believe me when I say I love you for who you are. I know I tried to push my feelings for Peggy aside for years, and I can't say that they had completely gone by the time she died, but I haven't really thought about her since I started falling for you."

"I've seen a picture of her Steve. You can't say there are no physical similarities."

"You both have dark hair and that is about it. I made a list. I wrote everything that I loved about Peggy and what I love about you. Everything I have circled is different."

He held out the sheet of paper and Wanda took it. She read the list carefully. The similarities were that they were brave, smart, kind, beautiful and selfless. What was different? Steve knew more about Wanda's life, fears and desires more than he had done Peggy. While he knew Peggy reciprocated his feelings, Peggy was always going to be a dream. Wanda was more grounded in reality.

Wanda sniffed, "You really mean all of this?"

Steve walked over and cupped her face. He stared into her welling eyes and nodded, "Absolutely."

Wanda then burst into tears and Steve immediately went to hug her. "Shush, it's okay."

"I'm sorry," she hiccuped.

"Hey, it's understandable. I should have been clear with you from the start."

"I love you, Steve. I just cannot lose you as well."

"I know. I'm not planning on going anywhere anytime soon." He pressed a kiss into her hair and rocked her gently. Wanda lifted her head and started to plant kisses along his jawline. Steve met her lips. It was so light and gentle at first. Wanda then clutched his t-shirt and ran her tongue along his lips. Steve allowed her accessed and they drank each other in and moaned in desperation as their hands began to tug at each other's clothing. Given how emotional Wanda had been, Steve thought it was best to ask, "You okay to do this?"

"I need you," she gasped as she pulled off Steve's t-shirt. "I need you."

"Okay, Doll."

Wanda did not hear the term of endearment as Steve removed her dress and immediately stroked his strong hands over her covered breasts and bottom. The two kissed again and Steve lifted her up to carry her to the bed. Wanda's hands began to work the button of his jeans and whispered, "Need you now." Her hand snuck down into his boxers and then gripped his twitching member in her hand.

Steve groaned at the feeling of her delicate hand on him and he unclipped her bra and pulled her panties down, leaving her bare. That was another thing in her favour: Steve knew every crevice of her body by now, and every mole and every scar. Sensing her desperation for them to be joined, Steve pulled down his jeans and boxers and rolled over so she was on top of him.

With one hand gripped on his now proud erection and another on his chest, Wanda joined them and they both let out a groan at the feeling.
"Oh fuck," Wanda whispered as he filled her. They had not tried sex at this angle but they really should have since it hit her at just the right spot. Steve sat up and wrapped his arms around her waist, almost as though he was holding a protective grip around her and Wanda felt a wave of safety fill her body as she moved.

Despite how desperate she was for him to fill her, she took it slowly, wanting to enjoy the comfort of his arms and body against her. Their moans were soft and gentle, affirming of their love for one another. Steve pressed kisses along her shoulder and neck as the pace of Wanda's hips picked up and their moans became more aggressive. Her nails began to dig into his back and her head tilted back as Steve's member hit her spot from the most delicious angle.

Her hips moved quickly as the feeling at the bottom of her spine began to increase with each movement. Wanda pressed her forehead against Steve's as their moans mingled together. She wanted to look at his eyes during his surrender, which judging by how much he was shaking could not be far away.

"Steve I-" Steve knew what to do and his hand went between where they were joined and used only one finger to roll her clit. Wanda let out a noise between a gasp and a choke and began to slam her hips against his in a bid to finally reach her peak. And when it came, it hit her like a train. Her senses went into overdrive and she could just about hear Steve calling her name with a tremor as he released. Wanda collapsed in a heap beside him as she tried to regain her breath. Steve was doodling patterns on her arms with his finger and looking just as whacked out as she was. It felt like an age until Wanda found the strength to speak again.

"That was…" she whispered.

"That was something," he replied.

"I don't know why I am so paranoid all of a sudden. I think I felt like this in Russia but not to this extent."

"I don't think to find out we're being followed helped."

"Speaking of which, Natasha spotted him by the Anne Frank House. Hopefully, she scared him off. I doubt it though. Something is telling me he is going to be right behind us at all times."

"Let's not kill the mood, not after that."

"Sorry. About everything today. I was immature and…"

"I'm sorry too. I should not have made you feel this way. I should have been honest from the start. I love you, Wanda."

"I love you too."

Wanda looked at the time and realised that in all the chaos, she had not taken her lithium. Once she had gone through her bag and took the pill with water, she snuggled up to Steve, her head under his chin and his arm around her. For the first time in three days, Wanda drifted off to sleep, Steve's heartbeat soothing in her ears.

Chapter End Notes
Sharon will be back in a later chapter so look out for that. I just needed to address something that was brought up in a previous chapter (Sam's concern about how solid Steve's feelings towards Wanda was). Let me know what you think.

Anyway, I published two fics over the weekend, one a Wanda/Steve and the other a Tony/Pepper so check those out if you wish. Both are light fluff so might be a nice break away from this.
Chapter Three

When Wanda and Steve walked down to breakfast the next morning hand-in-hand, they found Natasha and Sam helping themselves to the buffet. Both had small smiles on their faces, which indicated to their friends that the fight was over and all was at peace again, much to Sam's relief.

"Made up?" Sam asked.

"Yeah," Wanda replied. "We talked it through and it's all good now."

"I should go into relationship counselling."

"Well, you look well-rested so I take it that your moodiness has passed," Natasha commented.

"Thanks?" Wanda replied unsure if it was a backhanded compliment but shrugged it off. She helped herself to scrambled eggs, sausage and some toast. She also added a bowl of fruit salad. "So, when do we leave for Calais?"

"Let's get a table and I'll explain," Natasha ordered. Steve and Sam looked at one another about what she had to say. Once everyone had grabbed their breakfast, they found a table amongst the busy room. "I think we need to stay an extra night."

"Why?" Steve asked.

"Is this about the guy we saw by the Anne Frank House?" Sam added.

"Yeah. I need to be sure he had gone for good. I did get a better look at him. He's definitely blonde, white, tall, slim build and clearly quite fast if he managed to get away from me," Natasha explained. "It should be easier to spot."

"It was just weird how he showed up like that. It makes you wonder how close on our tail he was," Sam replied as he stuffed some mushrooms into his mouth.

"I'm wondering that too," Steve added. "I think Nat is right though."

"What if Ross already knows we're here?" Wanda asked. "The guy could have told Ross by now and he'll be sending in a SWAT team."

"I'm not so sure he is with Ross," Natasha retorted. "Think about it. He's been following us for weeks. Surely he would have told Ross by now."

"So who could he be if he isn't a spy for Ross? Some superfan?" Sam asked.

"I don't know." Natasha looked over the photographs Sharon had provided them. Something did look off about the images like there was something marked on him but she could not work it out. "The fact he is wearing the same outfit is freaking me out."

"So what do we do?" Steve asked. "Stay in the hotel?"
"May as well. Unless Wanda wants to pay a visit to the Anne Frank House."

Wanda looked around confused by the statement and asked, "Why would I want to go there?"

"I guessed since that is where we found you last night…"

"Oh." Wanda looked at her breakfast and started to toss it about with her fork. While she did have the urge to go back to the Anne Frank House, there was a lingering doubt in her mind. "Maybe staying in the hotel is a better idea."

The four looked around each other to gauge what they thought about this. Steve was up for whatever Wanda wanted to do, and if she felt safe in the hotel, it was good enough for him. Natasha seemed sympathetic to Wanda's wishes but there was a gleam in her eye that wanted to reassure Wanda that there was four of them against one guy. Sam, however, did not agree with Wanda's suggestion that staying in the hotel was the best idea.

"You know what, it isn't," Sam said firmly. "We should not be scared of our own shadows because of one guy."

"One problem there Sam: we're fugitives," Steve pointed out. "And we don't know if he is an agent of Ross."

"So, we put a cap on. Come on, guys."

Wanda looked between Steve and Natasha, hoping they would come to a decision without her input. The experience of being watched the previous night really freaked her out, especially since she did not know how long he was there before Natasha caught him. However, she wanted to go to the Anne Frank House. She was around the same age as her grandmother when they were both in Bergen-Belsen, and Wanda wondered what would have been the alternative to her grandmother just about surviving the atrocities.

"Okay," Wanda whispered. "Let's go."

"You sure Wanda?" Steve asked.

"Sam's right. We're just doing what the guy wants by hiding."

Steve blinked at her, but if she was sure about going outside the hotel, then he was going to be there for her.

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As the tour guide regurgitated information about Anne Frank's life before and during hiding, Wanda looked at the photographs of the Frank family and noted how young the girl was despite her infamy. She was only fifteen. Not even a full life lived. Wanda always wondered if her grandmother had met Anne Frank. Then again, her grandmother always said that everyone looked the same so even if they did interact, it would not have stuck in her grandmother's mind.

"You okay Doll?" Steve asked taking her hand.

"After my grandmother was liberated, she went back home and found that she was likely the only survivor. She had to rebuild her whole life, and I wonder whether she felt as though everything was too much for her," Wanda explained. She sniffed and had to wipe a tear from her eye. "I miss her. She always knew what to say to put things right." Steve wrapped his arm around her and pressed a kiss to the top of her hair. Wanda felt instantly warm from Steve's comfort and thankful that he was
there for her. However, she realised something: "Did you just call me Doll?"

"Yeah… sorry. Is that okay?"

"It's… appropriate I guess." It was appropriate in the sense that she felt like a fragile doll but she doubted Steve said it because he saw her that way. "Maybe we will test some others to see what fits." Wanda ran her fingers through her hair and kept looking in the corner of her eyes in case the man had followed them again. "Steve, can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"Did you know what was going on in Europe, back in the 40s?"

Steve took a deep breath because he did not know how Wanda would respond to the truth. However, Wanda needed honesty given that she had been deceived by Vision a few months before and there had been a misunderstanding over Steve not revealing what happened between him and Sharon. He admitted the truth for her benefit, even if it was not pleasant.

"We heard rumours, and then the Russians liberated Auschwitz and we were absolutely horrified. However, our units were told that since we had men heading towards Berlin, they were likely to meet some of those camps along the way and there was no point in us trying to liberate them since we needed to stamp out HYDRA." Wanda nodded in understanding. Steve could not save everyone at once, supersoldier or not. "If I could, I would have done it in a heartbeat."

"I know. It's part of why I love you so much. Steve, thank you for coming with me. I know it was dangerous, but I think I needed it. Just to feel closer to my grandmother. And Sam was right. I need to stop being scared at every turn."

Steve pulled her into a hug and stroked her hair. "You're braver than you believe, you know that?"

-o-

The drive to Calais was not as long as the one between Copenhagen and Amsterdam, though waiting in the queue to get onto a ferry to Dover felt just as long. There were many lorries and they noticed people trying to sneak into the back of the lorries. Women and children were among them, and they were looking desperate to get onto the lorries.

"You hear about this on the news but you don't realise the extent until you see it," Natasha commented.

"It makes you wonder how desperate they are to get to somewhere safe," Wanda added. As someone who had lived in a war zone, Wanda a great deal of empathy for the people trying to get to the United Kingdom in hopes of a better life. "I can't say I blame them."

"Okay, this is the final check before we get on the boat. Do we have the passports ready?" Steve asked. Everyone pulled out their fake passports and prepared for them to be inspected. When they arrived at the checkpoint, Steve said, "Bonjour, aimeriez-vous voir nos passeports?"

"Oui," the guard answered with his hand out. Steve handed over the passports and the guard kept looking at them and then back at each passport. Eventually, after what felt like an eternity, he handed them back and waved them to the loading bay.

"That was too close for a moment," Sam muttered.

"Hold on to that thought in case they inform the British intelligence," Steve pointed out.
Luckily, it seemed that the guard was not as observant as they thought as they passed through immigration at Dover. Wanda could not believe that they had done it; they had managed to get to England without being caught - sort of. There had not been a sighting of their stalker since Amsterdam but they still needed to be aware in case he was lurking.

"Right, onto London," Steve announced. Natasha knew where the safe house was so she was able to drive to its location. Upon arriving, they found the apartment completely ransacked. The furniture had been overturned and left in a state where cabinet doors were hanging off the hinges.

"Wow, someone told them to be thorough," Sam observed.

"Well I am too tired to sort this out," Natasha replied. "We do it in the morning."

"And what are we going to sleep on Nat?" Wanda asked as she picked up the sofa cushions and started putting them back in their proper place.

"Point. I guess the beds and sofa will do for now."

"Well, there seem to be three rooms, though they all are single mattresses."

"In other words, Steve, you're on the couch tonight," Sam pointed out.

"I don't mind sleeping on the sofa," Wanda interrupted. "I'm smaller so it should be more comfortable."

"Plan number two: buy a double bed," Natasha noted. "You know since you two have the inability to keep your hands off each other for five minutes."

Steve rolled his eyes and then grabbed his and Wanda's bags. "You sure you don't want the bed?" he asked Wanda, who looked to be grabbing a blanket from the upside down ottoman.

"Yeah, I'll be fine for the night. It's not like we haven't slept apart in the same bed since we started this relationship."

"Okay, well, tomorrow we buy a proper bed from Ikea or somewhere like that."

Wanda smiled, "Okay."

Steve pressed a kiss to her lips and left to go to their room. Wanda had a realisation that once they got the right bed, it would be their room. They had only been together for what was only a week and now they were practically living together - though with two other people. It all seemed like it was going fast but under the circumstances, Wanda was hardly going to complain.

Mostly because she realised how much she hated sleeping alone now that she had the luxury of Steve's strong body being close to her. Over the last year, Wanda had learned how not to be so dependent on other people, so the fact she found herself reliant for Steve's presence to comfort her was a little frustrating. However, she had been ill and Steve had been her best support through everything.

She thought about this when lying wide awake on the sofa. Being in a relationship was all new to her, and she really wished she had done it under better circumstances. After two hours of not being able to sleep, Wanda got off the sofa and walked towards the room Steve had claimed. He was fast asleep and her heart melted at the sight. Wanda had always thought he was a handsome man but it was little moments like this that made him nothing less than beautiful to her. After a minute of watching him, she walked over and tried to slip under the sheets with him. The bed shifted and Steve
blinked awake, his blue eyes clearly unfocused. Wanda smiled at him and cupped his cheek.

"You okay?" he asked softly.

"I think I am addicted to you," she whispered. "I crave your presence." Given how tired he was, Steve was unsure of what she meant but kissed her on the forehead anyway. "Can you just hold me?"

Steve opened his arm and Wanda shuffled closer so her body was right against his. Her hand came to rub Steve's biceps and his forehead rested against hers. Intimacy. Wanda had never known real intimacy with another person until now. Wanda pressed a kiss against Steve's lips and rolled over so her back was pressed against his chest. Steve pressed a sleepy kiss against her neck and wrapped his arm around her stomach. Finally, Wanda was able to fall asleep, comforted by the security of Steve's strong arms.

Chapter End Notes

Nothing really to talk about this week, except 1) I have started the Infinity War storyline (coming in Part Five) and 2) I am (finally) seeing Ant-Man and the Wasp this week (yes rest of the world, I know it has been a month since it came out in your countries, but it only came out two weeks ago here in the UK).

Anyway, let me know what you think and I shall see you next week.
Chapter Four

It took a week for them to make the safe house feel like a home. Steve had purchased paint for the walls and they had all picked out random decorative items. They had also bought a television and a license so they were not isolated from the world. Most importantly, Steve and Wanda had bought a double bed, which they wasted no time in christening. Finally, after weeks of running across Europe, they could finally settle into a normal routine.

Yet, their stalker was still on their minds. They assumed that they had shaken him off in Amsterdam, only Wanda thought he had seen him looking at her in a local coffee shop, and that was when she had a thought. Natasha had seen him when he was looking at them by the Anne Frank House, but they had not known how long he had been standing there.

When Wanda returned to the apartment, she grabbed the file that contained the CCTV footage stills and looked through them carefully and grabbed two markers. The first was footage of Steve and Wanda on their date in Seoul, and the stalker was not far behind them. She circled herself in red and the stalker in blue. She did the same with the next image and the image after that. After circling all the images, and with the sightings in Amsterdam and the coffee shop, she concluded that the stalker was not after the group. He was after Wanda.

“I should have picked that up,” Natasha said upon seeing Wanda’s evidence. “Are you sure you saw him in the coffee shop?”

“I believe so,” Wanda answered running her hands through her hair. “Why me?”

“I don’t know. We don’t know who he is and he’s good at slipping away. I don’t know how dangerous he is so you are not going to leave this apartment alone from now on okay?”

“You don’t think I can handle him myself?”

“Two is better than one in cases where we don’t know the hostile.”

Wanda did not like the idea of not being able to go out on her own, but Natasha had a point that if the stalker turned out to be seriously dangerous then having another person there to fight him off was better than just herself, especially since she could be so easily exposed if she used her powers. Therefore she nodded.

That night, Wanda had a nightmare. The stalker had snuck up behind her and strangled her. She had woken up screaming, sweaty and shaking so hard that she woke the whole apartment up. When Natasha and Sam came to the door of Steve and Wanda’s bedroom, Steve was in the process of trying to soothe her. He was holding her close, his hand stroking her hair and whispering that it was okay.

“Nightmare?” Sam asked softly.

Steve nodded, “I’ve got it here guys.”

They nodded and headed back to their rooms. Steve took a look at Wanda’s face and tried to wipe
her tears with his thumb. After fifteen minutes, her breaths levelled out and the tears stopped. “Do you need some water?” Wanda nodded and Steve went to grab some water from the kitchen. She gulped it down in one go. “Better?”

“Depends,” Wanda whispered. She put her hand to her throat and shuddered at the thought of the stalker’s hands on her throat. “It felt too real.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“He strangled me.”

“Strangled?”

“I remember watching a real-life crime documentary once and they said that strangling is the most intimate form of murder.”

“Hey, Doll. No one is going to murder you, not while I am around.”

“Why me? Why is he so obsessed with me?”

“I wish I knew,” he said. “Do you want to go back to sleep?”

Wanda shook her head and whispered, “TV.”

There was nothing much on television in the early hours of the morning, but Wanda found a movie that she could just stare at without taking anything in. Steve decided to cook her a grilled cheese sandwich though when he presented it to her, she rejected it.

“I’m sorry. I’m just not hungry,” she whispered. Steve sat next to her and tentatively put his hand on hers. She did not flinch away at least. He stroked his thumb over the back of her hand. After ten minutes of looking blankly at the television, Wanda said, “I need some air. Can we go for walk?”

Steve nodded and went to grab her shoes and coat. Since she was wearing sweatpants, it would not look too odd to be in her pyjamas. Steve threw on his trainers and coat and took her hand. Steve wondered whether this was a good idea for her to be wandering around in the pitch black night when she had just had a nightmare that the stalker - who was still out there - had murdered her. However, she at least was with him. There was a park nearby which was big enough for them to take a decent walk around so that Wanda could clear her head. Steve kept a lookout for the stalker in case he was following them but so far there was no sign.

“I should probably ask him why he is so obsessed with me,” Wanda said. “It’s weird. No one has noticed it’s us but he knows exactly who we are.”

“Everything about this guy is strange,” Steve replied. “He vanishes as quickly as he appears, he does not appear to have other clothes and he knows exactly where you are.”

“You’d think we’d have noticed if he jumped on a plane with us.”

“Exactly so I am stumped as to who - or what - he can be.”

“He could be HYDRA.”

“Possibly.” Steve wondered how the possibility of the stalker being a HYDRA agent had not entered his mind. HYDRA had snakes everywhere and the more he thought about it the more likely it was true. “We can run a search when we get back.”
“Okay,” she whispered. Wanda believed she had enough air after an hour of walking around, but she was too freaked out to go back to sleep. She lay on the sofa watching early morning television while Steve tried to run a facial recognition search against wanted HYDRA fugitives.

Nothing. Steve assumed that the image was not clear enough for it to match it to anyone but Steve did persist. There were two likely candidates that looked similar but only Natasha could tell if they were the same person.

“You been up half the night?” Sam asked coming out of his room in his running gear. It was six in the morning and the breakfast news had just started. Steve nodded over to the sofa where Wanda was still staring at the television screen, the news blaring out about the latest Brexit development. “So, what have you been doing?”

“Trying to see if this guy is a HYDRA agent. I have two possible matches.”

Sam had a look and pointed to one, “He’s too short. The guy was more than six feet.”

“And the other?”

“Too stocky.”

Steve rubbed his hands over his face, “Back to the drawing board then. I’ve tried facial recognition and I have tried descriptors but nothing.”

“Have you tried any other databases?”

“A few. He’s like a ghost.”

“What if he is one of those Winter Soldiers Barnes was on about?”

“Unless he managed to break out of the cryogenic freeze and escape from Zemo, I highly doubt it, and besides, he would not just be after Wanda if that was the case.”

“What about-”

“Sam, enough,” Wanda said firmly, not sitting up to look at him.

“I’m just trying to help-”

“I know but Steve has tried everything. He’s clearly on no one’s radar, and the CIA cannot track him because Sharon would have to give up knowledge of where we are.”

To Sam, catching this man, or at the very least finding out who he was important if it meant that Wanda felt safe but given that Steve had exhausted all avenues at this point, he decided to leave it.

“Coming for a run?” Sam asked.

“I would but-” Steve began but Wanda cut him off.

“Steve, just go. You’ve been up all night and you need to stop staring at a screen. Natasha is here and we will lock the door behind you,” Wanda said.

“You sure?” Steve asked walking over to her.

“Yes. Go. Nat’s here and I am not planning on going outside alone”
“Yes ma’am,” he chuckled pressing a kiss to her head.

As soon as the two men were out the door, Wanda locked and bolted it. She felt exhausted, but she was scared that if she dared shut her eyes that she would have the nightmare again. Instead, she took a shower to cleanse herself of what she thought was dirt on her mind. The hot water did wonders for the tension in her body and it did rejuvenate her senses so she was more awake.

After dressing in something light and taking her medication, Wanda thought about distracting herself by making breakfast. Natasha would be up soon if she was not already. It seemed the smell of fried eggs did the trick.

“Have you slept at all?” Natasha asked yawning towards the kitchen.

“If you had a dream about someone killing you, would you be able to sleep?” Wanda responded.

“Point. How are you feeling up there in your head?”

“I don’t know. It’s felt different since Saint Petersburg. Before I felt fine, I felt clear, but I don’t know whether it is the stalker or the medication is not working but I feel like the paranoia I felt when I was sick is back.”

“I doubt the stalker is helping your anxiety, especially after last night.”

“I just wish I knew who he was.”

“Me too. I take it Steve has done facial recognition searches on a million databases and come up with nothing.”

“Like Steve said, the man is a ghost. A leaf in the wind.”

“Right, well, you and I are going to a DIY store and grabbing every lock with can find.”

“Wouldn’t that get us weird looks?”

“Better to have weird looks than be sorry.”

Wanda nodded. There was a shop on the corner that sold locks so when that opened, she and Natasha made their way down and purchased two bolts and a safety lock for the door. Natasha then claimed she had to go to the chemist for something so Wanda followed her in. Wanda spent time looking at the makeup counter while Natasha asked for something behind the counter.

“You got what you need?” Wanda asked when Natasha walked back to her.

“Yeah. Come on. Let’s get back to the apartment. I need coffee.”

“I’m not sure increasing her medication will do her any good if I am going to be honest,” Sam said as stretched his left hamstring on a bench. “Maybe having her take a sleeping tablet for a couple days just so she can get some sleep would be an idea, but we don’t want her getting dependent on it. I think a good night’s sleep is what she needs.”

“Hard to do that when she’s having nightmares and there is someone after her. We could try her on a sleeping pill and hopefully that should get her to sleep,” Steve replied. “You have any other suggestions?”
“Well, I usually say to vets to find an activity that they would enjoy and that should calm them. I remember Wanda used to like playing the guitar, and then there was that English class she dropped for some reason.”

“I think she said she found the content dry. Too many dead white men according to Natasha.”

“To be fair, as a black man who went through a high school English class, I get where she is coming from.”

The two walked back towards the apartment, though when they heard something drilling, they were confused until they saw Natasha on her knees drilling what looked to be the fourth lock into the door.

“Four locks is a bit much isn’t it?” Sam asked making his way past Natasha. Wanda was watching from the other side and Steve went over to her.

“If it makes Wanda feel safer, I think it’s good enough,” Steve replied as he put his arm around his girlfriend. Wanda wrapped her arm around Steve’s waist. He pressed a kiss to the top of Wanda’s head and rubbed his hand along her arm. “Right, now that the flat is secure, do you want to go to bed?”

“I can give it a try,” Wanda replied.

“Listen,” Natasha said as she went into her bag, “when we were in the chemist, I grabbed some sleeping pills. Take one of those and try to get some sleep.”

“I can’t keep popping pills, Nat.”

“You’re not. It’s just one and it will send you off to sleep, which you need just as much as your lithium. It’s just for tonight.”

Wanda did not like the idea of doping herself up on various drugs but so far her attempts at trying to get some sleep were greeted with the feeling of life being choked out of her. One could not hurt and it was only for the night. Steve himself was feeling the effects of exhaustion and decided to join her in bed. Wanda snuggled up against him and he pressed his lips against her neck.

“I’m sorry I kept you up half the night,” she whispered.

“Hey, don’t ever worry about that. I love you, and I want you to feel safe.”

“You must get frustrated with my fucked up brain.”

“Don’t ever think that,” he said cupping her cheek. “Your brain has no effect on how I feel about you. At least the bad parts. You’re clever, you’re thoughtful… Those are the parts of your brain I like to think about.”

Wanda kissed his lips softly in gratitude. Comforted by his strong, warm body, Wanda started to drift off as the sleeping pill took effect. Once Steve saw she was asleep, he pushed the hair out of her eyes. It did worry him that she thought her mental health would be a source of frustration for Steve. He always saw her as more than her bipolar disorder and had fallen in love with her in spite of it. He had a sense that her bipolar disorder had been informing a lot of her mood lately. It did worry him whether her prescription was too low but he worried that if the dose increased it would stabilize her too much that she was not Wanda anymore.

Steve shook his head and pressed a kiss to her forehead. He would find ways tomorrow to help with
her mood swings. Right now he would let her sleep.

-0-

Wanda blinked awake as the sunlight beamed through the room and hit her eyes. She sat up and looked at the clock. It was 08:05. The previous day she managed to sleep between 09:00 and 14:00 but was back asleep again by 22:00. She had never felt so refreshed in her life. She had not had the dream again at least. She turned her head towards the other side of the bed and saw it was empty. Steve had probably gotten up for his run earlier though she imagined he would be back by now. She swung her legs out of the bed and pulled on her dressing gown. Steve was in the kitchen looking over the laptop. She smiled and pressed a kiss to his cheek.

“Still trying to work out who the stalker is?” she asked.

“No. I was just looking up ways to help you out with your head,” he replied. “I think the stress of entering Europe and the stalker has been affecting your moods so I thought I would find ways that we can do to reduce that.”

“Maybe not having a stalker would help.”

“True, but just some lifestyle changes such as what you’re eating and maybe just some light exercise.”

“You trying to say I am getting fat?”

“Not at all,” he chuckled and let her sit on his lap. “Running always gives me the space to think and I do feel better after. I was thinking though, maybe something like yoga with you. I don’t need you losing weight now you’re back to a healthy weight. However, I don’t think all this junk food has been helping your mood either.”

“I guess.” Wanda put her hand on his cheek and pressed a kiss to his lips. “You always think about me.”

“Well, I love you and want you to be well and happy.” Steve kissed her and rubbed her rumbling stomach. “Come on, I have breakfast ready for you.”

Wanda got off his lap and sat at the breakfast bar as Steve presented Greek-style yoghurt, strawberries, blackberries and blueberries with a little honey on top. Wanda smiled and took a bite out of her breakfast with gusto. She could deal with this, and it was better than taking more medication.

Chapter End Notes

So... the first draft of the Infinity War plot has been written so apart from a few revisions, I am happy with it (well as happy as a person can be when you think about what happens) so that should start in November. Speaking of Infinity War, if you want a breather, go see Ant-Man and the Wasp; it's cute.

The next few chapters will be a little more fluffy. I am in New York from 3rd September to 8th September so there won’t be a chapter that week, however, I do have a standalone that should tide people over.
Chapter Five

By late October, it seemed the stalker had disappeared and so did Wanda’s dreams about him killing her. There was a small part of Steve’s brain that was aware that the guy was still out there, but he did not think that it was worth worrying about unless there was a confirmed sighting. Wanda, meanwhile, felt so much better than she had done in a long time. The healthy eating and yoga had done wonders for her stress levels, and for the most part, she seemed brighter and happier.

With that worry out of the way, Steve was much much concerned with what to get Wanda for her birthday. Steve had never been in a relationship long enough that he had to worry about buying his partner a birthday present, but after some consultation with Sam and Natasha, he purchased a gold necklace with a ruby-encrusted pendant. It probably was a bit much but Steve thought Wanda was worth it, and she needed a day of spoiling after everything that had happened in the last few months.

Wanda had not been one for celebrating occasions. Being on the streets and in various foster homes, Wanda rarely knew what day or month it was nor did she really care, so when it came to her and Pietro’s birthday, it barely registered with them. The previous year, she had not wanted to acknowledge it at all. It was the first year where it would be just her birthday. While at the time Steve and Sam wanted her to celebrate it, they respected her wishes, only really daring to buy her pizza.

This year, they were hoping that she would be more open to it. Natasha bought Wanda’s favourite cake (chocolate fudge with caramel buttercream), Sam had gotten a few banners that said ‘Birthday Princess’, in the hope it would make her laugh, and Steve had reserved a table at a nearby Latin American restaurant for just him and Wanda to celebrate.

On the morning of Wanda’s birthday, Steve was the first to wake. He looked over at Wanda who was sleeping soundly. He smiled softly and leaned over into his bedside drawer to grab the long velvet box. He gently leaned over Wanda and placed a kiss on her neck. Wanda hummed and shifted at the sensation of his lips and beard. He leaned over her ear and whispered, “Happy Birthday.”

Wanda mumbled as she turned over and her eyes opened revealing her glazed green eyes. “You know I am not one for birthdays.”

“Well, I thought this year we would change that.”

Steve presented the box to her and she took it. “Steve,” she began as she opened the box, revealing the necklace that she thought must have cost a bit of money, “you really shouldn’t have.”

“You deserve it,” he said pressing his lips to hers. Wanda sat up and he helped her put the necklace on. “There, it suits you.”
“Thank you,” Wanda whispered. She leaned up to kiss him and he met her halfway. Wanda moaned as Steve’s tongue ran along her lips and she granted him access so their tongues melded together. Wanda’s hand crept down towards the hem of Steve’s boxers, only he grabbed her wrist and stopped her. Wanda broke the kiss and looked at him confused.

“Today, it’s all about you,” he whispered huskily into her ear. He rolled her onto her back and sucked on her earlobe. Wanda’s eyes rolled to the back of her head and resigned herself to whatever pleasurable torture Steve had planned. “Relax.”

His lips moved down to the milky column of her neck. Wanda tilted her head back so he had more area to cover and hummed as his lips and beard brushed against the sensitive skin. Once he found the spot that he knew drove her crazy, he gently sucked, licked and grazed his teeth against it. Wanda breathed deeply as his hands moved to her vest top and only broke away from her neck to pull the top off. Even though he had seen her naked many times by this point, it always took his breath away.

“You’re beautiful,” he whispered as he kissed her collarbone.

Wanda muttered something about him being evil and Steve could only smirk in response as he pressed small kisses down her sternum. His hand moved between them and went under the hem of her sweatpants and knickers and began to massage her centre. He was met with a hot slickness in response. His other hand cupped her right breast and he pinched her nipple between his middle and index fingers, twisting it and pulling it while his tongue circled the other nipple.

Wanda arched her back as she felt electric bolts run from her breasts and core to her spine and her breaths became heavy in response. Her hand rested on the nape of Steve’s neck as he took the tip of her breast between his lips.

“Steve,” Wanda whispered feeling her throat go dry all of a sudden.

Once Steve was certain that Wanda had been stimulated enough, he gently pushed one finger into her and her breath hitched. Steve detached his lips from her breast to kiss her on the lips and press his forehead against her. However, he felt the circulation in his arm being cut off by the tight waistband of her sweatpants. He tried to pull them off with one hand but Wanda had to really help him to get both the pants and knickers off in one go. Steve’s thumb pressed against her now bare clit and rolled it with his thumb as he dared insert another finger inside her.

“So tight,” he murmured against her lips.

Wanda moaned as Steve’s thick fingers filled her and her nails began to dig into his shoulders as the tension in her spine built. However, she needed him to surrender with her. “Steve, I need you inside me.”

“I am.” Wanda glared at him and he chuckled. “Sorry.” Steve pulled his fingers out of her so he could remove his boxers and Wanda moaned at the loss of feeling of his fingers. Steve kissed her and whispered, “Lie on your side.”

Wanda furrowed her eyebrows as she turned her left side. However, when Steve lay behind her, one hand splayed on her belly while the other cupped her breast and his erection pressed against her buttocks, Wanda instantly knew what he had planned. She wriggled a bit to tease the head of his member and Steve groaned.

Needing him to fill her, she parted her legs and let him adjust himself so that he could line up his erection with her entrance. With one smooth motion, he slid inside of her and Wanda gasped as he hit just the right spot.
With his face buried in her hair and neck, Steve began to make gentle movements, and his hand squeezed her breast and tugged at the nipple. Wanda made soft kitten-like moans with every movement and her hand moved to cover Steve’s hand that was on her stomach and laced her fingers with his. Wanda tried to turn her head and Steve met her halfway and kissed her.

Steve broke the kiss and began sucking and licking her neck. His hips picked up the pace and Wanda moved his hand lower so it was resting between her legs. Without instruction, he rolled her clit with his finger and Wanda tried to hold back a loud moan, though failed. Steve chuckled and started to move faster.

He could sense how close she was by the clenching of her walls around him and the high-pitched gasps coming from her lips.

“Come on Doll, come for me,” he growled into her ear.

Wanda tried to hold on as much as she could, but the tension became too much and she let out a sound between a moan, squeal and gasp as the waves of pleasure engulfed her body. Her walls tightened around Steve like a vice and he spilt inside her with a tremor-filled groan.

The two of them panted hard as they tried to regain some composure of their senses. Eventually, Wanda commented, “That was a good birthday present.” Steve laughed and kissed her. “I need a shower. You can join me if you feel up to it.”

Despite the fact his senses were still incoherent, Steve understood that and was more than willing to join her in the shower. By the time they had both actually cleaned and dressed, they found that Natasha and Sam had cooked breakfast for Wanda. Natasha could not help but look at them with a smile that wanted to ask them something inappropriate while Sam looked at the both of them with disgust.

Wanda ignored them, instead focused on the banners that Sam obviously bought, “Really? Sam? ‘Birthday Princess?’”

“They were the last ones,” Sam responded shrugging.

“Right, plan for the day: we’re going shopping,” Natasha ordered as she pushed a plate of Wanda’s favourite breakfast: scrambled eggs, sausage and pumpernickel bread.

“What for?” Wanda asked.

“Well, I think we need a girls’ day to get away from these two.”

“You make us sound like we make you butch,” Sam commented.

“That sounds nice,” Wanda responded ignoring Sam’s comment. “I feel like I need some new things now the winter is setting in.”

“Yeah, that’s totally what I was thinking,” Natasha said unconvincingly.

“This is what you planned?” Wanda asked when looking outside a lingerie shop.

“Partially. You don’t have to if you don’t want to, but I thought since you’ve gained so much confidence recently you would like to try something different,” Natasha answered. Natasha did have a point, but Wanda never saw the point of having sexy underwear, especially since the underwear
was likely to be removed in two minutes. “Okay, plan b.”

The next store was a clothes store which was much more of what Wanda was thinking of when Natasha suggested the shopping trip. However, while Wanda was leaning towards the jumpers and jeans, Natasha led her towards the dresses, and they were fancy dresses.

“These are not exactly everyday dresses Nat,” Wanda commented as she ran her hands over the silk red dress that reminded her so much of the dress she tried on in Tokyo.

“I know, but it is your birthday and you need to treat yourself - or I need to treat you since it is my money we’re spending.”

Wanda looked at the red dress, took one in her size off the rack and presented it to Natasha. “I like this one.”

“Do you always pick the first dress you see?”

“You know that I have not really been much of a shopper.”

“True. It’s nice. Try it on.”

Wanda went to the changing room where she changed into the red dress and looked at it in the mirror. It had a sweetheart neckline and a pleated skirt that came just under her knees. With her face and hair done, she actually thought she would look reasonably okay. Wanda did not really wear fancy dresses. The only other fancy dress she had worn was at the Christmas party. She had liked it at the time. It was black with lace sleeves that came to her knees. Natasha had helped her with the makeup and hair. Once the look was complete, it stunned Wanda at how different she looked. Shaking off the memory of Japan, Wanda stepped out to show Natasha.

“Okay, you may pick the first thing you see but you have a good eye,” Natasha commented. Wanda smiled and looked down at the dress. “Now, let’s complete the look.”

Natasha had grabbed a pair of black heels to go with the dress and then they raided the makeup stand, buying a whole new set including mascara, foundation and lipstick. Natasha urged Wanda not to look at the price. It was not overly expensive but Natasha was always told never to mention the price of a gift. When they arrived home, Natasha took Wanda into her room to get ready for the date.

“So, how is everything going with Steve?” Natasha asked when dabbing Wanda’s face with foundation.

“Good,” Wanda replied. “Well, you heard us this morning.”

“I never realised how much a demon Rogers was in the sack.”

Wanda felt a blush creep onto her cheeks. Wanda remembered that Natasha had known Steve for longer than she had so she asked, “Did you always think he was a prude?”

“Well, the first time we met he called me ma’am so that did not help. I just thought with him being from the 1940s he would be more of the marriage before sex type. Clearly, I was wrong. However, this is the happiest I have seen him in years so whatever you are doing keep doing it.”

“It’s not just the sex. Him being there is more than enough for me, and sometimes I feel like I don’t deserve him.”

“How so?” Natasha asked as she coated Wanda’s face with a matte powder.
“I think he must secretly get frustrated with my brain sometimes. On my worst days, I can be unreasonable - like what happened in Amsterdam.”

“I don’t think you were being utterly unreasonable then, though I think storming off instead of hearing him out was a bit much. However, I get that your head does not process rational thought the same way I would, even with the medication.”

“Sometimes I wonder if I should stop taking them now that I feel better, but I’m scared of what the outcome would be. What happened before would be nothing compared to what could happen if I go off my meds.”

“I don’t think it’s worth the risk. Not now that you are happy.”

Wanda nodded and closed her eyes as Natasha prepared to put some rose gold eyeshadow on the lids. Later when the look was pulled together, Wanda nodded and looked at herself in the mirror, “Yeah, I think I look okay.”

“More than okay. Steve is not going to be able to take his eyes off you.”

-N-0-

Natasha was right when she said Steve would be blown away by Wanda’s appearance in the dress. In fact, it took him a good few seconds to try to form a coherent thought as he blurted out, “You look beautiful.”

Wanda’s red-coated lips could only smile and she responded, “You don’t look too bad yourself.” Steve was in a green jumper with dark blue jeans so Wanda did feel a bit overdressed but she took it in her stride. “Come on. I’m hungry.”

Steve had stuck a pair of glasses on while Wanda hoped that her hair and makeup would be enough for them not to be noticed. They managed to have a booth to themselves and they actually sat close to one another. The waitress asked if they would like to look at the wine menu. Wanda declined and in the spirit of fairness, Steve declined as well.

“You don’t have to not drink because I can’t drink,” Wanda insisted.

“Saves temptation I guess,” Steve said brushing his hand along her face. “Listen, I have another gift for you.”

“Steve-” Before she could protest further, Steve handed her the gift. “You’ve given me more than enough.”

“Just open it.”

Wanda unwrapped the package and revealed a frame with a sketch of what looked to be the picture of her, Pietro and her parents. “Oh, my…”

“I thought you deserved to have something of your family that was not small.” At that point, Wanda just kissed him. He smiled softly as he cupped her face.

“Thank you,” Wanda whispered, tears blinking in her eyes as she pulled away. She chuckled slightly as she had left lipstick on Steve’s lips. She grabbed the napkin and wiped his mouth. “Everything you have done today has been … wonderful.”

She looked back at the sketch and noted how Steve had managed to get as much detail as possible
even though it was only a pencil sketch. Her father’s moustache, the necklace around her mother’s neck, Pietro’s mischievous look and her shy smile. She knew Steve had a talent for art but never like this. Steve pressed a kiss to her forehead and stroked the bare skin of her shoulder. Eventually, Wanda regained some composure and picked up the menu.

“I think I fancy the enchiladas,” she said. Steve nodded. He ordered the gaucho steak. “You’re too good to me.”

“Well, you have about sixteen birthdays to make up—”

“Not just that. You have been so patient and caring these last few months even when I am being completely irrational and unreasonable.”

“That is what love is Wanda: the ability to look past the flaws.” Wanda pressed her forehead against Steve’s and just stayed there for a few moments.

“I love you too,” she whispered. “I don’t think I have ever had a better birthday than this. Thank you, Steve.”

When they returned from their meal, Natasha presented the cake with the candles lit. Wanda had not had a birthday cake since she was ten, and it did bring back memories of the last time she celebrated with her parents and Pietro. She had been told to make a wish. She wished for her grandmother back, but it had not really worked so she never really dared to wish again. Now, standing surrounded by Steve, Sam and Natasha, she made a wish that they would be able to come home soon and be able to live a normal life.

Chapter End Notes

So, there is not going to be a chapter next week because I am in New York and just won’t have the time (or internet) to publish the chapter. I will have a standalone out at the end of the week so that should tide people over.
Chapter Six

Chapter Notes

And I'm back. New York was fun. Hot and humid (seriously New Yorkers, how do you cope all year round?) but enjoyable. Anyway, back to our regular schedule.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Six

Sam was wondering whether it was worth trying to get the rest of the group to acknowledge that it was Thanksgiving. He was not expecting some large event but he loved that it did bring people together and they could celebrate with one another. The recent United States Presidential Election left them with very little optimism of the state of the world, no one was really in a celebratory mood.

Since the night of the election, everyone was in a bit of a strange mood, as though any glimmer of hope of them returning home had dissipated in a single moment. The winning candidate's attitude towards the Sokovia Accords was hardly negative. In fact, he wanted to tighten the control over enhanced individuals in the United States, especially Inhumans and deporting those Inhumans who were undocumented immigrants. Since Wanda's citizenship was still up in the air when she escaped from the Avengers Compound, it was likely her application for permanent citizenship had been thrown out of the window. While they had little confidence in the other candidate's position on the Accords (she was supportive of them and was willing to work with the United Nations to ensure that enhanced individuals cooperate with the United States Government), she was a more 'ideal' choice when compared to her opponent.

Wanda thought this over while sitting in the bath the night before Thanksgiving. The water was shifting towards lukewarm but Wanda was too away with her thoughts to care about the temperature of the bath. She was thinking back to the previous Thanksgiving, which happened to be her first.

"Wanda, come on or else we are going to be late!" Natasha called through the hallway of the bedrooms. She turned her head into Wanda's room where the young woman was in the process of unpacking her bag. "What are you doing?"

"I'm not coming," Wanda replied.

"Why not?"

"I just don't feel as though I will be welcome."

Natasha sighed and rubbed her eye, "Stark has gotten over it. All you are doing is isolating yourself."

"I just don't want to go, Natasha! I don't understand the point in being in a room where I am universally disliked."

"What gave you that impression?"

"Maybe because I fucked with everyone's head and no one really wants to speak to me unless it is mission-related."
"To be fair, Wanda, you have not exactly been social since you arrived here. No one dislikes you; we just want to get to know you better. So pack your stuff up and get in the damn car."

Wanda grumbled as she repacked haphazardly. Her flung her bag into the trunk of the car and got in the backseat with Natasha, put her headphones in her ears and turned up her audiobook. Once they arrived in New York City and Tony's apartment, Wanda was still in her funk about her fear of being rejected by everyone. She took a deep breath as she followed everyone to the lifts. Rhodes and Sam were bickering with one another over who was going to win between the Carolina Panthers and the Dallas Cowboys, Natasha was tapping her foot as they waited to get to the top floor and Steve did his best to give Wanda a small reassuring smile that what was to come was not going to be as bad as she thought. The only one on the team who was not in attendance was Vision on account of the fact that he could not eat food. Wanda secretly envied him.

The lift door opened and revealed a long table with all the Thanksgiving decorations adorning it. "Wow. Pepper clearly went all out," Rhodes commented.

"Table decorations later. Football," Sam said throwing his bag down and moving towards the television where they found Clint already watching the game. Rhodes followed suit and Natasha rolled her eyes.

"I need female company and fast," she said walking in the direction of the kitchen, leaving just Steve and Wanda by the lift.

"So do you fancy watching the game or going to the kitchen?" Steve asked.

"I might get on everyone's nerves if I keep asking questions. I might just go unpack," she answered. Then Natasha's words about her being anti-social rang in her ears and she sighed, "I'll go to the kitchen."

In the kitchen, Natasha was checking on the yams while Pepper was basting the turkey. Laura, Clint's wife, was in the process of warming up the vegetables. After a minute of standing in the doorway, Wanda asked timidly, "Can I help with anything?"

Laura was the first to look up and give Wanda a welcoming smile. She said, "Yes. The potatoes in the slow cooker need seasoning, milk and mashing and returning to the slow cooker to keep warm."

Wanda nodded and went to the slow cooker to retrieved the potatoes. She had a quick taste to assess how much seasoning she needed and immediately grabbed the salt and pepper, testing it every few shakes and cracks.

"Am I okay to heat some milk on the stove?" Wanda asked.

"Sure, knock yourself out," Pepper answered. Wanda could not help but feel awkward around Pepper. She wondered what Pepper must have thought of her but since they had interacted only on one other occasion it was unlikely that Pepper had formed her own opinion of Wanda. "I like that jumper. Where did you get it from?"

Wanda looked down at her grey jumper. It had been one of the manic purchases following her arrival in the United States so she could not remember where she had gotten it. "I'm not sure to be honest," she answered. Wanda knew that it was friendly chit-chat but Wanda had never been good at making friends compared to Pietro. If he was there she would have been far more comfortable with speaking to people. "How is Tony?"

"He's... Tony," Pepper answered. Wanda had stopped reading people's minds so that they would be
able to trust her better but she was quite good at reading people. There was a sense of frustration in Pepper's voice that suggested that there had been a recent argument so Wanda decided to drop it. "So I heard you dropped out of school."

Wanda tensed. She had decided to take an adult high school English class and she was doing well for the most part to the point that if she had done well on a test, she could have gotten an A. However, a mission had gone badly wrong two days before the test and Wanda had suffered a panic attack in the classroom. She was given the option of taking it when she was mentally able but she could not cope with the strain of being an Avenger and the pressure of school. She did not tell anyone this in fear that they felt she was mentally unfit to be an Avenger.

"I lost interest," Wanda lied.

"I still think you should have pushed with it. I've seen your grades Wanda; you're clearly intelligent," Natasha argued.

"Well, as with all courses, the books were male, pale and stale," Wanda responded.

Pepper snorted at the comment and added, "I know what you mean. Give us some Charlotte Brontë, not Dickens."

"I don't know. Dickens was a revolutionary for his time especially when he talked about the struggles of women," Laura countered.

"At least you two got that, I ended up with Lolita," Natasha pointed out. "Nothing says progressive than a man leering after a twelve-year-old girl."

Wanda was relieved that she managed to break a social barrier and at least engage with a conversation with these three women that did not involve the need to talk about her brother, Ultron or any of her past.

Half an hour later, everyone was gathered around the table. Tony took the honours of carving the turkey, while the others instantly helped themselves to the sides. Wanda only took a small amount of everything and listened as the conversation between everyone. She was sitting between Clint and Sam, who were bantering on about the fact that the Dallas Cowboys lost and that Clint had to pay Sam $50. Wanda had no idea what they were talking about to even contribute. Steve was sitting opposite her and gave a small smile. Wanda smiled a little back and sipped her wine. It seemed she was the only one drinking rosé since she found red wine too heavy and white wine was too dry. She did appreciate that they did accommodate for her even though they did not have to do so.

She looked around everyone and the realisation dawned on her: this was her family now. It sounded so strange to her. Six months ago, she would have thrown up at the thought of spending a holiday with Tony Stark. She could not say that she and Tony 'got on' but they were at least civil enough that they could bear to be in the same room together without causing an argument.

A lump formed in her throat and had to excuse herself from the table, taking her glass with her. Steve and Clint looked to one another questioning whether they should see if she was okay, but they hoped that she just needed the bathroom. However, Wanda had gone to the balcony to get some fresh air and peace to start crying. It was not the hysterical sobbing she had done in the past. It was just soft tears. She tried to down the wine but then someone interrupted her by coming onto the balcony. Wanda wiped her tears with her sleeve and tried to compose herself. Not that it helped.

"Wow, I thought Thanksgiving with my father was hard enough," Clint commented. "You okay?"
"Yeah," Wanda lied. She did swig down the rest of her wine and felt the rush of alcohol go to her head. She kind of liked it and it took the edge away.

"Nat said you didn't want to come today. She said you think we all hate you."

"Well, Laura and Pepper seemed okay around me. I guess they don't dislike me."

"Honestly, everyone is a little worried about you. Sam and Steve said you did not want to acknowledge your birthday."

"I haven't had to for the previous fourteen birthdays so why should number fifteen be any different?"

"Fair enough. Listen Wanda, it's always been you and Pietro against the rest of the world, but you don't have to do that anymore. You're making yourself lonely and depressed for no reason."

It was after Clint said that Wanda had another realisation: she was seeing this as a punishment for everything that had happened that year, and that was why she was isolating herself. Yet everyone was trying their hardest to make her feel included. Combined with her realisation that this was going to be a new family and Natasha's words, it made her have the epiphany that she had to try to make an effort.

"I guess you're right. I don't think it is entirely for no reason. I'm not sure how anyone can forgive what I did." Wanda took a couple of deep breaths. "I think I am ready to go back inside."

Once inside, she found that the conversation around the table had moved towards a trip to see the latest Star Wars movie next month. Wanda liked Star Wars. She had watched all six movies a couple months ago so maybe this cinema trip would be the perfect opportunity for her to socialise.

"Can I come with you guys?" she asked, though it was more of a blurt.

Wanda snapped out her memory when she heard a banging on the door and Natasha yelling, "Wanda, you've been in there nearly an hour! Are you okay?"

"Yes. Just away with my thoughts," Wanda replied. The bath water had gone cold so Wanda escaped to the warmth of her fluffy white towel.

When she was dried and dressed, she went to the living room where it looked like Chinese takeout had been ordered. She smiled as she snuggled up to Steve and grabbed her kung pao chicken. Natasha had chosen *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* as their movie for the evening.

"It feels like such a long time ago since we have watched this movie," Natasha commented.

"I know," Wanda replied. "It's hard to believe it is only a year since this came out. It's great that there is more than one female character who is dominant through the series. I love Leia, but she was being surrounded by a bunch of sausages."

"Well, at least there is more than one black person in this galaxy," Sam commented. "I give it until *Episode IX* before they reveal that Finn is Lando's son."

"Well, Forrest Whitaker's is going to be in *Rogue One,*" Steve pointed out.

"My god, three black people in *Star Wars.* What is the world coming to?"

The four of them laughed at this. It was then that Wanda realised how close the four of them had become over the last few months and they deserved to know about the reason she quit school.
"Guys, can I be honest with you about something?" Wanda asked.

"Sure, what's up?" Steve replied.

"I did not drop out of the English class because I thought it was boring. It was after the incident in Buenos Aires, and I had a panic attack." Steve, Sam and Natasha looked between one another, remembering what happened in Buenos Aires. There was a leak that Rumlow was hiding out in the country, but the result was an ambush where they all just managed to survive. Wanda was snuck up on and had a knife pressed to her throat. "I just kept imagining the knife on my skin and I freaked out. After I just could not cope with it all."

"Why did you not mention this before?" Sam asked.

"I thought I would be seen as mentally unfit, and I just did not want to be thrown back into therapy again."

"To be honest, we probably could have all done with some therapy after that mission," Natasha commented. "I knew it had to be something else that caused you to quit school."

"Well, I'm not going to be able to go back anytime soon so... I'm quite happy with what we have at the moment."

"See and I thought we would not have something to be thankful for this year," Sam commented.

"Well, here is to a dismal Christmas and a crappy New Year," Natasha added.

Chapter End Notes

Clint will be back soon.

Next week, prepare for some Christmas music (yes I know it's September but I saw Halloween stuff in JCPenny so...). Speaking of Christmas, since the last chapter of the Infinity War plot will be coming on Christmas Eve, would anyone be up for something more fluffy to balance out the doom and gloom?
Chapter Seven

I feel odd posting a Christmas chapter in September but whatever. Anyhoo, smut is ahead because why not?

Chapter Seven

December flew by everyone with no warning and then it was Christmas Eve. Natasha decided they should at least put some effort into celebrating the holiday. She had bought a decent sized tree to put up, though there was no decoration. Sam called it the saddest looking Christmas tree he had ever come across.

Wanda did not mind. It was something at least. Wanda had grown up with a small tree since her family was a blend of Jewish and Christian people. Her father was more liberal in his views though he did observe Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Hanukkah. Yom HaShoah was acknowledged as well given that both her parents had lost many relatives in the Holocaust. Hanukkah was Wanda's favourite of these holidays. When she was little she used to love watching the lights. She and Pietro still kept this tradition in their foster homes, with Pietro having remembered the blessings on the chanukiah.

The first night of Hanukkah that year happened to fall on Christmas Eve. Wanda had found a chanukiah in a shop and had gotten the special blue candles. It seemed silly given she was the only person in the apartment with a Jewish heritage and upbringing but everyone got into the spirit.

After sundown, Wanda placed the shamash in the centre of the chanukiah and placed the other candles in going from the right. She lit the shamash with a match and began to recite the first blessing, "Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Hanukkah. Amen." Then she recited the second blessing, "Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam, she'asah nisim l'avoteinu, b'yamim haheim bazman hazeh. Amen."

Steve smiled. Wanda could speak Serbian and English fluently but he was surprised to learn she had also some understanding of Hebrew, Yiddish, German and Romanian, possibly through the exposure of her family. It was quite nice to hear these influences in her speech sometimes.

Finally, Wanda recited the Shehecheyanu, a special blessing that is done on the first night of Hanukkah, "Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam, shehekheyanu, v'kiyamanu vehegianu lazman hazeh."

Wanda lifted the shamash and lit the first candle from the left. Once all eight candles were lit, Wanda put the shamash back in the centre of the chanukiah and placed the chanukiah by the window.

"And that was an introduction to Hanukkah," Wanda said. "We have to let the candles burn out. I know it seems long so you don't have to do it every single day until the end of Hanukkah."

"You kidding, that was kind of mesmerising," Natasha commented. Wanda smiled and wrapped her arm around Steve's waist. Sam had made some eggnog that had been resting in the fridge while the
ceremony took place. Since he knew Wanda was not drinking, he gave her the bourbon free version.

"I usually hate eggnog, why is yours so good?" Natasha asked.

"It's mostly bourbon," Sam replied.

"That's why."

Wanda chuckled as she sipped her alcohol-free drink. Without the burn of the alcohol, she was actually able to taste the flavours in the creamy mixture. In some part of her mind, she wished that she could properly partake in the celebrations but it seemed too risky. Steve wrapped his arm around her waist and kissed the top of her head.

"So, It's a Wonderful Life is on in a few minutes," Steve announced. "Wanda's never seen it."

"Is this the one where the guy tries to kill himself?" Wanda asked. "Sounds cheery."

"It's actually quite uplifting believe it or not," Natasha countered. "Come on. You'll enjoy it."

Wanda doubted it. When the opening scenes showed a young George Bailey was hit by his boss and then the whole movie was a never-ending slog of bad stuff happening to him, Wanda wondered why the attempted suicide had not happened sooner.

"Strange, isn't it? Each man's life touches so many other lives. When he isn't around he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?"

Wanda had felt that hole last Christmas. Without her brother, it did not feel like it should be Christmas. However, it did not feel as lonely as she could have been having broken the awkwardness between herself and the other Avengers. She had gotten Natasha for Secret Santa, and she had bought a black jumper. Natasha seemed appreciative of it. Vision, who had been her Secret Santa, had gotten her a rosary, though he probably bought it because he thought it was a nice necklace rather than assuming that she was Catholic. She did keep it because it felt rude if she did not. She did explain to him that she was Jewish and Jewish people tended to wear Stars of David, not crucifixes. He still was not too sure, possibly because religions were not founded on logical facts to him.

By the end of the movie, she was sucked into the spirit as George Bailey ran through Bedford Falls, yelling, "Merry Christmas, movie house! Merry Christmas, Emporium! Merry Christmas, you wonderful old Building and Loan!"

"Okay, you guys win. This is actually pretty sweet," Wanda commented.

"Told you," Steve whispered. "You sleepy?"

"A little." The couple bid their friends a good night as they padded to the bedroom and climbed into bed. "You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm just thinking," he replied. "This time last year I did not think how much our lives would change."

"For better or for worse?"

"Bit of both. Worse in the sense that we can't go home, but better in the sense that I have you."
Wanda gave a small smile. "How about you?"
"Pretty much the same. I can't say I have been much of a Christmas person but the last time I properly celebrated it was when I was nine. Even then it was hard."

"Your grandmother?"

Wanda nodded, "First Christmas without her and it just did not feel natural."

"The Christmas after Ma died was weird. Luckily I spent it with Bucky and his family so it made it more bearable I guess, even if it was him that cooked the meal."

"What about his mother?"

"I never told you how I knew you had bipolar disorder, did I?" Wanda shook her head. "Bucky's mother also had bipolar disorder - well it was called manic depression back then. She had electroshock therapy but her episodes kept coming back every few months. That Christmas was among her lows so Bucky, as per usual, ended up cooking for his sisters."

"He has sisters?"

"Three. Bucky's father died in a factory accident and with his mother not really being able to look after them, Bucky pretty much raised them."

"Are they still alive?"

"Jenny and Josie passed away before I was found in the ice. Jodie is still alive and she is aware that Bucky is still alive but I doubt they will be reunited before she dies."

"They must have been heartbroken when they thought he was gone."

"They were. That was the worst thing I have ever had to do. I think after that point, his mother checked completely out and I read that she was taken to a psychiatric unit and…"

"Lobotomized?"

"Yeah."

Wanda took Steve's hand and squeezed it, "Steve, promise me that if I become really sick again, put me in a psychiatric unit."

"Wait, you want me to admit you to a hospital after I have told you that Bucky's mother had her brain cut out of her?"

"I imagine that is now illegal but the point is you don't know how uncontrollable I could be. Wakanda was just a warm-up, and I don't want you to feel like you can't cope if I become unreasonable. The hospital will be the safest place for me, and if I refuse, just drag me there."

"I don't think you'll get to that point Wanda."

"Hopefully not, but you never know. Anything could happen."

Steve cupped her face and placed a kiss on her lips, "Okay. I promise."

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Christmas morning arrived, though rather than being woken up at the crack of dawn by the excitement, Steve was woken up to the feeling of Wanda's lips on his neck. He hummed as his eyes
opened and then smiled as he rolled onto his back as Wanda kissed his lips slowly and sensually. Steve's hands removed the white nightdress she was wearing, leaving her in just her black cotton knickers.

Wanda began to plant kisses down Steve's body and the feeling of her naked body moving down his while her lips planted firm kisses against his skin caused Steve to squeeze his eyes shut, especially when her tongue came out to trace his abdominal muscles. She smirked as she felt them clinch. Steve was always putty in her hands whenever she teased his body like this.

Her hand played with the waistband of his boxers and Steve lifted his hips to help her remove them. She could not help but chuckle as his arousal was so obvious. A finger glided along his length and she whispered, "I have barely done anything."

"You do not have to do much to me," he commented.

Wanda's hand gripped the base of his member and took a small lick of the head. Steve's eyes rolled to the back of his head as her lips wrapped around the tip. His hand rested on her hair and she hummed against him so the vibrations would travel up his spine.

"Fuck," Steve whispered.

The first time Wanda had done this - back in Saint Petersburg - Steve was not sure if he would enjoy it but Wanda seemed to enjoy it just as much as he did, so he was not going to protest. For Wanda, she was never sure if she would enjoy it either. The idea of it seemed quite frightening since she wondered if she was going to gag, but she took her time with it and Steve seemed appreciative enough.

However, this time he gently pulled her hair and she removed her lips from his throbbing erection. She looked confused until he whispered, "Come here."

Wanda smirked and moved back up to his lips. Wanda pulled down her knickers and positioned herself over him as they joined together. Her hands rested on his chest as she moved her hips back and forth, building a steady pace. Steve gripped her hips as to guide her, but by now the two knew what buttons to press to drive each other wild. Wanda's head tilted back as she picked up the pace.

Their gasps and moans mingled in the air. Wanda looked down and leaned down to kiss him. Both were in pure ecstasy as Wanda's hips moved faster. Her back arched and her breathy moans became high pitched. Steve was already riled up from her wake up call so the sensation of her squeezing around him was almost torturous as he kept surging and then coming down again. She was so soft, hot and wet that Steve was losing track of who he was.

Wanda moved her hand between them and rubbed her clit. At that point, she lost all sense of whose body was whose, her mind jumbled and she pressed a hard kiss against Steve's lips to muffle their yells of pleasure as they released together. Wanda lay sprawled on top of him as she tried to regain her breath. She felt boneless. Steve felt like his body had turned to liquid.

"Well, that was a unique Christmas present," he whispered. Wanda laughed as he planted kisses along her neck and shoulder. Wanda just about lifted her head up to kiss him again. "Merry Christmas Wanda."

"Merry Christmas Steve." At that point, she climbed off him and went to grab something from under the bed. "Here, I got you something." Despite how heavy his arms felt, Steve managed to take the gift from her. "It's not much but I thought it was something."
Steve peeled the wrapping paper off, revealing an Annette Hanshaw CD. "Oh wow."

"I remember you saying that you really liked her music so I thought I would get the greatest hits so that you can listen to her music at a better quality."

"Thank you," Steve whispered as he gave her a kiss. When he broke the kiss, he leaned over to his bedside table, opened the drawer and pulled out a gift of his own. "Snap. I promise that this is the only one."

"Good, because you spoilt me enough on my birthday," Wanda replied taking the paper off. Her heart stopped when she saw it was a copy of the Oasis CD that her father had brought back from England that one time. "Oh, Steve."

"It's the one with 'Wonderwall' on. It's kind of our song I guess so I thought it was worth getting a new copy for you." Wanda pressed her head against Steve's and smiled. "Did I already say Merry Christmas?"

"You did. Come on. Let's have a bath together and get some breakfast in us."

When they finished their bath, Steve and Wanda joined Sam and Natasha in the living room. It seemed that they had all gotten gifts for each other. Sam had gotten Wanda a grey jumper with stars on and Natasha had gotten her a copy of Carrie Fisher's autobiography Wishful Drinking. Steve had gotten a couple of new t-shirts from Natasha and Sam had bought him a copy of the Disney war propaganda movies. Sam opened up Wanda's gift. She had also gotten him some t-shirts, Natasha had gotten a couple books and Steve had bought Marvin Gaye's Trouble Man soundtrack.

"Well, I thought you would be missing it on your iPhone," Steve replied.

Finally, Natasha opened her gifts: a bottle of vodka from Sam (Russian Standard no less), a red jumper from Wanda and a copy of her favourite movie (When Harry Met Sally) from Steve.

"Wow, you really thought of meaningful gifts," Natasha commented.

"Well, these were all important to you guys so…" Steve said. Wanda pressed a kiss to his cheek. "So, movie and TV day?"

"And I will order Thai food later. Right now, we are watching the greatest Christmas movie of all time," Sam began…

"Please don't let it be Die Hard," Natasha whispered.

"Anyone for Love Actually?"

Wanda and Natasha looked at each other and shrugged, "Okay."

It was not a conventional Christmas Day. They spent most of it watching what British television had to offer. Top of the Pops, The Great Christmas Bake Off, Doctor Who, Call the Midwife and EastEnders (which Natasha and Wanda had gotten slightly addicted to). Instead of a turkey dinner, they ordered Thai food, drank a few beers (except Wanda who stuck with Diet Coke) and just made the best they could out of the situation they were in.

A week later came New Year's Eve. After what felt like a bad year, Steve hoped that 2017 would be a bit of an improvement and in one way it was. He had shelter, he had his friends, but most of all he had the love of Wanda. As they watched the fireworks display, Steve kissed her - a good way to start the new year.
Chapter Eight

It had been six months since they arrived in London, and Wanda thought that her stalker had given up his pursuit. No one had seen a sign of him since Wanda thought she saw him outside the coffee shop, so maybe the fact that they were on to him scared him off. Natasha thought it was safe enough for Wanda to leave the apartment on her own. However, Wanda had gotten so used to having someone with her that going out on her own did not have much appeal. She liked to have some company with her to stop herself from being bored.

Natasha had the same view when she suggested going to see *Fifty Shades Darker*. She could not say she enjoyed the books and the first film for the quality, but she found the books the best unintentional comedy she ever read and she had to see the movie to see if the hilarity could be matched on screen. However, the men were not exactly keen on the idea, having cringed their way through the first movie when Natasha dragged them to it two years prior. Wanda had only encountered the first movie on Netflix out of curiosity and found she could not keep her eyes away despite knowing that she was watching a car crash in slow motion. Still, she thought the film was competent enough to see if the second film was worth watching.

"I'll come with you if you want some company," Wanda replied.

"You sure? I did not think it would be your type of movie," Natasha commented.

"I spent most of my depressive episode in Wakanda watching the Kardashians; I clearly appreciate so bad it is good media."

"Great, the film starts at six."

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It was during the movie that Wanda really wished she could drink because the movie was beyond the depths of awful. It seemed like the competence of the previous film had disappeared and what was left was the story with all its issues and, according to Natasha, without the comedy value of the book. It seemed like everything was just a slog and meaningless and not even the sex scenes could pique their interest.

"Okay, that was a very bad idea," Natasha commented as they walked out of the cinema.

"That was not even funny like the first one," Wanda replied sipping her Diet Coke through the straw.

"I have never found myself wishing more for the narration. At least it would have been entertaining in a bad way."

"Well, I think we can skip out on the next film."

"Deal. Out of curiosity, have you ever thought of doing that stuff with Steve?" Wanda nearly choked on her drink and she tapped her chest. "I take that as a no."

"I never honestly thought about it until now."
"Eh, to be honest, the idea of one of you being the more dominant one in bed is a little weird. Steve does not seem the type. Then again, the way you two go at it sometimes I wonder…” Wanda broke out in laughter. She turned her head to the side. She saw a tall, blonde man standing against the wall. Their eyes met for a moment and Wanda felt a chill run through her spine. She turned her head back and after a few steps, she froze. Natasha stopped and looked confused. "What is it?"

"Is it just me or does that look like my stalker?" she whispered.

"Okay just keep moving and try not to look too weird," Natasha whispered. After a minute she turned her head and saw a tall blonde man behind them. "Okay, you keep walking and I am going to take him out."

"Nat, no." Natasha ignored her and turned around. However, the man had disappeared out of sight. When Wanda noticed her friend not moving, she asked, "Am I seeing things again?"

"No. I'm certain I saw him too. Come on, let's get back home."

The two made a hurry to get back to the apartment where, after ensuring the door and windows were fully secured, they explained what happened to Sam and Steve.

"I thought we scared him off," Sam replied as he paced around the room.

"I did too but he's probably gotten better at hiding himself," Natasha said. "We can't stay here." Natasha went to the laptop and started searching for nearby safe houses. "There are two safe houses that we can use. One is by a beach in Dorset and the other is in Edinburgh."

Steve, who was checking that a slightly shaking Wanda was okay, looked to Sam and Natasha and said, "We should split up. Wanda and I should go to the beach house and you two go to Edinburgh."

"What?" Wanda asked. "What about us having to stick together?"

"We go to the beach house and lay low until we got confirmation that the stalker has run into a dead end, and then we join them up in Scotland."

"It's not a bad idea Wanda," Sam imputed. "If the creep is still watching the apartment then Natasha and I will go first, get him on our tail and then you two head off in the other direction. That way he'll have no way of tracing you."

Wanda looked between the three of them. She did not want to split the group up, but it had to be done in order to keep everyone safe. They would not have thought of it if they did not want to keep her safe.

"Okay," she whispered.

"Right, we leave tonight," Natasha ordered.

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Within the hour, Natasha and Sam had driven off into the night. Steve and Wanda were told to wait half an hour before making a move. The pair had switched the lights off to give the impression that no one was in the apartment so the living room was coated in darkness. Wanda sat on the couch with her arms wrapped around her legs and watched Steve looking out of the window.

"It's always me," Wanda whispered. "It's always me that ends up ruining everything."
"That's not true Wanda," Steve told her. "Remember when you were in the medical facility in Wakanda and I said that it was my fault?"

"Vaguely. I don't get how."

"Well, I dragged you into a fight that wasn't yours. Sometimes I wonder if Tony had a point when he said he was protecting you."

"Protecting me? He put me under house arrest and did not have the guts to ask if I would be okay with it. The funny thing is that I probably would have been fine with it if he had asked."

"Really?"

"After Lagos, I needed some space to think and it probably would have given me that space. But obviously getting Vision to lead me on was a better idea in Tony's head. I don't even hate him. I feel like I should but I can't. I just don't feel anything towards him."

Steve gave her a soft smile and walked over to her. "I feel really guilty about everything that went down between Tony and me. I should have been honest from the beginning."

"You know what though, I would not change anything. Just so long as I was with you. As unfortunate as this situation is, you've made my life bearable these last six months." Wanda pressed a soft kiss against Steve's lips and pulled back. "We should get going. The cab will be here in a minute."

Since they did not have a car, the plan was to take a taxi to a train station, catch the next train to Southampton to make a connecting train to Weymouth, then another taxi to the town of Stonebridge. Once they were on the train to Southampton, Steve told Wanda to get some sleep since they would not be in Stonebridge until the early hours of the morning. Given how exhausted she was, Wanda was more than happy to oblige as she rested her head on Steve's lap as he stroked her hair. He stayed awake to keep an eye out in case they were being followed. The day had felt so long and he did feel exhausted. A couple hours into the journey, Steve got a message from Sam that he and Natasha were stopping off in Birmingham and ditching the car in a hope to confuse the stalker.

He really hoped that they managed to shake off the stalker. They were still coming up with nothing in trying to find out who he was and even Sharon's contacts at the CIA were stumped. That was the most frustrating part. If the stalker was a friend, why was he acting so weird around them? If he was a spy for Ross, why had they not been arrested yet? If it was HYDRA, why had he not attempted to kill them? The man was an enigma.

After changing at Southampton, Wanda remained awake. Steve wrapped his arm around her and held her close, both protectively and reassuringly.

"What do we do now?" Wanda asked.

"I don't know. Lay low I guess," Steve answered.

"When we were fifteen, Pietro and I ran away from our foster placement and we spent most of the night riding around on the buses of Novi Grad. One of us would stay awake while the other slept. It was better that way in case we were kidnapped or assaulted."

"How long did that go on for?"

"Don't know. It was winter when we had to go back into the care system. I remember because we nearly became hypothermic and had to be taken to the hospital."
"Why did you run away?"

"We just didn't want to be there. The couple were fine but they weren't my parents. Stupid really. Again, probably a sign that something wasn't right with my brain." It was then that Wanda had a realisation. When she was eight, her mother had periods where she acted irrationally, which Wanda always thought was out of character and it only stopped after she started taking some medication. Her grandmother also had similar symptoms. "I think my mother and grandmother must have had bipolar disorder." Steve remembered what Shuri had told him about genetics having a factor in bipolar disorder, but he never thought to ask if Wanda remembered anything unusual about her parents. "I can't remember anything specific but my grandmother used to get very paranoid. I just thought it was because of what happened to her during the war, but after Srebrenica happened, she acted extremely odd and she went away for a bit. It must have been a psychiatric unit."

"Did your parents ever tell you?"

"I was five. I guess my mother did not have to worry until I showed the signs. Funny, it means I was always going to be screwed up."

"You are not screwed up Wanda."

"You always say that. I'm the woman who volunteered for people who work with Nazis despite her grandmother and other relatives being Holocaust survivors just because they offered the chance to be powerful."

"Did Strucker tell you he was HYDRA?"

"No."

"So you did not know he was HYDRA until it was too late. You tried to escape and you ditched them when you saw the opportunity. That's not exactly a willing subject."

"I think my grandmother would be rolling in her grave."

"I think she would understand that you were manipulated."

Wanda did not say much after that. She laced her fingers with his and he pressed a kiss to her head. After they arrived in Weymouth, they got another cab to Stonebridge where they were dropped off at an old stone cottage resting on the edge of the beach. Wanda took a large inhaling breath and absorbed the sea air. It was the most beautiful smell she had ever smelt. Salt and earth. She raked her hand through her hair and let the air blow London out of her roots.

Unlike the London flat, the cottage looked untouched, as though Ross' men had not considered it a possible option. There was a cute little kitchen in the corner and a narrow staircase leading up to the upstairs landing. There was a cosy nook with a television and a fireplace, and given that it was still February, Wanda could not wait to use it.

"We should head up," Steve said softly. Wanda nodded and grabbed her bag. Wanda led the way upstairs and they were relieved that the bed in the master bedroom was big enough for the two of them. Wanda rolled her neck to try to stretch out the tension from the journey but it was still stiff. "Do you want me to draw a bath for you?"

"Only if you join me," she answered.

Steve smiled and dropped their bags on the floor. Unpacking could wait. The bathtub did not look the biggest but it would be enough if Wanda sat with her back against Steve's chest. Once the water
was the perfect temperature, the couple stripped of their clothes and climbed in. Wanda sighed in content as the hot water coated her strained muscles, Steve's strong arms wrapped around her and she heard his soothing heartbeat in his chest. She rested her hand on Steve's and smiled softly as he pressed a kiss to her bare shoulder.

Wanda did not know what they were going to do until Sam and Natasha told them it was safe for them to go to Edinburgh. For the moment, she was glad that she and Steve were safe and sound for the time being.

End of Part Three

Chapter End Notes

Well, I was asked where the stalker was. I swear you will get answers very soon. Start placing your bets.
Part Four: I Follow Rivers

Chapter Notes

You know when you realise that the Infinity War plot is only 6 weeks away. *Silently Screams* I re-watched the movie for the first time last night and I will say that it is better on the second viewing, even if it does have major writing fumbles.

And as always *grabs bullhorn* smut ahead.

Part Four: I Follow Rivers

Be the ocean, where I unravel.
Be my only, be the water where I'm wading.
You're my river running high;
Run deep, run wild.

Chapter One

Two months after they arrived in Stonebridge, Steve and Wanda still had not been told to come up to Edinburgh. While there had not been any sign of the stalker since they arrived, they could not take the risk of the stalker finding out where Wanda was. As much as she did miss Sam and Natasha, Wanda was happy to get some space with Steve so they could act like a proper couple. They settled into Stonebridge fairly swiftly. However, due to the fact they were still meant to be incognito, they refrained from socialising much in case someone did recognise them. Now that spring had arrived, the weather was warming up and Wanda was taking advantage of being so close to the sea. There had been many days where she would sit on the sand, embracing the feel of it on her feet, cleaning it off with the water and bathing in the sunlight. She actually had not felt more at peace with the world around her until now.

This position on the beach is where Steve found her one afternoon. She was reading a book and the wind was blowing through her red hair, which had grown out in the nine months they had been on the run. It was not as long as it was but it was just coming to under her shoulder. Steve had arranged a picnic basket to surprise her and join her on the beach to watch the sunset. Now that the seasons had changed, Steve had noticed the bluish-green of the sea more than the murky grey it had been during February and March, and he actually would not mind if he stayed in Stonebridge forever.

“Hey Doll,” he said sitting beside her. Wanda beamed at him as he pressed a kiss to the top of her head and wrapped his arm around her.

“Hey, what you got?” she asked looking at the basket.

“Well, I thought you could do with something to eat. I have some sandwiches, chocolate and soda.” Wanda immediately went for the chocolate. “So, how is your book?”

“Well, it seems like Tess is going to get a better life with Angel,” she answered. She was reading a
beat up copy of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* she had found in a second-hand bookshop. Steve had never read it but given how long the book was and the main protagonist was only now getting a bit of happiness, he doubted that the happiness would last long. “It’s just a shame that the last man she trusted did something so… evil.” Wanda put her bookmark on the page and put it on her lap. “So nothing from Nat or Sam yet?”

“No. They’re okay but the stalker seems to have vanished again.”

“Vanished. Yeah. He’s still lurking somewhere.” Wanda shook her head. She did not want to think about her stalker anymore. “We should just stay here. Reinvent our lives. Get married. Have kids.”

“That actually sounds like a nice plan.”

“Unrealistic though.” Wanda looked down at her lap and opened the large bar of chocolate. She inhaled the sweet scent that blended with the salt of the air and snapped a chuck off to eat. Wanda loved chocolate. When they were on the streets, Pietro had stolen a large chocolate bar for them and neither of them wanted to eat the whole bar of chocolate right away in order to hold onto the luxury. It took them a week to eat the whole thing. She shuffled closer towards Steve so she was resting against his chest. She looked towards the water and smiled softly, “I never realised there were so many colours in the sea until we came here. Reminds me of your eyes.”

Steve smiled and laced his fingers with hers. As the sun descended, the sea turned from blue to the most striking pink that Steve had ever seen. It reflected in her eyes, and Steve’s heart gave the tightest squeeze. He loved how green her eyes were, and the pink blending with it reminded him so much of a blossom tree.

Steve had noticed when her moods shifted, even with the lithium. Some days she would have the hints of depression and not want to go outside. Other days were like this where she was happy to be one with nature, and he was always there for her when she needed him.

Wanda grabbed a cheese sandwich from the basket and ate it with gusto. She gave a small shiver and Steve pulled a blanket around them. Part of Wanda was joking about staying in Stonebridge and having a family, but moments like this she wanted that. “Husband,” she whispered, testing the name on her lips. She gave a small smile.

“You say something?” asked Steve, pushing her red strands of hair from her eyes.

“Nothing. Just pondering something.” As much as she liked the idea of Steve being her husband, it was too soon in their relationship to consider marriage much like it was too soon for them to have a child. “Do you reckon that if we were back in New York, and the Accords did not exist, would we have gotten together?”

Steve squinted his eyes in thought before answering, “It may have taken us longer, but yes.”

“You think so?”

“Looking back, there were moments where I felt there was a spark between us. Remember when you joined me on the balcony at the Christmas party?” Wanda nodded. “Then there was a moment before Vision interrupted us when I was comforting you about Lagos.”

Wanda remembered that moment well. She did not know at the time whether it was because she needed the comfort or the appreciation of Steve’s sincerity that she wanted to kiss him right there and then. Her frustration with Vision was less to do with him forgetting what she had told him about phasing into her room without permission (though some part of it was) and more because he had
stopped her and Steve from having what would have been their first kiss.

“I felt those sparks too,” she said softly. Steve cupped her face and pressed his lips against hers so softly that Wanda scarcely felt them. Steve pulled away and licked the taste of salt from his lips. Wanda’s hand went to the back of his head and pulled him into a deeper kiss. When she broke the kiss, she whispered, “Maybe we should take this inside.”

Without any further instruction, Steve helped her gather the blanket and the basket before they practically ran back to the cottage. Wanda wasted no time in removing her t-shirt and jeans while Steve immediately dropped everything in his hands and lifted Wanda up into his arms so her arms were wrapped around his neck and her legs enfolded around his hips. The two kissed again as Steve walked towards the sofa and gently placed her on the cushions. Wanda could feel her nipples straining against her bra and she unhooked it and gasped as the cool air hit them.

Steve in the meantime was indulging in the saltiness of her skin. The sea air had permeated her flesh and Steve relished the different taste of her skin. He licked, kissed and sucked her neck and shoulders before moving down towards her chest. Wanda stroked his hair and hummed and squirmed as Steve rolled his tongue around her nipple. Eight months of sleeping together and he could still arouse her just as much now as he did then. Her hands went to the collar of his t-shirt and tugged at it.

“Need this off,” she whispered. Steve laughed softly against her breast and pulled his t-shirt off. Strong. Safe. Secure. That was everything Wanda felt whenever she saw him shirtless. He kissed her again and pressed his body against hers. Wanda drank him in as his velvet tongue brushed against hers and her brain went cloudy. She almost complained when Steve broke the kiss but as soon as his tongue and mouth touched her belly, his beard scratching against the sensitive skin, she was gone. “Gospode Bože.”

Steve smirked. He knew she was putty in his hands whenever she whispered in her native tongue. He could smell her arousal the closer he got towards her core. He was on his knees by this point and knew he was straining in his jeans. He unbuttoned them to relieve some of the pressure though when Wanda complained he was wearing too many clothes, he pulled and kicked off both the jeans and the boxers.

Wanda licked her lips. It had been a week since she had taken him into her mouth and the idea was really tempting but with his mouth so close to her throbbing core, she would wait. They had all the time in the world. Since they arrived in Stonebridge, their sex life had gotten more exciting. Since Sam and Natasha were not around, they had more freedom to make love anywhere in the cottage they wanted to. Tender sex that was as gentle as a feather in the air; urgent sex that - like this moment on the couch - made it impossible to reach the bedroom in time; and experimental sex which had some mixed results including one amusing incident where Steve nearly dropped Wanda while he was trying to perform cunnilingus while she was on his shoulders in a backwards piggyback.

“You’re beautiful,” Wanda whispered. Everything from his eyes to the wiry hair surrounding his proud member was a sight to behold and Wanda was still amazed how after all these months she could be blown away by the sight of his naked form.

“So are you,” he replied. His hands moved along the outside of her thighs and Wanda automatically opened them to him. He placed her knees on his shoulders and leaned in and inhaled the scent of spice that was so uniquely hers. Thinking he had teased her long enough, his tongue darted out and made a powerful lick against the crotch of her panties and the sensation of the material rubbing against her made Wanda groan inwardly. However, she needed to feel his tongue on her flesh so she pulled at the hem of her knickers and Steve helped out by pulling them down the rest of the way.
before placing kisses up the inside of her thigh.

With no barrier between them, Steve could indulge the taste of her. His hands gripped her hips as his mouth covered her mound, his tongue made rhythmic movements against her entrance and lapped up the salty, spicy slickness coming from her.

“Oh yeah,” Wanda breathed. The teasing Steve had inflicted on her had riled her up so much she felt so close to the edge after what was only a few licks. She thought she was going to tip over when Steve pressed a kiss to her clit but somehow did not. He licked and sucked the nub, and once he was sure she was stimulated enough, he slipped a finger inside her and Wanda hitched at the feeling of his thick finger curling against her walls.

Wanda began bucking her hips in a bid to get more stimulation from Steve’s lips and finger. She was so close and she needed to push Steve to lick, suck and finger her faster. Her hand was pressed firmly against Steve’s head and her other hand was holding onto the sofa cushion.

“Steve,” she gasped. Steve slipped another finger inside and curled it so it rubbed just against the right spot and sucked hard on her clit, and with one final flick of the tongue, Wanda shattered. Stars appeared behind her eyelids, and her limbs turned to jelly. Steve could feel her walls clench around his fingers like a vice and the gush of slick nectar that tasted purely of her coated them and he removed his fingers so he could drink her in.

With her mind still under an orgasmic cloud, Wanda could just about feel Steve rearrange her legs so they were lying across the sofa, her back against the cushion and Steve climbing on top of her so his face was hovering hers. He pressed a kiss to her lips and Wanda could taste herself on his lips and the dewy remains on his beard. Wanda wrapped her legs around his hips to hold him in place, and in one smooth motion, Steve slid inside her. He let out a groan as he began to move and he laced his fingers with Wanda’s.

Their moans and breaths mingled with one another's as Steve picked up the pace of his hips. Wanda’s eyes squeezed shut as Steve stretched her walls and felt the ebbs of another climax build. She had barely recovered from her first orgasm but the tension was building in her belly.

Steve’s climax was also building at a fast rate. He had been so aroused when doing down on her that he was tempted to rub himself but held off because he knew coming inside Wanda would be more satisfying. His need to come meant he was almost at the brink within a couple minutes of entering Wanda.

Steve kissed her hard and pressed his forehead against hers. Wanda’s nails scratched along his back and Steve groaned at the pleasure of the pain. The hand that was laced with hers moved between where they were joined and he moaned at how wet she was and how much of her slick covered his member and their thighs.

“You close?” he gasped as he began to roll her clit.

“Yeah,” Wanda breathed.

Steve pounded into her, and the tightening in his groin built and built. He shuddered and gasped as he released, the only words on his lips were a declaration of love. With one final circle on her clit, Wanda released with a silent scream. This second orgasm tore through her, and the numbness in her body felt like she was floating on water.

Steve kissed her softly and turned them over so they were on their sides. Sleep-hooded, Wanda’s eyes fluttered shut and Steve pulled a blanket over their sweat drenched bodies. As he pressed his
lips to her forehead, sleep engulfed Steve and he drifted with a small smile on his face.
Chapter Two

First things first, how awesome was Doctor Who last night? Only took them about 55 years but we got a female Doctor and she is fabulous. Anyway, enough gushing. Back to what you actually came here for.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The one perk Steve had found in Stonebridge was the number of surrounding hills he could climb during his morning run. Even though he was not seeing the point in running to keep his stamina up, it did give him some space to think. Given it was the early hours of the morning, people were still sleeping and only a few shops were beginning to open. Steve always dropped by one shop on the run back to the cottage to grab a newspaper.

Only today, he had to stop and read the headline carefully: Ellen Nadeer, a United States senator who had been outspoken on her distrust of Inhumans, had been killed in an explosion caused by an Inhuman.

"That's the reason we have these Sokovia Accords," the shopkeeper said. "Who knows who can walk into a building and be able to blow themselves up. Look what happened in Nigeria last year. Who knows if that Maximoff woman purposely blew up that office building."

Despite the rage brewing in his blood, Steve paid for the newspaper before running back to the cottage. Wanda was awake now, and she was cooking breakfast. She turned around and smiled at him, "Hey." He smiled back at her softly, but then put down the newspaper. "What now?"

"You know that senator who rants about Inhumans?" Wanda nodded and rolled her eyes. "She's been killed by an Inhuman."

Steve watched as the realisation dawned on Wanda's face what this meant. "So that's more tightened rules for enhanced individuals."

"More than likely."

"They are never going to see the difference between those who use their powers for bad and those who use it for good, are they?" Steve thought back to what the shopkeeper said about the incident in Lagos. Anyone could see it was an accident, but what Wanda just said hit him like a ton of bricks. "I guess they are scared of things they can't understand. Even I can't understand what this is." Wanda held her hand up and the red glow emitted from it. "You know what, I would like to see them try to make Thor sign the Accords."

Steve let out a small laugh, "I doubt they will get very far." Steve walked over to her and placed his hands on her waist.

"I must have been given these powers for a reason. I broke free from the Compound because I can overpower the Mind Stone. How is that possible? Thor said that they were so powerful that they had
"Well, that is what he was supposed to be finding out. He said what you showed him involved the other stones."

"Maybe because the Mind Stone gave me my powers, I am immune from its effects." Steve pondered this for a moment and he had a terrifying thought that if there was a point where whoever was after the Infinity Stones came for the Mind Stone, Wanda would be harmed just as much as Vision would be. "Hopefully it will never come to that."

Steve squinted, "Did you just read my mind?"

"I just needed to know what you were thinking. I'm just hoping that Thor will stop it before it gets to that point." Steve pressed a kiss against her forehead and hugged her close to his body. Wanda breathed deeply and pulled away. Once she composed herself, she asked, "You hungry?"

"Yeah," he whispered. He let her go and watched her plate up breakfast. If you took one look at Wanda, she did not appear to be powerful. She looked perfectly normal, and yet she had a power that they did not know the full extent of, or why she was given this power.

He shook his head. Wanda was right. He would only worry about it when they hit that hurdle.

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It was later in the evening that Steve was sitting on the bed reading a book while Wanda was practising some yoga poses. Her flexibility had improved since she started taking it up seven months before and it had toned her arms, stomach, legs and buttocks. Said legs and buttocks were becoming a bit of a distraction for Steve, so much so that he had read the same sentence five times.

It was the shorts that added to the sight. It emphasised the supple thighs and the curve of her buttocks. Wanda caught a glance at him looking at her and she decided to tease him. She turned so that her back was facing him and she bent forwards, her backside in the air and she smirked.

"Enjoying the view?" she asked.

"I knew you were teasing me," Steve commented.

Wanda chuckled and stood straight so she could crawl towards him. "I never knew my ass could be such a distraction." She sat astride Steve's hips and she put his book aside. Steve smirked and cupped her ass, giving the flesh a little squeeze. "I always thought you were boobs guy."

"I'm an 'any part of your body' guy."

Wanda chuckled and planted a kiss on Steve's lips. Steve's hands went to her sports bra and he pulled it over her head. He squeezed one of the pillows of flesh and pinched the nipple. Wanda moaned into his mouth and she started grinding herself on Steve's twitching member.

However, Steve's phone rang through the room and Wanda moaned in frustration. Steve grumbled as he leaned over, muttering something about Natasha and Sam's poor timing, only he froze when he saw the name was neither.

"Sharon?" Wanda asked looking at the name.

Steve answered the phone and put it to his ear, "Sharon, what's going on?"
Steve, we need to talk face to face. It's about your stalker. Meet me in Weymouth tomorrow. I'll be in one of the cafes on the seafront at about 11:00.

The phone hung up suddenly, and Steve looked to Wanda, who seemed very confused. "What's happened Steve?"

"She wants to speak to us about the stalker."

"Do they know who he is?"

"We'll find out tomorrow I guess."

The bus from Stonebridge dropped them on the seafront and it was just a case of finding the cafe that Sharon was referring to. Eventually, they spotted her blonde hair reflecting the sunlight.

"Hey," Steve greeted. Sharon gave them both a small smile, and Wanda did return it. Despite the initial jealousy of when she first found out about the kiss in Leipzig/Halle Airport, Wanda knew that Sharon was not a threat to her relationship. That said, she was not above putting a possessive hand over Steve's. "So what is going on?"

"Natasha and I have a plan to find out who the stalker is," Sharon explained.

"Okay, that's good."

"However, it does involve bringing you both up to Edinburgh."

Wanda and Steve blinked at her and Wanda asked, "Wouldn't that be putting me in danger?"

"Not necessarily. We don't know how he has been able to follow you. However, if we can get him in the right place at the right time, we might stand a chance of arresting him. We won't be using you as bait, but Natasha has a hunch that if you come to Edinburgh then he might come too."

Wanda and Steve looked to one another and Wanda bit her lip. She said, "It might work, and we do want some answers. It could be a good opportunity."

"You sure about this?" Wanda nodded. "Okay. It's a good plan."

"The thing is that we have a feeling that he is not human," Sharon said.

"You think he might be a shapeshifting alien?" Wanda asked. It sounded so stupid when she said it. Why would an alien be after her?

"Possibly. It means we have to hand him over to S.H.I.E.L.D."

"I thought -"

"The new director Jeffrey Mace made a deal that if all S.H.I.E.L.D agents sign the Sokovia Accords, the government will re-legitimise the organisation. They have the resources to find out who he is, and we need to know if he is a threat."

"Okay, thanks for letting us know," Steve said.

"Listen, Mace is letting me in on the questioning since I am a former S.H.I.E.L.D agent. I can stick a camera on my collar and that way you two can be on it."
"But what if they start asking questions about whom he is following? Would that not put us in danger?" Wanda asked.

"It depends on how cooperative he is or what his intentions are."

Wanda nodded understanding this and then turned to Steve, "Steve, can you get me a tea please?"

"Sure," he said. "Do you want anything, Sharon?"

"Coffee, please," she answered. When Steve left for the counter, it was just the two women together. "So how long have you and Steve been together?"

"How could you guess?" Wanda asked trying her hardest not the laugh.

"You had his hand on him like you were marking your territory."

Wanda snorted a little, "Sorry, I just know about what happened in Germany."

"You don't have to worry about it. It was stupid and, with hindsight, weird. Even if we tried it would not work out. Part of me would be worrying too much if he liked me for me, not because I was Peggy's niece."

"You know, after I found out about you two, I thought that he was deflecting his feelings about Peggy onto me. I didn't handle it too well, but Steve did reassure me that his feelings for Peggy have nothing to do with how he feels about me, and I believe him."

"Well, you have the benefit of not being a blood relative of a previous love interest." Wanda smiled. She actually found she liked Sharon now the awkwardness had passed. "I think you two are good for one another. You both seem happy."

"We are." Wanda then grew serious. "Sharon, I think the stalker is after me. It seems like everywhere I go he is there. So when you arrest him, I need to speak to him face-to-face."

"Are you sure that's a good idea?" Sharon asked. "If you think he is stalking you, don't you consider him a danger to you?"

"It's crossed my mind, but I need to know why he is following me."

"Okay, but I need someone to be in the same room as the two of you in case he becomes violent."

"Okay," Wanda nodded. By that point, Steve had returned with the drinks. "Thanks."

"So, what have you two been talking about?"

"Just tuning Wanda in on the plan," Sharon answered. "I was just getting to who is going to be our lead man on the mission."

"Who is it?"

"Oh, just someone who could take him out with both eyes closed," a male voice said behind them. Steve and Wanda turned around to see Clint Barton standing there, his eyes covered with sunglasses and wearing his brown leather jacket. "So, Nat tells me that you two have been humping like bunnies."

Wanda rolled her eyes but got out of her seat to give him a hug. She said, "I am so glad to see you."
"Hey man," Steve said standing up. "How are you and family?"

"The kids are growing like weeds and Laura's good. Still, wish Ross' minions would piss off and this thing was less itchy." Clint pulled up the hem of his jeans and showed the ankle monitor. "Cut a deal with the CIA that if I cooperated with them on this then I get two years knocked off my sentence."

"How many did they give you?"

"Five years. I'll give it this, it means I can officially retire this time."

"Clint, I'm sorry that I put you through that," Steve apologised.

"Hey, I owed a debt," Clint replied. "And I could have said no, so I am as much to blame for this. And who knows, if I take more deals like this then the sentence will be null and void in no time. So back to the plan..."

The plan was that in two days time (to give Steve, Wanda, Sharon and Clint the next day to drive up to Edinburgh), CIA agents would surround the area of the old town where the safe house was - not that the agents aside from Sharon and Clint knew about it - and wait for the stalker to sit on a bench, which according to Natasha was something he did a lot. They would wait an hour before arresting him and handing him over to S.H.I.E.L.D. Clint was there to shoot the stalker, but only to subdue not kill.

Wanda nodded with every instruction. She really hoped that she would get some answers as to why this man was so obsessed with her, and maybe she would not be scared of her own shadow. When she explained her plan to Steve that night, Steve was not exactly happy with it.

"Wanda, a few months ago you were having nightmares that this man was going to kill you," he stated firmly.

"I know Steve," Wanda replied running her hands through her hair. "I just need to hear from his mouth why he has been stalking me."

"I'm not disputing that Wanda. I'm just worried about you being in a room alone with just him."

"You don't think I can take care of myself?"

"It's not that. I don't know how dangerous this guy is. We don't even know if he is human. I just think having someone in there with you is safer than nothing." He walked over and cupped her face. "I don't want to see you hurt."

"I'll be okay Steve. I just want to talk to him."

"Okay, but I stand outside and watch, and if I think it is getting too dangerous, I will jump in. Deal?"

Wanda nodded, "Deal." Steve pressed a kiss to her lips and pulled her into a close hug. "I guess we best start packing then."

Chapter End Notes

Told you guys that Clint and Sharon would be back. Well, the big reveal is next week so final bets people. The odds favourite is Vision but we shall see.
Chapter Three

It was half an hour into the car journey to Scotland when Wanda and Sharon fell asleep in the back seat. Clint was driving and agreed to swap with Steve when they reached the halfway point. Steve was reading a map and looking out the window. Clint took a glance in the interior window and saw Wanda sleep soundly.

"How has she been these last few months?" Clint asked.

"It's not been easy," Steve replied turning to look at his girlfriend. "How much did Nat fill you in on?"

"I know they diagnosed her with bipolar disorder not long after you busted us out the Raft."

"She's been taking her meds so, for the most part, she is stable. She does have moments where she falls into a funk but it's not as bad as it was when she was off her meds."

Clint took a deep breath. He remembered with great detail what Wanda had been subjected to on the Raft and he gripped his hand on the steering wheel harder.

"Easy, easy," Clint commented as he was shoved into the cell with his arms twisted behind his back. He shook the pain off as the guards slammed and locked the door. He looked to his left and saw Scott in the neighbouring cell and Sam in the one beside that. "This is a bit extreme."

"What do you expect when you have been declared war criminals?" Ross asked.

Clint looked to his left and noticed the cell on his right was empty. "Where's Wanda?"

"Ah, that. You see, you three do not have biologically enhanced abilities. So, Miss Maximoff is receiving some extra precautions."

At that point, the main guard, known as Lockwood, and another guard came in, holding up an unconscious Wanda by the arms. From the looks of it, she was wearing a straitjacket and had something around her neck. Without any care if she got hurt, they threw her into the cell. Clint ducked down to his knees and tried to see if Wanda was okay.

"Okay, I know that is against the human rights convention," Scott tried to assert.

"I don't think it applies to enhanced humans Mr Lang," Ross retorted.

In the midst of this exchange, Clint could see Wanda's eyes twitch open. She looked spaced out as whatever they injected her with began to lose its edge.

"Hey," Clint whispered. "It's me. I'm here."

"Clint," she groaned softly. Wanda just about pushed herself up. She looked dazed and confused and she began struggling against the straitjacket that she only just realised she was strapped in. "Where am I?"
"It's called the Raft Miss Maximoff," Ross answered. He was tapping something in his hand. "It's an underwater prison created for the sole purpose of detaining and incarcerating enhanced individuals. Your little stunt in Germany has earned you four criminals about thirty-five years."

"Are you kidding me, Ross?" Sam asked. "We were trying to get to Siberia. There's a lunatic-"

Sam's protests were cut off when he heard a pain-filled yell come from Wanda's cell. It was that moment as Clint knew what the thing around her neck was: it was a shock collar. Wanda panted as the pain wore off. At that point, Clint snapped.

"YOU SICK BASTARD! DO YOU HONESTLY THINK-"

Wanda's yells of agony came again, and then it dawned on Clint that the more they protested, the more that Wanda was going to get hurt. He looked her as tears pricked the corner of her eyes. Ross put the control for the shock collar down and left with a satisfied smug smile on his face.

"Is she okay?" Scott asked. Wanda's light sobs confirmed his answer. "So what do we do?"

"What can we do?" Sam asked.

"Wait for Cap?"

"That assumes he is still alive."

Clint ignored this conversation. Instead, he sat next to the wall looking into Wanda's cell. The young woman was shaking as the electrical volts left her nerve endings and Clint could see she was trying to regain control of her breath. He had made a promise to himself after Pietro sacrificed his life for Clint that he would look out for Wanda as much as he could. Seeing her now, he realised he had failed.

"Ten times they shocked her," Clint explained. "They did it three times after Sam, Scott and I made a fuss. The rest was for the guards' twisted amusement. I think she gave up. She did not eat or drink anything. She did not speak to anyone. I guess that she wished for death. I can't say that I blamed her."

Steve looked back at Wanda and smiled sadly at her sleeping form. The peace that coated her face was in such stark contrast to the sleep - or lack thereof - she had in Wakanda. The tossing and turning, the moaning, and the sobbing in her sleep before she woke up either screaming or in floods of tears felt like a distant memory.

"I'm glad she is with you, Cap," Clint said breaking Steve from his thoughts. "You seem to have given her something to live for."

"She's my something to live for too," Steve replied softly.

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When the finally arrived in Edinburgh, Steve and Wanda were greeted with huge hugs from Sam and Natasha. It was only then that Wanda realised how much she had missed them in the last couple of months, and was thankful that they were okay.

"So, how was Stonebridge?" Natasha asked breaking the hug.

"It was nice," Wanda replied. "I really liked being by the sea."
"Well, Edinburgh is not by the sea but it has its perks. So what have you two get up to?" Wanda's cheeks went a bit pink. "Thought so."

"Told you, humping like bunnies," Clint commented as he walked towards Natasha and gave her a hug.

When their pizza was delivered, Sharon and Clint ran through the plan again for Natasha and Sam's benefit, though when they heard Wanda wanted to speak to the stalker face-to-face, they had just as many concerns as Steve.

"Wanda, you really have to be sure about this," Sam said. "He's clearly determined."

"I know. However, if you were in my position, would you want to know?" Wanda replied.

"Before we hand him over to S.H.I.E.L.D, he'll be taken to MI6 in London. Agent Ross is meant to be meeting me to interview him," Sharon explained.

"Agent Ross… as in the guy who is your boss?" Sam asked.

"Yes. He doesn't know that I know where you are."

"Do you really think it is a good idea for Wanda to be there when he is there?"

"We have photostatic veils," Natasha interrupted. "Put a wig on her and no one will realise it is Wanda."

"I have thought it through guys," Wanda stated. "I know how dangerous this is. However, if you were in position, wouldn't you like to know why a stranger is obsessed with you?"

Steve and Sam looked to one another, Sam mentally asking if Steve was okay with it and Steve replied that he was not but if it gave Wanda some peace then he was not going to stop her. Sam sighed and nodded, "Okay, so long as you are sure."

"I am," Wanda replied softly

"The only downside is that I can only risk bringing Wanda with me," Sharon imputed. Wanda looked at Steve and realised that this would mean their agreement for him to be outside the room would be broken. "I know Steve wanted to be there but with MI6 already on red alert, sneaking more than one war criminal into the building is too risky."

Wanda rubbed the corner of her eye and waited to hear Steve protest. However, the only word she heard from his mouth was, "Fine."

Wanda looked up and saw his face was not agreeing with what he was saying. She wanted Steve there. However, Sharon was right. It was dangerous enough with her in the building and with Agent Ross there, she did not want to risk Steve's safety.

"So, at 10:00 tomorrow, Clint will position himself on the roof of this building while other CIA agents will surround the area ready to pounce when Clint shoots him with a taser arrow," Sharon explained. "Assuming that he comes of course."

"You sure the taser will work?" Steve asked.

"Worth a shot," Clint answered. "As you guys have said, we don't know how powerful this guy is and a taser may be the best way to subdue him."
"Right, now that we have gotten that sorted, I suggest we get some sleep," Natasha announced. "We need Clint on his A-game tomorrow."

Sam showed Wanda and Steve to their room and gave them a look to keep whatever they had planned quiet as he left.

Wanda shook her head and said, "I'm too tired to do anything but sleep."

Steve smiled and kissed the top of her head, "Come on. Let's get some sleep."

Except Wanda did not get some sleep. She spent most of the night tossing and turning, throwing the sheets on and off and staring at the clock.

02:43.

03:12

Finally, at 04:47, Wanda decided to get out of bed and go to the kitchen to grab some water. She braced against the kitchen counter and took a breath. She guessed that her inability to get some sleep was due to her nerves of having to confront her stalker the next day. She had no idea what to say to him and she had no idea what she expected him to say if he did say anything. There were just so many questions and Wanda did not know where to start. She doubted whether he would speak to her if she was in disguise.

"Wanda?" Steve asked. Wanda jumped at the sound of his voice and put her hand on her chest.

"Don't scare me like that," she snapped turning to him.

"Sorry," Steve smiled a tired and sheepish smile. "Can't sleep?"

Wanda shook her head, "This man has been haunting my nightmares for months and I am scared to hear what he has to say."

"I know. I wish I could go with you."

"This is assuming that he doesn't get away."

"True, but that would mean doubting Clint." Wanda could not help but give a small smile. She turned toward the cupboards and began looking in them for something to eat, eventually finding some cookies with rainbow candies. Wanda held the bag up as though she was offering Steve one and he replied, "Sure." Wanda took two cookies out and handed him one. "Do you still think that confronting him is a good idea?"

"Honestly, I don't know."

"You know that I don't want you to do it, and that is not me wanting to have an iron hold over you. I'm just scared. I love you and don't want anything to happen to you."

Wanda chewed the sweet, chocolate cookie as she pondered this thought. In her determination to get some answers, she had not really considered Steve's feelings on the matter. Knowing that he would have to wait for her to come back safely was going to be hell for him, she imagined. Wanda wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her lips against his. Steve pulled her closer to him and rested his hands on her hips. Wanda pulled away and Steve pulled her into a hug.

"I don't want anything to happen to you too," she said softly. "I promise to be careful Steve. I'll have
Sharon and Clint covering my back at MI6 as well."

"I'll still worry about you."

"Wouldn't expect anything less."

Steve kissed the top of her head and whispered, "Come on. Let's go to bed."

-o-

Wanda kept having to adjust the blonde wig as she strutted down the alley. The face she had appropriated was a Scottish police detective and Natasha had made a fake S.H.I.E.L.D. identification badge so that she would be able to get into the interview room.

She hid behind the corner and looked over to the open area. There were many people fluttering about, but even among the clutter of people, she could see her stalker walking towards the bench. Wanda wondered whether he had been in Stonebridge the whole time and she felt a little sick. He had gotten a lot better at hiding it seemed.

"Okay, weirdo is in position," Clint stated through the comms.

"Agents are getting into position now," Sharon replied.

Wanda could see the woman sitting by a coffee shop with sunglasses on. Wanda could also see snipers on the roof and other agents pretending to do some mundane activity. She also looked up towards the safe house. She could not see Steve at the window, but she knew that there was a radio so that Steve, Natasha and Sam could listen in on the action. When she left the safe house, she had given Steve a longing look as though she was fearful that she was never going to see him again. So far, she was trying not to think about it.

"Okay, on my order," Sharon said. Wanda felt her heartbeat in her ears as she waited for Sharon's order. She looked at the blonde woman as she took her sunglasses off. That was the signal.

Everything went into slow motion as an arrow flew through the air and hit the stalker right in the chest. The taser released and blue bolts released over his body. Just then Wanda caught a flash of something that she had to blink twice to ensure she was not seeing things. Sharon had also caught a glimpse because she asked: "Are you seeing this?"

"Son of a bitch," Clint commented.

The stalker struggled off the bench, only to collapse on his knees as the other agents surrounded him with guns. Wanda joined them, moving her body so it was directly facing the stalker. The taser seemed to be causing some glitches in what Wanda realised was a disguise. A disguise for someone whom she thought was a friend a long time ago.

"Vision?" Sharon asked as she walked up. She took a glance at Wanda and noticed her hands clenched in a fist. "What are you doing here?" The android did not speak. Sharon sighed and held up her badge. "You know we are going to have to take you in?"

Vision nodded as one of the agents pulled his arms back and handcuffed him in something that if he wanted to he could break out of easily. However, he seemed to submit to his arrest as though he knew it was the right punishment.

As he was led away, Wanda and Clint looked to one another in shock. He put his hand on her shoulder and asked, "You okay?"
"I don't know," Wanda replied.

"Come on, we might get some answers once we get to MI6."

Chapter End Notes

Oh my God, it's Vision. No one guessed that ;). Yeah, I don't think I was being as subtle as I thought I was. Anyway, we still have some more answers to come. Until next week.
"You know that the Secretary of State is going to be livid by this," Agent Ross stated as Sharon led Clint, who was holding Vision by the elbow, and a disguised Wanda out of the hanger of their jet.

"I think we need to hear him out first," Sharon replied.

"I don't know. I think I would get more satisfaction out of seeing Ross lose it over the fact his grand plan to keep tabs on people has failed," Clint commented. Wanda tried to resist the urge to snort.

"I thought you were here to help us, not make smartass comments," Agent Ross argued.

Clint huffed, "Sorry. Personal grudge."

"Well leave it at the door. Agent Carter is right. So, if you would like to follow me to an interview room." He then noticed Wanda standing on the other side of the android in custody. "Who's this?"

"Oh, Agent McAlister sir," Wanda replied, in an American accent, handing her fake ID to him. "I am the new S.H.I.E.L.D liaison officer."

Agent Ross looked between the badge and her and gave it back to her, "Well, I don't think we will be needing your services anymore."

"Actually, it is worth her being in the room just to feedback to S.H.I.E.L.D if he does turn out to be a threat," Sharon protested.

Agent Ross rolled his eyes and said, "Fine," and then began grumbling about the amount of paperwork and aggravation this was going to cause. He started walking away and Wanda and Sharon took glances at one another before following Agent Ross towards the interview room.

Vision had not said a word on the flight to London, even with Clint making some snide comments. Wanda had felt a load of anger fill her body throughout the flight, and she really had to resist hitting him. However, she had to keep her cool in fear that she may reveal herself to Agent Ross and then be arrested herself.

Clint was very forceful with Vision when he sat him down in the chair opposite Agent Ross and Sharon. He had not quite forgiven the android for nearly choking him to death in the Avengers Compound and for allowing Wanda to be arrested and subsequently tortured. Wanda was standing by the opposite wall with her arms folded.

"So," Agent Ross began as he pressed the record button on the tape, "we have found footage of you in your… disguised form in places like South Korea, Amsterdam, and London. What's the deal?"

Wanda and Sharon looked at one another, wondering what Vision was going to answer. His options were to lie or to reveal he was following Wanda and thus revealing where she and the others were hiding. Granted, the next option was to stay silent, which he did.

"Vision, I suggest you make this easy by answering questions," Sharon told him. "You have to in..."
accordance with the Sokovia Accords, which you signed willingly."

"You should know that given that is what we were told when we were arrested," Clint added. Sharon shot him a warning look. "Sorry."

"Let me put it to you this way: you are an AI, originally designed by Ultron and powered by the object that took out S.H.I.E.L.D agents five years ago," Agent Ross warned. "You are very high on the list of people that Secretary Ross has recommended be kept a close eye on. Unless you tell us what you were doing, you are on a one-way ticket to the Raft."

"I could tell you some great stories, including how Wanda was put in a shock collar and tortured until she went insane."

"Okay, one more comment from you Barton and you are out."

Wanda did not usually use her telepathic powers but she needed to know what was going through Vision's metal head at that point. Clint's words seemed to process something in his mind. Eventually, he answered, "Given that I am not usually required to go on missions anymore, I thought I would take a tour of the world."

The breath Wanda was holding in released. She exchanged a look with Clint and she could see in his eyes that he was somewhat relieved Vision had not betrayed them.

"That's it?" Agent Ross asked. "You were sightseeing?"

"I heard that it was better to see the world for myself than hear about it."

Agent Ross ran his hands over his face in frustration, "Do you realise how reckless that is?"

"I would not harm anyone."

"We don't dispute that, Vision, but you are a high-risk individual under the Sokovia Accords. We can't risk you losing control of that thing in your head."

There was a moment of silence before Vision asked, "So what happens to me now?"

"I don't know. That is up to Secretary Ross. Most likely it is going to be house arrest." Agent Ross pressed the pause button on the tape recorder and said, "I need some coffee. Agent Carter?"

"Good idea," Sharon answered. She turned to Wanda and Clint and asked, "Can we be sure he will be in one piece when we get back?"

"I'll make sure," Wanda answered. As soon as Agent Ross and Sharon left, she reverted back to her normal accent, "Clint are the cameras off?"

"Red light has gone," Clint answered looking at the camera.

"I am a little confused here Clint," Vision said as Wanda moved around to face the android. Slowly she peeled off the veil and pulled off the wig. She doubted she had seen Vision look more confused.

"Wanda, what are you?"

"If you don't mind, Vision, I will be asking the questions," Wanda interrupted, holding her hand up so it was clear to Vision that she was the only person to speak. "How have you been able to follow us?"

Vision tapped the Mind Stone in his forehead and explained, "Your powers were created by the
Mind Stone so there is a link between us." Wanda sighed in exasperation. She should have known that. "I just wanted to know if you were okay."

"You could have just asked to meet her and find out yourself," Clint said. "Instead you fucking scared her to the other side of the country."

"I did not intend to do that Wanda. I just thought you would not want to speak to me."

"You could have just sent a letter or used Tony's phone to send me a message and ask," Wanda said in a tone that was exacerbated. "I have had nightmares of you strangling me to death because you were acting so weirdly. It scared me, Vision. If there is a link, you should have felt that."

"The link is not empathetic I am afraid. I am sorry if I scared you. I just wanted to know if you were okay, but I did not know if you would want to speak to me, I swear." While Wanda still felt angry at him, the way his eyes were looking at her directly suggested he was telling the truth. "I have been giving a great deal of thought to what happened. Mr Stark said that you had been treated fairly badly on the Raft." He held his head down in shame. "I thought it was an empty threat."

Wanda's lips went thin and she sat in the empty chair opposite Vision. "You said to Sam that we deserved what punishment we got."

"I did not mean you."

"Ross hates me to the most. I thought he made it clear when he announced the Sokovia Accords. Whatever punishment he had in store for me was going to be worse than what he was going to subject to Clint, Sam and Scott." Her voice was oddly calm, though her hand was shaking a little. "Okay, do you really want to know how I am?" Vision nodded. "I have a mental illness called bipolar disorder. It means that I can become so depressed that I can't get out of bed or I can become so manic that I am impossible to control. It started happening after we were busted out of Raft. I'm taking medication for it so I am stable at the moment, but you stalking me caused a lot of anxiety and stress that affected my moods."

"I am sorry, Wanda. I did not consider how much my actions were affecting you. I came to the realisation - and so has Mr Stark - that we should have consulted you about staying in the Compound." There was a long awkward silence between the three. Wanda felt like an elephant had been lifted off her shoulders and Vision did seem genuinely apologetic and regretful of his actions. Wanda looked at the door in case Sharon and Agent Ross came in at any moment. "So what happens now?" Vision asked.

"We leave, and you have to accept whatever punishment you get," Wanda replied. "I think they will be more lenient on you since you haven't hurt any civilians."

"I hurt you though."

"You just have to promise not to reveal where we are."

"That I can do."

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Anything."

"When you said you wanted the world to see me the way you do, what did you mean?"

"I thought it was obvious," Vision answered.
It took her mind a minute to work out what was obvious. Then she remembered Vision's suggestion involving mistletoe and the pieces fit together. She thought Vision's claim to have romantic feelings back in the Compound were him trying to manipulate her so this floored her. "Oh… right."

"I can't explain how it came to be, but I do have feelings for you, Wanda." Wanda did not know how to react to that. She was struck dumb. "Judging by your reaction, you do not feel the same."

"No shit," Clint commented. "Sort of hard to have feelings for someone who helped imprison her in her own home when she thought she had no one in the world."

Wanda gave Clint a look and he remained silent for a moment. Wanda played with the necklace that Steve had given her for her birthday and her mouth went thin. After a moment, she stated "Clint is right, but I never had any feelings for you even before all that. We were just… friends. I'm sorry Vision." Wanda could see the disappointment in Vision's eyes. She did not know that he had a physical heart to break but it did not mean rejecting him was easy. "You just need to forget about me and move on."

"I'm not sure I can do that," Vision replied.

"You have to. It's for the good of both of us and everyone else." Wanda put the veil back on and placed her red hair back into the blonde wig. "If you genuinely care about me Vision, you would do as I say."

At that point, Sharon and Agent Ross came back into the room. Agent Ross seemed to be a little calmer now he had some caffeine in his system and he announced, "Well, it looks like you are going to have to face some time under house arrest. You should thank Mr Stark for that. He's coming to get you."

"Let's hope Daddy can let you play with the PlayStation," Clint commented.

"I think we're all done here," Wanda said. Wanda gave a glance at Vision. He looked resigned and she did feel sorry for him. "Make sure you don't get yourself into more trouble, Vision."

The four left the room and Ross mumbled something about pushing paperwork before walking into his temporary office.

"Well, I was not expecting that," Sharon said to Wanda and Clint. "Did you manage to get everything out in the open?"

"I think so. He did not mean to scare me intentionally, but at the same time, I can't believe how much of an idiot he is."

"I can," Clint replied. "Listen, I have to go straight back to Iowa. You going to be okay going back to Edinburgh with Sharon?"

"I'll be fine Clint. Thank you for everything you have done these past few days."

"Hey, anything. As I said, I owe a lifelong debt," Clint replied pulling Wanda in for a hug. "Go on. Take care of yourself."

"You too."

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By the time Wanda arrived back in Edinburgh, Wanda was exhausted. The lack of sleep she had the
previous night and the day's events finally hit her. All she wanted to do was to get into bed and sleep for the rest of the week. However, as soon as she and Sharon walked through the door, they were bombarded with questions by Natasha and Sam.

"Was that really Vision?" Sam asked.

"What the hell was he doing?" Natasha added.

"Whoa," Sharon interrupted holding her hands up. "I'll explain everything when you give me the space to breathe."

Wanda held back a moment while Sharon walked toward the kitchen. Quietly, she walked into the bedroom and curled up in a ball on the bed. She was still in the blue shirt and black trousers but she could not be bothered to change into something more comfortable. She held her knees and the emotions she had been holding in all day finally exploded within her and she started crying softly. Part of it was relief that she did not have to be scared anymore but it was mostly frustration at Vision for being so stupid and the lack of sleep from the previous night.

"Doll?" Steve asked softly walking into the room. He was holding a blue carrier bag but immediately put it down when he saw Wanda sobbing and lying like a small child in the middle of the bed. "Hey," he whispered as he lay next to her.

"I'm sorry," Wanda squeaked.

"Hey, you have no need to be sorry. It's been a stressful day." She sniffed and wiped face with her sleeve and tried to compose herself. "Do you want to talk about it?" Wanda did not want to speak about it. She was tired and wanted to forget about it as soon as possible. However, she knew the way her head worked and it was not likely to forget about it any time soon. She nodded and sat up. "I do have some food if that would make you feel better."

"Honestly, Steve, I can't stomach anything at the moment," she answered.

"Okay," he whispered. "So, did he say why he had been following you?"

"He just wanted to know if I was okay. He knew where we were because of the telepathic link between us. It was not strong enough because he could not see how what he was doing was scaring me."

"Does he realise now?"

"I think I made it clear." Wanda wondered whether it was worth mentioning the fact Vision said he had feelings for her, and she almost did not want to, but she did not want to leave Steve out of the loop. "He also said he was in love with me."

"I think I worked that bit out. He always seemed to attach himself to you like a puppy."

"I just thought he was trying to manipulate me. I thought it was not serious." Steve did not really know what to say that could comfort her. She was really shaken by the day's events and the only thing he could think would help would be for her to get some sleep in order to make her thoughts somewhat coherent. "This is so fucked up. I did not think he had a physical heart to break, but the look on his face looked like I had ripped his heart out, stamped on it and chewed it to death then put it back in his chest. It was not a nice feeling to do that for someone, even after everything."

"Well, you can move on. We can move on." He looked at her and gave her a soft loving smile as he pressed his lips against her forehead. "It's going to be okay now. No one is going to hurt you."
Wanda nodded, "I need a shower. I just want to wash everything about today off my body and out of my hair."

Steve nodded and let her off the bed. Once in the bathroom, Wanda stripped the trousers and shirt off her stiff body as the room filled with steam. She was still shaking with anger and relief that she did not think she could ever stop shaking. However, once she stepped into the shower, the warm water filled her senses and she inhaled deeply. When she walked out of the bathroom, Steve had laid a pair of pyjamas on the bed and she gave him a small smile.

"Feeling better?" he asked.

"A little," she replied as she sat on the bed. "You still have that food?"

Steve nodded and went to the kitchen. Wanda changed into her pyjamas and when she arrived in the kitchen, Steve had heated up what looked to be Chinese. Natasha, Sam and Sharon were sitting around the table with their meals eaten and they all offered Wanda smiles of sympathy and reassurance.

"You okay?" Sam asked.

"Yeah. Just a bit of a day that's all," Wanda replied. "You know, at least I know that he did not intend to hurt me."

"And I hope he gets how stupid he was," Natasha added.

"I think he does."

"Listen, I have to get back to the US, but if you guys need anything, you know where I am," Sharon said getting out of her seat. "Just keep yourselves safe."

"Sharon," Wanda began, "thank you for everything you've done."

Sharon gave a small smile as she bid everyone goodbye. Once she left, Wanda began to eat. Steve felt relief. This was so much different from how she was before in Wakanda. It seemed as though she was now putting herself first instead of letting things like today drag her down emotionally. Natasha and Sam noticed this improvement as well.

"So what are we going to do tonight?" Wanda asked.

"Movie?" Sam suggested. "Something relaxing."

"Good idea," Natasha said.

When the movie had been finished, Wanda wanted to retire to bed and Steve joined her. Wanda was so tired that she was not too bothered about Steve making a fuss over her, and his care lulled her until she was relaxed from the inside out. They made gentle love that night. No rush for peaks, just pure love. His love for her was so strong that she could feel it in every nerve ending. When they shattered together, they lay intertwined and watched each other with hooded lids.

Steve was right: the whole ordeal was over, and while they were still fugitives of international law, Wanda finally felt safer than she had done in a long time.

Chapter End Notes
Really, this was to address a problem that I had with the writing of Vision’s character arc in the films which is the writers skipping over major points of development and conveniently ignoring everything that happened in Civil War because they needed the romance to make people feel sad for him.

Any readers who are actual Vision fans, I really hope you take this as something portraying character growth and not as ‘Ron the Death eater’. He will be back in a few chapters because you know... Infinity War is coming.
Chapter Five

Chapter Notes

Since I am rather merciful, I thought I would give you lovely readers a couple of breather chapters before we get to Infinity War. So, in the spirit of fairness, I thought I would depict Steve's birthday. Do you really need reminding that smut is ahead?

Chapter Five

"Do you think this is a good idea?" Wanda asked as she and Steve stood in front of a grand hotel. Sam and Natasha had arranged for a romance package at The Hilton Edinburgh Grosvenor for them to celebrate Steve's birthday. Steve had been surprised by it, and he did insist that they did not blow out on them, but they insisted that he and Wanda needed some time alone together. Wanda did point out they spent a lot of time alone in Dorset, at which point Natasha told her to shut up and have fun. "You sure that we won't be recognised?"

"Well, Nat always said to act as natural as possible." Steve had his hand laced with hers and he gave it a squeeze. "Come on. We'll probably be spending most of our time in the hotel room anyway." Wanda smiled coyly, and they went to check in desk. "Hi, it should be under the name Rushman?"

"Rushman," the check-in lady commented as she looked through the bookings. "Ah yes, you have been gifted the romance package." She handed the key over and said, "Enjoy your stay."

The second they found their room, Wanda gasped. The room was pure white and had red bed linen, but the most interesting part was the hot tub in the bathroom. There was also a bottle of alcohol-free rosé champagne, strawberries and chocolate.

"They really must have spent some money," Wanda commented as she sat on the bed. "Remind me to spend some extra money on their Christmas presents."

Steve smiled and sat on the bed. He looked at the champagne for a moment before lifting it out of the ice bucket and popping the cork open. He poured two glasses and handed one to Wanda, "Well, this is going to be an interesting couple of days."

"Define interesting," Wanda ordered, her left eyebrow raised as she sipped her drink. She admitted without the taste of alcohol, it tasted really nice. Steve ran his hand up the inside of her thigh, only she crossed her legs before he could reach where he was targeting. "Got to work harder than that Birthday Boy."

"So what do you suggest we do?"

"How about we sit by the pool?"

"You sure? I thought you were worried about being caught."

"We've lasted this long so… If we keep our heads down, read our books, we should be okay. Come on."

Steve smirked. Half an hour later, the rosé had been finished, Wanda had changed into her red bikini
and Steve had put on a pair of swim shorts. They strutted down to the pool area, which was quiet save for a couple of people. They found a couple of loungers and they laid claim to them. Wanda stripped out of her romper and Steve had to restrain himself. The red bikini she was wearing looked as though it should barely exist and the shock of scarlet against her skin made it stand out against the white surroundings.

"You okay Steve?" Wanda asked.

"You're just so beautiful." Wanda smiled and she sat on the lounger. Steve pulled his shirt off and he sat on the lounger next to her. "This is nice."

"I know. It's quite nice to be pampered."

"Can I get you a drink?" a waiter asked.

"Oh," Wanda said looking at the menu. She saw there were some alcohol-free cocktails. "I'll have the virgin mojito please."

"And I'll have the same," Steve ordered.

"Oh, and could I get some crab cakes as well?"

"Certainly madam," the waiter replied. "Anything for you sir?"

"Um… I'm good thank you." The waiter went to get their drinks and Wanda smiled at Steve. "You hungry?"

"Well, it is lunchtime. So how do you feel about turning ninety-nine?"

"Well, it's technically thirty-two. I missed a load of birthdays."

"I can't imagine waking up and all I know being gone."

"The culture shock wears off. It's gotten better since you and I started a relationship." Wanda smiled and she leaned over to kiss him. Only they were interrupted by water splashing onto their legs. They broke apart and saw two young boys splashing in the pool.

"Oh my god, Jake, Tom, what did I say about jumping into the pool?" a mother chastised. "I'm so sorry. They get very excited by pools."

"It's no problem," Wanda replied with a smile. She was not going to protest children having fun.

Steve could see the soft expression as she watched the two boys play. He could tell Wanda would be a great mother. Once their virgin mojitos and Wanda's crab cakes arrived, they sat and talked about the books they were reading. Wanda was reading Sharp Objects and she was theorising that the mother was the killer. Steve had taken to reading The People vs OJ Simpson since he had intended to pick up the book having watched the television series it inspired.

After a couple hours, Steve fancied stretching his legs, so he decided to take a swim in the pool. Wanda put her book down and watched as Steve's muscles flexed with each stroke. They seemed to ripple up his back. She decided to take a risk and she lowered herself into the water. Steve spotted her and intercepted her before she could swim towards him.

"I thought you were not a strong swimmer," he commented.

"I'm not but it does not mean I should miss out on the fun." Steve chuckled and placed a kiss on her
lips. Wanda moaned into his mouth and the only thing that was stopping her from removing his swim shorts was that there were people around them. "I think we should head back to the room."

They quickly got out the pool, wrapped themselves in towels and scurried back to the room. Since they both smelt of chlorine, they decided to take a shower together. As the water coated them, they kissed tenderly and their hands explored the bodies they knew so well. Steve pressed her against the tile wall and Wanda moaned as he lifted her legs so they were wrapped around his waist. In no time, he was inside her, moving at a torturous pace, though the need for a release came at them quickly and without any encouragement, they shattered together.

Once they were actually clean, they exited the shower on shaky legs, dried with the towels and grabbed the fluffy white dressing gowns. It seemed to be too small for Steve and too large for Wanda but they did not care. When they ventured to the bedroom, the alcohol-free champagne had been replaced with a fresh bottle and Wanda wasted no time in topping up their glasses. Steve lay on the bed with his legs parted so Wanda could sit in between them and he could wrap his arms around her.

Wanda found an old movie they could watch while snacking on strawberries. When it came to dinner, they ordered room service (pesto tagliatelle for Wanda and an Angus beef burger for Steve) and stayed in their relaxed bubble for the rest of the evening.

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The morning of Steve's birthday dawned, and Wanda was the first to wake up as the sun disturbed her sleep. Steve's arm was draped over her belly and he was still sleeping soundly. Wanda loved mornings like this. She loved looking at his sleeping form and allowing herself to fantasise about their future. It was still an uncertain future - and Wanda hated being reminded of it - but it did not mean it never could happen.

Marriage. Wanda lifted her left hand and imagined a wedding ring on her bare ring finger.

Children. That was a bit more of an issue. She would have to plan a pregnancy to the nth degree given that she could develop postpartum psychosis if she did not get the right support and advice. Still, she put her hand on her belly and rubbed the bottom of it, imagining a little baby swimming around in there.

Wanda turned her head to Steve and placed her hand on his. Her fingers tap-danced over the back of his hand and she kissed his forehead. Steve's eyelids scrunched and his eyes opened, glazed and unfocused. She gave a sweet smile and kissed his nose.

"Happy birthday," she whispered.

Steve smiled tiredly and pressed his lips against Wanda's lips. Steve was dazed and Wanda looked over at him with hooded lids.

"What did I do to deserve you?" Steve asked pushing her red hair behind her ear.

"I think I should be the one asking that question," she responded.

"You were awake very early."

"I was just thinking about the future."

"Good or bad?"

"Good, but I won't say. I don't want to jinx it." She kissed him again and climbed off the bed. "I just
remembered I have your gifts."

Steve sat up and watched her walk to the wardrobe, "You did not have to get me anything."

"Don't be ridiculous," she responded as she padded back to the bed and held out two wrapped packages. "It's not every day you turn ninety-nine."

Steve snorted and took the packages from her. He unwrapped the blue polka dot paper gently and the first present was a new sketchbook and a pencil set. "Wanda…"

"I've seen your drawings Steve and I think it is a waste to deprive the world of your talents," she explained.

Steve cupped her face and kissed her softly, "Thank you."

"You still have one more gift to open."

Steve was more curious as to what this gift could be. It was smaller than the others and it felt like a box. Steve unwrapped it, revealing a velvet box, which when he opened revealed to be harbouring a gold watch.

"I know it seems much but I wanted something to match the necklace you gave me." Wanda played with the gold necklace around her neck and smiled. "Do you hate it?"

"No, I love it. I just was not expecting something like this." Steve gave her a reassuring smile and he put it on his wrist. He cupped her face and kissed her. "You are incredible."

Wanda smiled and pressed her body against his. Wanda gazed softly with hooded lips and she kissed him again.

"You seem sleepy," he said pushing her hair from her eyes.

"No, I'm just so in love," she replied and she pressed her lips against his forehead. However, she was a little sleepy, and she drifted off.

Steve smiled and he kissed her nose. He was rather hungry so he decided to order breakfast. Wanda probably needed half an hour of sleep before she could function. With breakfast on the way, Steve noticed something about the way Wanda was lying that looked mesmerising. Her head was resting on her hand and her breasts were exposed. He looked at his sketch equipment and got an idea. He sat in the chair facing Wanda’s side of the bed and squinted as he drew the first line.

An hour later, Wanda stirred awake to the smell of waffles and she sat up to see Steve bringing in a trolley of breakfast items. He smiled at her and handed over the plate of waffles. Steve was in his dressing gown so Wanda asked, "What have you been doing for the last hour?"

"I thought I would put one of your gifts to good use."

Wanda looked at the foot of the bed and saw there was a sketch. She lifted it and her eyes widened. She knew Steve was an excellent artist, but the fact he managed to get every detail of her sleeping form before she could shift was amazing.

"Steve, this is beautiful."

"Well, you are an excellent muse."

Steve leaned in to kiss her and Wanda put her breakfast aside. Food could wait. Wanda undid the tie
on Steve's dressing gown and leaned back. She parted her legs so Steve could settle between them, only she pushed him onto his back. He was dominant on her birthday, so he could be the submissive on his. She pressed a kiss to his jawline and ran her hands up his sides. Steve hummed at the feeling, especially as she started moving her lips down his chest and down his abdomen.

Steve spread his thighs wider so Wanda had enough space to settle and plan her next move. She licked the head as she gripped the base of his shaft. Steve's head rolled back and he submitted to the pleasure. It was only a small lick but it did not mean it did not send a shiver up Steve's spine. The combination of his arousal while drawing Wanda and her exertion of power over him had driven him wild and he had to stop himself from exploding too soon.

Wanda took him into her mouth, and she rolled her tongue around the head. Steve's mouth dropped open and a gasp left his throat. Wanda looked up and saw his head lift up and their eyes met. The sight of her mouth wrapped around his aching dick and the sensation of her tongue against his sensitive flesh was almost too much to bear and he had to grip a pillow to hold on.

Wanda sucked on the head and she began to run her hand along the shaft. He was like velvet and steel, and there was something so powerful about the way that he was submitting to her that Wanda was growing wetter by the second.

"Wanda..." Steve groaned. His hand went to her hair and he stroked the red strands. She could feel that he was close as his thighs started to quiver. However, she knew that Steve would find more satisfaction coming inside of her.

Her lips detached and she kissed up his hypersensitive body to his lips. Steve moaned into her mouth and he gripped her hips. She straddled his hips and slid down his length, both moaned at the feeling of being joined at last. She pushed Steve's hair from his face and he gripped her hips as Wanda bounced her hips.

"Fuck," Steve moaned as his eyes squeezed shut. Steve grabbed her breast and pinched her nipple. Wanda bit her lip and her back arched as her hips moved faster and faster to the point where she was slamming her pelvis against his.

Her face was twisted in pure lust, love and pleasure. He thrust his hips up in a bid to meet her sways. The tension in Steve's groin was at breaking point but he held on so he would be able to come with her. His head was buried in her neck and he could smell her district scent. It was musky and earthy and he indulged on how real it felt.

"God I love you," he groaned sucking her neck.

"I love you too." The tension in the back of her spine was about to snap, but she needed Steve's surrender first. "You close?" Steve had been close the second they had joined, so all he could do was a nod. Wanda leaned in and sucked his ear, "Come for me, Steve."

Steve followed her order and his whole body went rigid as he pulsed his hot seed inside of her. Wanda's desire to realise came not long after and her spine arched back as it turned to liquid. She fell forward against his strong frame, panting against his shoulder. Steve pressed a kiss to her temple.

Wanda lifted her head and pressed a kiss to his lips. "Happy birthday Steve."

"Best birthday ever," he whispered back.

Once they came to, Wanda rolled to her side of the bed and looked to the waffles. "That really worked up an appetite."
Steve chuckled. "They gave us more of that rosé, so maybe after breakfast, we could sit in the hot tub."

"I like that plan." Once Wanda and Steve finally finished their breakfast, they got out of the bed, put on their swimwear and walked towards the bathroom where Steve turned on the hot tub. Wanda had an ice bucket with the sparkling rosé. "I think this must be part of the package. It's probably a good thing that it is alcohol-free."

Steve smiled as he opened the bottle. Once Wanda had tested the temperature, she smiled and they climbed in. They let the bubbles massage their bodies and Wanda sighed in content.

"Is this really the best birthday you've ever had?" she asked.

"Well, I've never smiled as much on a birthday as I have done today." Wanda gave a small smile. "Honestly Doll, I would not have cared about what we did so long as I was with you."

"Well, at least I don't have to put much effort into next year. Though…"

"I'll be the big one hundred."

"You know when you put it like that, you do sound like a cradle snatcher."

"Well, you are nearer to thirty and since I am biologically thirty-two it balances out."

"Still," she whispered. She smiled and nudged closer to him. "What would you like by next year?"

"A real home I guess. Unrealistic but it would be nice to settle with you in a place we can actually call home."

"I know the feeling."

Wanda smiled sadly and rested her head on Steve's shoulder. It seemed they had similar desires but had no way of achieving them. She shook her head. She pressed a kiss against the corner of his mouth and they settled to enjoy the bubbles.

The best they could do for now was enjoy what they had.
Chapter Six

August

Natasha had declared it girls' night in the flat, which meant that Steve and Sam had to find a way to entertain themselves. They usually would have gone to the pub but Sam fancied a change of scenery.

"You serious?" Steve asked when he saw the bowling alley.

"Hey, it will be a laugh," Sam replied.

"For who?"

"You are great at bowling. Why are you so worried?"

"I'm worried that you are going to be pummeled." There was a smug smirk on Steve's face that knew would touch a nerve with Sam.

"Yeah right," Sam scoffed.

"Do I need to remind you of the first Avengers bowling tournament that you lost?"

"I would not have lost if Nat did not keep feeding me booze."

"You could have said no." The bickering continued as they collected their rental shoes and set their fakes names up on the computer by their assigned lane. Sam threw first, knocking four pins down on the first throw and then another two on the second. "You sure that don't want the bumpers up?"

"I will get enough to beat you," Sam countered, trying to not his show his pride being bruised. Halfway through the game, Steve was leading, though he was restraining himself in a bid to not make Sam feel bad over his pitiful score. "So, you and Wanda good?"

"Yeah, everything is great," Steve asked as he prepared to take his next throw.

"Well, I was thinking, you've been together a year - nearly. Isn't it the time where you start putting a ring on it?"

Steve would be lying if he said he had not thought about proposing to Wanda. It was not as though he did not want to, however, he was not sure whether they could legally marry. If he was to marry her, he would like them to do it under their real names and surrounded by more people that they cared about.

"Maybe if we weren't fugitives," Steve answered simply as he took the throw. He hit seven pins. "Wanda deserves better than to have her name stripped from her on a marriage certificate."

"I suppose you have a point. It sucks unless we can find a priest who can marry you both legally."

"Like that would happen."
Meanwhile, Natasha was pouring a glass of wine for herself and some fruit infused water for Wanda while Wanda was looking for something to watch. Wanda had already put a sheet mask on her face. Eventually, she came across *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* so she settled on it. It was mostly for background noise while she and Natasha had a chat.

"Here," Natasha stated holding out the grapefruit, strawberry and mint water to Wanda.

"Thanks," Wanda replied. "Do you reckon the boys are having fun?"

"Well, I imagine Sam is having a great time losing at bowling." Wanda smirked as she took a sip of her water. Natasha sat down and ran her finger around the rim of her wine glass. "So, you and Steve have been together for a year right?"

"Nearly. Why?"

"Any pangs for a ring to go on that finger?" Wanda nearly choked as she took another sip of water "Okay, maybe not?"

"I haven't really thought about it," Wanda replied tapping her chest. "I guess given that we're on the run, I doubt whether we could marry legally. And if we were to get married, I would like us to be able to do it under our own names."

"True. Wanda Rogers has a nice ring to it."

"It wouldn't be Wanda Rogers. No one else in my family has the name Maximoff, and I don't want the name to die with me. I haven't told Steve this, mostly since we don't know if we ever will get to marry." Natasha could hear Wanda's sadness about the situation in her throat. She got a sense that Wanda would marry Steve in a heartbeat, but she was right. Wanda sipped her water thoughtfully and started running her hands through her hair. "Marriage is just a piece of paper really."

Natasha did not believe that Wanda thought that was true, but could only give a sympathetic smile and reassure, "It will happen eventually. However, there is nothing wrong with just living together as life partners. You could still have a family."

"I guess." Wanda admitted that their time in Stonebridge had been one of the best times of her life, despite the fact that they were hiding from Vision and had to lay low. There was something about their domesticity that reminded her of her parents that she wanted to cling to that more than anything in her life. "I'm okay really. I am just being…"

"Pessimistic?"

"Realistic."

"Maybe it is nice to dream Wanda."

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*September*

Steve had wondered what to do to acknowledge that it was his and Wanda's first anniversary as a couple but before he could suggest that they celebrate the occasion, Wanda was struck down with a bad cold. The first couple of days were filled with mostly sleep. On the day of their anniversary, she seemed perkier as Steve saw her sat up in bed and watching the television. Steve could not help but smile as he saw Wanda wrapped up in blankets and her nose so red it could guide Santa's sleigh.
"How's the patient?" he asked. He was holding a tray containing a bowl of tomato and basil soup, toast and some chocolate.

"A bit better I guess," she croaked. She lifted her hands to take the tray from Steve and she rested it on her lap. After she took a sip of the tomato soup, she commented, "I never knew how good you were at making soups."

"I didn't make it. It came from the tin," he told her as he sat beside her. He gave a smile and pressed his lips to her forehead. "You look adorable."

"I look disgusting. You have to say I look adorable in fear of upsetting me."

"Well, you look a damn side cuter than I did when I used to get colds."

Steve had not thought of his pre-enhanced self for a while. He knew the list of his ailments like the back of his hand. It has also been a long time since he thought of his mother, who had to sacrifice a day's pay each time he fell ill. The worst had to be the rheumatic fever when he was ten, which led to further heart issues before his enhancement at twenty-five. That was also the closest he had been to dying.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"What for?"

"Complaining about being ill with just a cold when you have faced worst ailments than this."

"Well, I think complaining is a good sign that it isn't serious." Steve had to be thankful that this could be treated with over the counter medicine. If it was worse, Steve would have had to take her to see a doctor. "You took your meds?"

"Which ones? The bipolar meds, the cough medicine or the anti-virals?"

"Well, all three."

"Yeah. Took all my doses." Wanda gave a sweet but tired smile. "I love you, you know that right?"

"Of course I do. Why are you thinking that?"

"I don't know. I think sometimes I feel like I don't tell you enough."

"Well, you always let me know in other ways, so don't worry about it." He took the risk of pressing a kiss to her lips. That was also him proving his love in other ways than saying it. He loved her in sickness and in health. It also helped that he did not stand the risk of catching her cold. "So, is there anything on Netflix that you fancy watching?"

"I guess we could continue Orange is the New Black."

"I was thinking Suits."

"I'm the sick one here so I get the choice."

"Coin toss?"

Wanda won on heads. However, she drifted off to sleep in the middle of the episode. Steve shook his head a little but still moved the tray off her lap and covered her with the blanket. He gave a soft loving smile and kissed her on the forehead.
When Wanda had suggested that she and Steve went to see the newest adaptation of Stephen King's *IT*, Steve looked a little unsure about it. Not because he was scared of clowns, or really scared of anything the film had to offer. He was just curious why Wanda wanted to see that particular movie.

"Well, I read the book and there is nothing else on in the cinema," Wanda explained. "It might be fun, you never know."

"Yeah, nothing screams fun like watching a killer clown mutilate children." Steve had also read the book upon Sam suggesting it to broaden his pop culture horizons. While he thought the writing style was rather good, he could not say that it would be a book that would stick with him his whole life. In fact, it had been a rather uncomfortable read in places. "All right, if you want to see the movie, I'll come with. It's your birthday." Wanda smiled and wrapped her arms around his neck. "I guess it is something different before we see *The Last Jedi* in December."

Steve and Wanda walked to the nearby cinema, bought the tickets, drinks and popcorn, and found their seats near the back of the screening room. The screening was half full, which did surprise Steve since the movie had been out for over a month. Granted, since it was nearing Halloween, he imagined many people were going for the atmosphere. Wanda sipped her Diet Coke and took a handful of popcorn.

"You know I think I remember seeing a version of this one Halloween," Steve commented. "It was the Halloween after the Battle of New York and Tony thought it would be a good bonding experience to watch the miniseries version."

"Any good?"

"Depends on whether you define weird as a positive description."

He suddenly remembered Maria Hill's concise description of Wanda and Pietro's powers ("*He's fast and she's weird.*"). He was not sure if Maria was using it as a positive description given the context of the conversation. He did remember how quickly he was the empathise with them. He had read how the HYDRA manipulated the test subjects under the guise of S.H.I.E.L.D so they could use them as weapons. As much as he did respect and care for Doctor Erskine, he knew Project Rebirth was designed to turn more people into weapons to beat the Nazis. He guessed the main difference was that Erskine was completely honest with Steve from the start.

"You okay Steve?" Wanda asked.

"Just thinking," he replied.

"You do too much of that sometimes. I wonder how much can fit into your head."

"There is not enough space to be honest."

"I know I am a mind reader but what do you think about?"

"You mainly."

"Is that you trying to be romantic?"
"Is that so bad?"

Steve smiled and pushed some of her hair from her face. He leaned in to kiss her softly and Wanda smiled into his lips. They broke apart as the lights dimmed and the screen flashed with the British Board of Film Classification information meaning the film was about to start. Two hours later, both emerged from the cinema looking completely bewildered by what they had just seen.

"Did Pennywise actually do that dance?" Wanda asked.

"Well, they don't call him a dancing clown for nothing," Steve replied taking her hand. "You okay?"

Wanda had jumped quite a few times during the film, and at one point she gripped Steve's hand so hard, he felt the circulation cut off. She took a sip of her Diet Coke and replied, "I think so."

On the way back to the apartment, they passed a music store and Wanda spotted a guitar in the window. It reminded her of the guitar she had back in the United States. She remembered the first time she had gotten it. Doctor Ahmed had suggested taking up a new hobby to focus on outside of training and she had managed to learn a couple songs on the guitar once she got a grasp of the chords.

Steve looked at her and asked, "Do you want the guitar?"

Wanda looked at him and replied, "Probably costs too much money."

"It's only thirty pounds. Not that much."

"Where would we put it?"

"We'll find space. Come on," he said leading her into the store.

Truth be told, Steve really liked hearing Wanda sing. It was a sweet sound and he hoped that getting a guitar would help encourage her to sing again. Five minutes later, they emerged with the guitar in Wanda's hands.

"You do too much for me," she commented.

"I know, but I would not lie if I did not say that this isn't for some selfish reason," Steve replied. "You have a talent for music, and I like hearing you sing."

"It's hardly a great voice."

"You undersell yourself." He wrapped his arm around her and pressed a kiss into her hair. "We can try it out when you get back."

"Well, I am not sure if I can sleep after that movie so I guess it is worth brushing up on my skills."

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November

"Dive bar on the east side, where you at?" Wanda sang as she strummed a C chord on her guitar. Wanda had listened to Taylor Swift's new album for the first time, and the song that had stuck with her the most was 'Delicate'. She felt like it resonated with her the most and she wanted to try to learn it on her guitar. Since getting the guitar, Wanda had learned Oasis' 'Wonderwall', Johnny Cash's 'I Walk the Line', and The Chainsmokers and Halsey's 'Closer'. She had been surprised by how easily she had managed to pick up the skills again for her to learn three songs, in addition to the two songs
she had learned before they went on the run. She strummed a D minor chord and sang the next line, *Phone lights up my nightstand in the black.*

"Hey, how is it going?" Sam asked walking into the kitchen.

"Not too bad," Wanda answered. "I've only gotten to the second line. I just need to put lines one and two together, and then go to line three, and combine the three lines."

"That sounds like a load of work."

"It's actually quite easy once you get a hang of the chords. I'll show you." Wanda adjusted her hand back to a C chord and began to strum as she sang, *Dive bar on the east side, where you at?* Her hand moved to a D minor. *Phone lights up my nightstand in the black.* Then it adjusted to an A minor. *Come here, you can meet me in the back.* On the final word, it shifted to an F chord. *And then I repeat the chords for the next three lines."

"So why this song? If I was you, I would have pulled evil, vindictive Taylor by learning 'Look What You Made Me Do'."

"I think my vindictive days were over when Pietro died." Wanda strummed a C note again and looked at the lyrics. She strummed again and sang, *Dark jeans and your Nikes, look at you.*

"You haven't really mentioned your brother for a while," Sam commented.

"I still think about him. I wonder what he would think about this situation. I wonder what he would think about Steve and me. I hope he would be happy for me."

"I think he is. I think he would want you to be happy, and you are clearly happy with Steve."

"I am. I think you are right. I just wish he got a chance of happiness as well, but at the same time, I am proud of what he did. Does that sound weird?"

"Trust me, I get the feeling. When Riley went down, they gave him a medal of honour and while I was proud of the sacrifice he made, he deserved to have a full life."

Wanda smiled a little. Truth be told, when she first met Sam, she did not think they would have much in common. He was friendly enough to her, and always tried to include her as much as everyone else. However, it was a group therapy session suggested by Doctor Ahmed that showed her she was not alone that changed that view. She could argue that was the moment her bond with Steve, Natasha and Sam was born.

*I know this may sound a bit of an odd session given that Wanda is my only patient here, but I think it might be worth you three discussing your own issues with post-traumatic stress to show Wanda that there are people around her who understand how she is feeling,* Doctor Ahmed explained.

Steve, Sam and Natasha were sat in a sort of crescent-shape while Wanda was sitting on the sofa. Wanda was not too sure she wanted to know this about her teammates, even if she got why Doctor Ahmed had suggested it. It just felt like she was butting in on their personal business.

*I guess I'll go first,* Sam said taking the stick from Doctor Ahmed. *Well, I guess it started when my wingman Riley was knocked out of the sky by an RBG. It felt like everything just stopped. Complete cliché I know but it did. The shock just numbed me. I think I remember trying to call his name but nothing came out. It was his funeral that was the worst bit. I remember his mother screaming that I could have done something. She's fine now, but after that, I just did not feel as though I could carry on in the military. It was like losing a limb or something. I could not sleep for months after. I just*
kept picturing him falling to the sand, and what he looked like on the floor. His body had been cut in half." There was a catch in Sam's throat that Wanda detected and she tried to hold back some tears herself: "I did come close to the edge. I know that much. I don't know when I broke out my funk, but I know I would not have been able to do it without my family and the people around me."

He gave Wanda a small but reassuring smile, and it was the first time that Wanda felt as though she was not quite alone.

"Do you remember that song that you played me after that session where you three came in to talk about your experiences with PTSD?" Wanda asked.

"Kendrick Lamar's 'Alright'?"

"Yeah. I felt it gave me some hope that things would be alright eventually."

Sam took the laptop and opened YouTube. Soon the chorus blared, "We gon' be alright. We gon' be alright. We gon' be alright. Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be alright." Sam and Wanda started bopping along to the beat with bright smiles on their faces.

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December

Sam was chewing his burger thoughtfully. Wanda was looking around the table and nibbling at her fries. Natasha sipped her lemonade and Steve was tapping his fingers on the table. They were eating at a Gourmet Burger Kitchen following a Christmas trip to the cinema to see *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*. They had been rather quiet since the credits had rolled.

"It was… interesting," Natasha offered uncertainty.

"I am not quite sure what the point of the casino scene was," Sam added.

"It was… fine I guess," Steve commented. "The Luke-Rey-Kylo side was good."

"And the porgs were cute," Wanda imputed. "Though I did find the Leia stuff a little awkward considering…"

"That is true," Natasha agreed.

"But that scene with Rey in the pool was pretty awesome," Sam countered. "And the battles were pretty great."

"Yeah, it was a good movie," Steve confirmed.

"It's not as good as *The Force Awakens*," Natasha countered. "Wanda, what do you think?"

"My mind is still a little blown from the last fifteen minutes," Wanda replied.

"It does make me wonder what they are going to do with *Episode IX*," Sam imputed. "You know since *The Force Awakens* was Han's movie, this one was Luke's…"

"Could be Lando's," Steve joked. "Well, they brought Peter Cushing back to life in *Rogue One* so the sky's the limit."

Once they finished their burgers, they returned to the apartment and watched *Elf* for some light relief after the intense nature of *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*. Steve and Wanda snuggled on the sofa while
Sam drifted off and Natasha began reading her book. Wanda chuckled at some of the antics in the film as Steve played with her hair. He pressed his lips to her head and looked at the clock. It was nearing 23:00 and he did have the intention to go to midnight Mass at the nearby Catholic church.

"You okay Steve?" Wanda asked lifting her head up.

"Yeah, I just need to got to midnight Mass," he replied.

"Oh." Wanda had not really known Steve to be religious. She knew he came from an Irish Catholic background, but she had not seen him go to church every Sunday and he clearly had no issue with having sex before marriage. She wondered where this sudden urge to go to a traditional church service came from. "How come?"

"I'm not sure. I just feel the need to for some reason."

Wanda looked at him and bit her lip, "Do you want me to come with you?"

"You don't have to."

"I know, but I just don't want you to be on your own. It's Christmas, and we're practically family. We need to do things together. You celebrate Hanukkah with me so it is only fair that I go to midnight mass with you."

Steve pushed the hair out of her eyes and smiled, "Okay. Best get ready then."

Given that Wanda had changed into a nightdress, she decided to switch to something warmer. She opted for a grey jumper, black leggings, her winter boots and green beanie with a green coat shielding her from the cold air. Steve smiled when he saw her emerge from the bedroom. He had his dark jacket on and some jeans and Wanda thought he had not looked more handsome than in this moment.

"Come on," she whispered taking his hand.

The two walked hand in hand to the Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus where the congregation was already gathering. They probably looked a bit exposed but once everyone started to pile into the building, Wanda and Steve sat at the back.

"When was the last time you went to church?" she asked. "That wasn't a funeral?"

"Dunno. Maybe the Christmas before Ma died," he answered. "I just never found the incentive to go since then."

"So why now?"

"I guess I actually have something to be grateful for." He smiled at her and pressed a kiss to her lips. "You've made my life complete in a way I never dreamt was possible."

Wanda gently kissed him again and then the priest began to open the Mass with the introductory rites.

"In the name of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit," he declared as he made the sign of the Cross. Steve did the same. Since Wanda was not Catholic she did not do the sign but bowed her head in respect.

She listened to the liturgies and sang along with the hymns. Steve held her hand throughout, giving
small smiles as he listened to her sing. Once the Eucharist had been delivered, everyone sat quietly as he or she heard the choir sing, "Fall on your knees, O hear the angels' voices, O night divine, O night when Christ was born."

Steve wrapped his arm around her and whispered, "Perfect day."

Wanda smiled as the warmth filled her heart. She had never felt so loved and happy. She felt that nothing could break this feeling.

End of Part Four

Chapter End Notes

*Rubs hands together* Okay, join us next week for the first part of Avengers: Infinity War.

Also the effort it took not to make a parody of the discourse surrounding Star Wars: The Last Jedi was like me looking at an open bar of chocolate.
Part Five: (Don't Fear) The Reaper

Chapter Notes

Right, here we are, what we came for: Avengers: Infinity War. Some advance notes before we start:

1) For copyright reasons, I am only sticking to the Captain America side of the movie. This means that we will not see Tony, Peter Parker, Doctor Strange and everyone involved. This makes sense for me since the main focus of the story is Steve and Wanda.

2) There will be some changes, least of all the fact that Wanda and Steve are together. I will explain the reason for changing some things from the movie when we get to it. Since this is also the main focus, there is a lot more expansion than there is in the movie.

Okay, all that covered, let's get started.

Update: This part is dedicated to Stan Lee.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Part Five: (Don't Fear) The Reaper

All our times have come.
Here but now they're gone.

Chapter One

There was a loud bang and the walls began to shake. It was pitch black, but the sounds were still surrounding it. It could hear people yelling in pain and anguish. The door opened, and the woman with white blonde hair grabbed the case it was entrapped in and ran in the opposite direction. She stopped suddenly. There stood something she feared most of all.

"You're not getting your murderous hands on this," she spat.

"I would not call it murder, so much as... population control. You know there are too many people in the galaxy Irani. Food and supplies will become low eventually. It's either kill them with mercy and dignity or let them suffer from starvation and disease."

"You're insane Thanos!"

"That's your personal opinion.

The larger figure lifted the woman up by the throat and began to crush it with one hand. As the life was choked out of her, the woman slumped the dropped the object in her hand on the floor. The larger figure practically threw the dead woman on the floor and lifted the object up and cracked open its shell. He smiled and placed it inside his gauntlet.

"One down. Five more to go."
Wanda snapped her eyes awake and panted heavily. She felt a cold sweat on her body and her hands were trembling.

"What the hell was that?" she whispered. She glanced at the clock and it was 02:12. She licked her dry lips and turned to the body sleeping soundly next to her. Steve did not look as though he had been disturbed by her waking so suddenly. She wondered whether it was worth waking him up to tell him about the strange dream she had woken up from. Yet she did not know what it meant for it to make any sense to herself, let alone Steve. She did not know who Thanos was, nor what the object he was after was. However, she did know why he wanted it, and it was cold and calculated way he expressed his desire was what disturbed her the most.

"I would not call it murder, so much as… population control."

She took a deep breath and threw her legs over the side of the bed. She ran her hand through her hair and pondered what to do next. Eventually, she decided to splash some water on her face. In the bathroom, she turned the cold tap on and looked at her face in the mirror. She looked freaked out over what she thought was just a dream.

'But it felt so real.'

That was the issue. It was not like the dreams - the nightmares - she had about the Raft and her stalker strangling her. She knew they were nightmares. The vision she had experienced, she was not too certain about. Mostly because she felt a massive jolt of pain when whatever Thanos was after was placed into his gauntlet. It was like she was connected to it, and she did not know what the object was or how she could be connected to something that looked to be from a far distant planet.

She shook her head and cupped her hands so the water could fill it and she splashed it on her face to snap whatever that dream was out of her mind. It did not do much good. She could still feel the jolt going through her body. Wanda sighed and turned the tap off.

She padded back to the bedroom and her heart skipped a beat at the sight of Steve sleeping peacefully. She walked over to the bed and sat down with her back against the headboard. Her hand went to his head and she stroked the fingers through his hair. It had grown a lot since they had been on the run and she wondered whether it was worth trimming it. Truth be told, she just liked running her hand through the hair.

Steve scrunched his eyes and they fluttered open at the touch. Wanda gave a small smile and whispered, "Sorry."

"What time is it?" he asked groggily sitting up in bed and rubbing his eyes.

"Nearly 02:30."

"In the morning?"

"I had a bad dream, or I hope it was just a bad dream."

"Do you want to talk about it? If it helps?"

Wanda told him about what she saw and what she had felt which made her doubt it was a bad dream. Steve looked just as confused as she did. He could not work out what this meant since it seemed such a random thing for Wanda to dream about.

"I think it was real," she said after a pregnant pause. "It just felt so different and as you said, it seemed random. I usually have nightmares about things that have happened in the past."
"That was what I was thinking. How are you feeling?"

"A little scared to be honest. I just… I don't know. It wasn't so much what I witnessed but the way Thanos said it. He was not even making it rational to himself. It was like he knew what he wanted."

"Destroying half the universe?"

"Population control, he called it. Not even a semblance of doubt or care. He killed people without hesitation to get what he wanted."

"So how is the thing that he is after going to help?"

"I don't know, but for some reason or another I am connected to it."

Steve had to ponder what this meant. He knew that Wanda's abilities had been created by the Mind Stone. He remembered Thor saying that the Infinity Stones had been cropping up more in recent years and he wondered if there was a connection between Wanda's connection to the Mind Stone and what had happened in her vision.

"Wanda, how did Vision know where we were?"

"He said he felt my presence through the Mind Stone." Wanda froze and then ran her hand through her hair. How could she have been so stupid? "What Thanos was after was an Infinity Stone, wasn't it?"

"It would make sense."

Steve cupped her face and stroked her cheekbone. He did not know what to say that could reassure her, because he was a little scared himself. He could only give her a soft smile in reassurance. "Can you hold me?" she asked.

"Of course I will." Steve gathered her into his arms and let her pillow her head on his chest. He laced his fingers with hers and planted a kiss on the top of her head. "I wish I could say it was going to be all right, but I don't want to give you false promises."

"I guess we will have to wait and see. I don't like the idea of it."

"Me neither, but I guess it gives us a clearer picture of what we are facing up against."

Wanda knew what they would have to face eventually. A genocidal maniac hell-bent on murdering half the universe under the guise of being omnibenevolent. It was not a case of who they were facing.

It was just a case of when.

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One Week Later

"Hear me and rejoice. You have had the privilege of being saved by the great Thanos. You may think this is suffering, no. It is salvation. The universal scale tips toward balance because of your sacrifice. Smile. For even in death, you have become children of Thanos."

There was chaos around them. Dead bodies. Destroyed parts of the ship. Injuries. The irony could not be more blatant. There was someone on the floor. Blonde. One eye. Strong arms. There was another being above him. "I know what it's like to lose. To feel so desperately that you're right, yet to
fail nonetheless." The larger being picked up the man by his head and continued, "Frightening. Turns the legs to jelly. I ask you to what end? Dread it? Run from it? Destiny arrives all the same, and now it's here. Or should I say: I am."

"You talk too much," the man responded. It was Thor. Only he looked so different. Rougher. His hair was short and he only had one eye.

The being turned towards one of the only other survivors, a tall, thin male with long dark hair, "The Tesseract or, your brother's head. I assume you have a preference."

It had to be Loki. "Oh, I do, Thanos. Kill away." Thanos pressed a stone against Thor's head and the latter yelled in pain. It seemed watching his brother being tortured was too much to watch and Loki yelled, "All right stop!"

Once Thor caught his breath, he groaned, "We don't have the Tesseract. It was destroyed on Asgard." However, Loki held the blue cube in the air to Thanos. "You really are the worst, brother."

"I assure you brother, the sun will shine on us again."

"Your optimism is misplaced, Asgardian," Thanos mocked.

"Well, for one thing, I'm not Asgardian. For another, we have a Hulk."

At that point, the Hulk went out to attack Thanos, but the green monster was too weak to subdue and was defeated swiftly and knocked unconscious as a result. Thor attempted to subdue the titan but he was knocked over like a bowling pin. One of his minions wrapped metal around Thor's arms and neck to restrain him. Thanos was about to kill the Hulk when the bifröst appeared and carried the Hulk away. Thanos turned towards Heimdall, injured on the floor and aware that this was his last act.

"That was a mistake," Thanos said as he stabbed Heimdall in the chest.

"No!" Thor yelled. "You're going to die for that."

One of the minions presented the Tesseract to Thanos, which had been knocked to the floor when the Hulk attacked Thanos. "My humble personage bows before your grandeur. No other being has ever the might, nay the nobility, to wield not one but two Infinity Stones. The universe lies within your grasp."

Thanos took the stone, broke its shell and placed it into the gauntlet. Thanos looked to the outside of the ship and said, "There are two more stones on Earth. Courvos, Proxima, Cull, and Ebony. My children. Find them and bring them to me."

Proxima replied, "We will not fail you, father."

"If I might interject," Loki interrupted. "If you're going to Earth, you might want a guide. I do have a bit of experience in that area."

Thanos snorted, "If you consider failure, experience."


At that point, Loki tried to stab Thanos but he was stopped by the gauntlet. In response, Thanos gripped Loki by the neck and squeezed hard. "Undying? You should choose your words more
carefully."

*With his last word, Loki gasped, "You'll never be a god."*

Loki slumped in Thanos' hand and Thanos dropped the body to the floor, "No resurrections this time." He turned to Thor and smirked as he put the energy into the gauntlet to destroy the ship and make himself disappear.

Wanda screamed as she sat up, her heart pounding and her body drenched in sweat. She panted in a bid to try to calm herself down as she ran her hands through her hair, but there was no way she was going to be calm after what she saw. Thor was dead. The Hulk had been sent to somewhere unknown. Worst of all there was a familiar jolt through her body when the object he was after - a glowing blue cube - was placed in the gauntlet.

"Wanda?" Steve asked putting his hands on her shoulders. Wanda jumped violently at the touch and Steve had to whisper, "Sorry. It's me. It's okay. You're safe."

Wanda threw her hand over her mouth and ran to the bathroom. Steve could hear her throwing up into the toilet. He rushed to follow her and he became incredibly concerned when he saw how pale, clammy and terrified she looked. He went over to her and rubbed her back as she heaved.

Once Wanda was sure the contents of her stomach was empty, she rested her back against the bath. It seemed she had woken up Sam and Natasha as well since they were standing at the bathroom door with worried looks on their face.

"Is she sick?" Sam asked grabbing some water for her.

Wanda shook her head weakly. She took the water from Sam and swilled her mouth out. Her throat burned from the stomach acid, and her heart was still racing so much she thought it was going to burst out of her chest any moment. Steve had his arms wrapped around her protectively and he rubbed her arm.

"What's going on Wanda?" Natasha asked.

"I don't know," she gasped.

"Maybe we should get out of the bathroom and into the living room. Give her some air," Sam suggested. Steve nodded. He helped Wanda up and into the living room where he sat her on the sofa. She still looked spaced out and was trembling. Even though it was January and the air was said to be sixteen degrees Fahrenheit, Sam opened the window so Wanda could get some fresh air. "Better?"

"Thor's dead," Wanda said abruptly. The other three looked at her in disbelief.

"What do you mean Thor is dead?" Natasha asked.

"There is a being called Thanos. He's after some objects that can help him destroy half the universe. Thor was on a ship... There were many people - civilians I think - on the ship. I think the Hulk was there."

Steve noticed Natasha tense at the mention of Bruce Banner being on the same ship as Thor. It may have been nearly three years since Natasha had last seen Bruce but it did not mean the feelings had gone away completely.

"Is he..." Natasha began with a catch in her throat.
"I don't know. He was beamed off the ship by the bifröst. He wasn't conscious when it happened so it is likely he is alive but I don't know where he was transported," Wanda answered.

"But why would Thanos go after Thor's ship?" Sam asked. "More to the point, why were civilians on the ship?"

"Asgard is gone, and those civilians were refugees."

"But what could Thanos be after if Asgard was destroyed?" Sam asked.

"The item was a blue cube."

A chill went up Steve and Natasha's spine. They looked at one another and they both said, "The Tesseract."

"The what?" Sam asked.

"HYDRA's secret weapon and the reason the Chitauri army were able to invade New York back in 2012," Steve answered. "Thor said it was one of six Infinity Stones. He encountered the Aether back in 2013 and while we were in South Korea trying to get a hold of what Ultron was building, Thor had a vision that the emergence of the Infinity Stones in the last few years meant something."

"And the Mind Stone is in Vision's head," Wanda added. "We need to warn Tony."

"That's a good point," Steve said walking into the bedroom to grab his phone. Sam turned on the television for a moment and Steve stopped short of seeing the news. The banner at the bottom screen read, 'ALIEN INVASION ATTACK IN NEW YORK'.

"I think we may have a problem with that plan Wanda," Natasha commented grimly. She observed the phone footage that witnessed Tony, Bruce (her heart leapt a bit in relief that he was on Earth), and two other men (one wearing a red cape and the other in a monk's outfit) confronting two beings, one which she thought could easily play Lord Voldemort and the other was a Dungeons and Dragons character.

They could only sit and watch as the fight played out live. The man in the red cape was kidnapped and it looked as though Tony was going after the caped man. Wanda ran her hands through her hair.

"He's got an Infinity Stone," Wanda announced. "That's what they are after. They were on Thor's ship with Thanos. They're his minions, but there was four of them on the ship."

"So where are the other two?" Steve asked.

"Probably after Vision," Sam answered. "Is there a way to get a hold of the Compound?"

At that point, the phone in Steve's hand rang and Tony's number came up. Frowning, he answered it, "Hello?"

"Steve, it's Bruce Banner. Tony, he's gone up to a spaceship to stop-"

"I know. I'm watching the news. Get to the Compound. When you do get there, please confirm if Vision is there."

"Um, Tony said that Vision has gone AWOL and he has turned off his transponder."

Steve felt the colour drain from his face, "Okay, thanks for letting me know. Just get to the
Compound." Steve hung up and tapped the phone to his head. "Vision's not in the Compound and they have no way of tracking him."

"Shit," Natasha exclaimed. "What is he thinking?"

"I think he must be sensing what is going on," Sam replied. "He has the Mind Stone in his head so he has a link to the other stones."

"Sam's right. He's probably gone into hiding so Thanos can't get to him," Wanda agreed.

"Or maybe he needs help from someone who he thinks can help him," Steve countered.

"You think he might have come here to find us?"

Steve nodded. "Nat, Sam, we need to get our suits on."

"What about me?" Wanda asked. Natasha and Sam left to get changed and Steve knelt in front of Wanda. "Do you think I might risk exposing us?"

"No. It's just that you still look freaked out over what you saw, so I would rather you stay safe here."

"Steve, I need to come out with you. Four eyes are better than three."

"I know, but Vision knows where we are so if no one is in, then he has no way of letting us know he is in the building. At least with someone here, he stands the chance of being safe. Okay?"

Wanda did not like the idea of Steve ordering her to stay behind, but he had a point that leaving Vision exposed in the open air could put him in more danger. Wanda nodded and replied, "Okay."

Steve pressed a kiss to her lips and went to change into his suit. It had been nearly eighteen months since he had to wear his Captain America suit and he got the impression that it did not fit him as well as it had done. His biceps had lost a bit of definition so it was mostly loose on him. He hiked the sleeves up so the cuffs were resting on his forearms. He pulled on his fingerless gloves and went back out to the living room where Wanda was glancing out of the window. She was sipping what smelt like camomile tea from a cup. There was something about the way she was silhouetted that made Steve's heart squeeze.

"Any sign so far?" he asked.

Wanda shook her head. "I think he might be in his disguised form, so keep an eye out for that if you can." Steve walked over to her and cupped her face. "What are we going to do when we find him?"

"We go back to the Compound."

"You honestly think Ross is going to let us walk in there like we're free people?"

"He's got bigger priorities at the moment than the Sokovia Accords, or at least I hope he does. You saw what that guy in the cape can do, and with Tony up on that ship, they're two people down out of a very small pool of people who can legally stop this. He's going to need us."

"And after we get back to the Compound?"

"I don't know. I guess we have to work out a way to stop Thanos from getting his hands on the Mind Stone. I'm just not sure how yet."

Wanda smiled softly and leaned up to kiss him properly. They were only broken apart by a cough
and they broke when they saw Sam and Natasha standing there with their suits and gadgets at the ready.

"Not to break up this moment, but we have other things to be worried about," Sam pointed out. Steve gave Wanda's hand a squeeze. "If he comes Wanda, call us immediately. Use a codeword or something. That goes for everyone."

"Like what?" Wanda asked.

"Christmas has come," Natasha suggested with a small amused smile on her face.

Wanda nodded and watched as the three of them left the building. She watched from the window as they split into three different directions. She took a deep breath and went to the bathroom to at least wash her face, brush her teeth, and change into a pair of jeans and long sleeve shirt. It may have been a distraction, but it meant that they could get out of Edinburgh quickly.

'And then what?'

Wanda did not know what they were going to do next. Keep on the run with Vision in tow? Find a way to stop Thanos? She did not know how they would be able to stop him now that he had minions to send out and get the stones for him. She knew that this was going to be far greater than she could ever imagine.

Once she was dressed, Wanda went back over to the window, and that was where she saw Vision standing there. Her predictions were correct in that he was in his disguised form. However, he was standing there and looking up at the window for all the world to see. Wanda had the light off so she wondered whether he could see her. Wanda sighed and grabbed her hat, coat, boots and keys. Once she was down the stairs and out the door, she came face to face with Vision. She still felt the pang of anger for what he had done, but under the circumstances, it was not the time to bring it up.

"Vision, what are you doing just standing out here?" she asked walking up to him.

"I was just wondering if you would believe I am here for a legitimate reason," he answered. "You were very angry the last time we saw each other. Justifiably of course. Being under house arrest gave me some time to think."

"Vision, that's great, but I know why you're here and we need to get you out of sight." Wanda went to grab her phone from her pocket but realised she had left it inside the apartment. "Listen, come inside. Steve has a plan and we need to let him know you're here."

Vision looked confused as to how Wanda knew why he was here, but before he could dare to ask, something impaled him, Wanda was thrown through the window of a nearby shop and Vision was knocked to the ground, and he felt a burning sensation in his head as the figure above him used a sceptre to attempt to dig the Mind Stone out of his head.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I wasn't going to ease anyone into it.
Chapter Two

Wanda groaned as she attempted to stand. Once the pain wore off, she turned her head to see Vision being held down by the creature she recognised as Corvus with a sceptre pressed against the Mind Stone. Wanda ran towards the two and blasted Corvus off Vision and use her telekinesis to pull Vision out of sight and against a wall.

"Thanks," he said.

"Don't mention it," Wanda replied.

Wanda noticed the injury on his stomach and she tried to fix it. However, Vision seemed to be short-circuiting. "The blade severed the vibranium shield."

Wanda furrowed her brow. Vibranium was meant to be indestructible. "Is this supposed to be possible?"

"It's not supposed to be." Wanda just about got it sealed when Vision pushed her away and the spectre launched between them. "On my count."

"Vision, no." Vision ignored her and went to attack Corvus, flying him through the air. "Shit."

Wanda went to move to go after Vision, only for the female hostile - Proxima - to attack her. Wanda ducked out of the way of the spear the woman was holding and forced her hands to glow red in preparation for the attack. The spear blasted Wanda square in the stomach and she felt herself fly several hundred yards onto the stone floor and the female creature was about to stab her when Wanda used the weaves to shield herself.

Wanda saw the beam from the Mind Stone hit the nearby statue, blasting Proxima off her and Wanda was able to get to her feet. However, the beam stopped and Wanda could hear Vision's yell of pain. Wanda threw Proxima into a truck, causing it to explode and she flew up, knocking the Corvus off Vision again and took Vision from the roof and they fell into the train station. He was back in his normal form now and the best she could do was pull him against the railing and try to fix the injury with her powers again.

Vision groaned, "Wanda just run."

"I'm not going to leave you here."

"Because I have the Mind Stone?"

Wanda looked around and saw the two figures move towards them. They had them cornered. Wanda stood up and she felt her hands tingle as the red weaves started to form around them. "Leave him."

Proxima laughed, and mocked, "Do you honestly think your words mean anything?"

"I am warning you," Wanda declared, her hands burning now in a way it had not done since her final confrontation with Ultron. "I am not letting you get the stone. If you want it, you are going to
The two creatures looked at one another, unthreatened and itched towards Wanda. Wanda held her hand out, preparing to blast the largest energy ball she could muster when she noticed the creatures look at something behind her. Wanda turned her head apprehensively in case this was a distraction technique, but she could see something behind the moving train. Proxima threw a spear at the person, only he grabbed it. When the light became clear and she saw it was Steve, her heart leapt in relief.

Sam then flew in and kicked the two hostiles off their feet. Steve threw the spear to Natasha, who came in swinging it about and attacking the Corvus, injuring him in the process. The five scuffled while Wanda tried to fix Vision's injury until Sam kicked them both to the ground, guns pointed.

Firmly, Natasha stated, "We don't want to kill you. But we will."

Proxima mocked, "You'll never get the chance again."

Just then, a blue beam of light took them from sight. The spear flew from Steve's hands and the three could only look on with confusion. Wanda looked towards the three, but they all seemed relieved that everyone was okay for the most part.

"You okay?" Steve asked leaning down to Wanda's level.

"I'm okay," Wanda replied with a small, loving smile. They both turned to Vision as Sam and Natasha helped him up.

"Thank you, Captain," he groaned as he got to his feet.

"Come on, we need to get him out of sight," Natasha ordered. "A quinjet is on the way."

They managed to get back to the apartment without anyone noticing and despite the police presence. Wanda was somewhat annoyed with herself that she had exposed them to the authorities but that was not her primary concern at that moment. Her concern was getting Vision back to the Compound without Thanos' minions noticing them. Once they were in the living area, Sam and Natasha placed Vision on the couch and Sam shut the curtains. Natasha turned up the television in case there was any news about Tony, but nothing to indicate he was safe so far. In fact, there was a woman on the screen pleading for help in finding her nephew. Peter Parker was sixteen and last seen on the bus but had disappeared when the attack happened. In addition to Tony and Peter going missing, Spider-Man had been seen going towards the ship in the sky.

"You don't think that is connected do you?" Sam asked.

"They're the same person Sam," Natasha sighed. "I told Tony that getting a kid involved in our dramas would be a bad idea. Now look what has happened."

"He's actually quite capable for a young person," Vision commented.

"I know, but he's a kid at the end of the day. He should not be involved in things bigger than he is."

In the meantime, Steve was tending to the cut on Wanda's forehead. It looked to be only a scratch but it was worth cleaning it up. He gently dabbed a damp cotton pad against the cut. Wanda hissed at the pain but it was not as bad as it could have been.

"Are you mad at me?" she asked.
"Why would I be mad at you?" Steve responded.

"Because I left the apartment and got myself into danger."

"Of course I am not mad at you. I'm just glad you're okay Doll."

"It's my fault anyway," Vision imputed. "I was hovering outside and Wanda only came out to get me inside. I was doubting whether Wanda would believe why I was outside the apartment, given everything that had happened."

"You mean stalking her through Asia and Europe and sneaking up on her so she did not know if you were friend or foe?" Natasha asked.

"Or the fact that you threw her into a torture chamber," Sam added.

"Guys," Wanda warned.

"It's fine Wanda," Vision insisted. "They are speaking the truth so it does not offend me. They are your friends and are looking out for you."

"However, this is not the time for venting any anger," Steve argued. Internally, he did harbour a great deal of anger towards Vision for the emotional stress he put Wanda through the previous year. However, he had to put that aside for now because there was a greater danger that needed attention.

"I was telling Wanda that being under house arrest had given me some space to think about my actions. Wanda made it explicitly clear that my actions were unacceptable and had hurt her emotionally, and I did not think about how my actions were affecting her and the rest of you. So, I am sorry."

The four of them looked to one another, however, Steve, Sam and Natasha looked at Wanda to see how she would respond since it was her that had been most affected. Wanda sighed, "Okay Vision. I forgive you."

"Right, now that is done," Sam began, "We need to work out a plan on how to stop World of Warcraft's rejects from getting their hands on the Mind Stone."

"The quinjet should be here in the next couple of hours," Natasha told. "We should get packing because I doubt we'll be coming back here when this is all done."

"Good idea," Steve said taking Wanda's hand. Wanda noticed Vision looking at them and then look down. She guessed that whatever he felt towards her was still there, and Steve had revealed that her heart was placed with someone else.

The two walked out of the living area towards their bedroom and Steve grabbed the duffles from the top of the wardrobe. Wanda began looking around for items to take to back to the Compound. She took her clothes from the wardrobe and drawer, and then she looked at the items around the room, most of which were gifts from Steve. She had her pendant around her neck, but there was the drawing of her family, the nude sketch, the Oasis CD, and her guitar. The drawings and the CD could be packed easily, but she wondered whether they would be able to take the guitar. She did have a guitar back in the Compound, but this guitar was more special to her.

"Should I bring the guitar?" she asked. "It's a bit big."

"It's not like there isn't space on the quinjet," Steve replied putting his shirts into the duffle. "Are you okay?"
"I just can't believe that we managed to for so long to stay on the run, and now it's over." Steve walked over to her and wrapped his arms around her. Wanda winced a little. Steve pulled away and Wanda turned around and lifted the back of her shirt up. There looked to be a nasty bruise forming on her skin. "It's probably from when she threw me to the ground. Could be worse." Steve pulled the fabric down and gently wrapped his arms around her from behind. His hands rested on her stomach and Wanda's rested on his. "Maybe now we can think about a more certain future."

"Yeah, maybe," he whispered pressing a kiss to her neck. "Come on, we still have some items to pack."

Wanda nodded. She put the drawings and the CD in with her clothes. Once she was certain she had everything, she grabbed her duffle and her guitar and met Sam in the living area where he had dumped his duffle. Vision seemed to be alternating between staring at the television and surveying the room.

"What are we going to do about the food?" he asked looking in the fridge. "Could make us an omelette."

"I don't know how you can think of your stomach at a time like this?" Wanda commented.

"I get hungry when I'm nervous. I take it that you don't want anything." Wanda shook her head and leaned against the counter. "You okay?"

"I think so. I'm not exactly expecting a welcome banner when we get back to the Compound."

"Well, I hope Ross would have greater priorities than the issuing of the Sokovia Accords given the circumstances."

"This is Ross we're talking about," Wanda said. "Remember when I told you about his grudge against Doctor Banner. The way Ross treated me in the Raft, I can't imagine what he would have had in store for him."

"Well, it is what we deserved isn't it?" The tone was loud enough for Vision to hear and Wanda turned her head to see how the android would react. "I've not forgiven him for what he did Wanda. I can be civil for the sake of the universe, but he knew what they were going to subject you to on the Raft."

"I know, and I gave him a piece of my mind when he was taken to London to be interrogated. I think I made it clear how his actions hurt me, and that was more than enough for him to see the error of his ways. I'm not saying that we have to be friends with him, but we need to be civil enough to find a way to stop Thanos getting his hand on the Mind Stone."

Sam sighed. He looked over at Vision, and said, "Hey, how are you holding up?"

"Well, I cannot really stand up so I am not holding myself up," Vision answered. Sam squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head. Wanda tried to fight back a laugh. "I think I owe you an apology as well, Sam, for what I said before you, Clint and Mr Lang were sent to the Raft. I was working in the context of the written law, and I was also told that written law is what we should follow."

"Well fifty years ago, it was the law that black and white kids should be in separate schools so forgive me if I don't think that the law holds up in fairness Vision," Sam argued.

"Fair point," Vision agreed. "I thought that what you were assisting a known terrorist. I did not have all the facts, and I did regret my role in your arrests, especially when it caused great pain." There was a moment of silence between the three and Wanda tapped her fingers against the counter. "So,
Wanda, how long have you and Captain Rogers been in a relationship?"

"Sixteen months," Wanda replied.

"And are you happy with him?"

Wanda smiled, "I am."

"That is good enough, I guess."

Wanda turned back to Sam who mimed, "Did he have the hots for you?"

Wanda nodded, her lips thin. She heard a duffle being thrown into the pile and saw Natasha, who had changed out of her suit and into a pair of jeans and a jumper, walking towards the counter. Wanda asked, "How long until the quinjet arrives?"

"An hour. How are we all holding up in here?" Natasha asked.

"Maybe we should reword that question," Wanda suggested.

An hour later, the quinjet landed on the roof. It was the same one that Steve had used to get to Siberia, then the Raft and finally Wakanda where it had been left. It seemed that Shuri had been having a play with it since it had been boosted with a load of Wakandan technology. It had been given a more accurate global positioning system so they could get the Compound in stealth mode and with the added security of the vibranium without a hitch.

"I like what she's done with the place," Natasha commented. "Are we sure that the girl is only seventeen?"

"I know, it surprised me as well," Steve replied as he and Sam helped Vision into onto the plane. "With the boost to the thrusters, we should be able to get to New York in no time. Send a message out to the Compound that we're on our way."

Natasha nodded as she sat in the pilot's seat. She typed a message and sent it to the Compound. "Message sent, are we all strapped in?"

Steve looked around and said, "All in."

"Okay, let's go home. Anyone for music?"

Natasha flipped on the stereo and the sound of The Weeknd and Kendrick Lamar's 'Pray for Me' blasted through the speakers. 'I'm always ready for a war again. Go down that road again. It's all the same.'

Wanda put her head on Steve's shoulders as they took off. The sun was just about rising over Edinburgh. Wanda liked to watch it come up. It gave her a sense of peace. At that moment, however, she was filled with nerves for what was to come.

Thanos already had two Infinity Stones. His minions had captured someone with another Infinity Stone and there had been a failed attempt on Vision's life. In addition, they were down four people who could help them if needed. She had a sense that stopping Thanos was not going to be a simple game of chess.

Chapter End Notes
Yeah, the most obvious change was the arrival of the quinjet. It made more sense in the context of this story that I would give them time to pack as they have settled in Edinburgh rather than the passing visit in the movie.
Chapter Three

"Sir, with all due respect, the Sokovia Accords are not my main concern right now," James Rhodes argued to Thaddeus Ross, who was projecting himself along with other members of his department into the Compound. "Tony is missing. There are extraterrestrials after very dangerous weapons. We are going to need as much help as we can whether or not they have signed the Accords or not."

"Still no word from Vision?" Ross asked.

Rhodes signed, "Satellites lost him somewhere over Edinburgh. He's got one of the weapons the aliens are after Ross. He was probably trying to hide somewhere."

"Or meet with four of the world's most wanted criminals."

Rhodes sighed again. He signed the Sokovia Accords because he felt that the Avengers needed to be put in check to reduce the collateral damage of their missions. What he did not sign up for (and was left out of the document he signed) was torture. Not long after Vision had been put under house arrest, the android had confided in Rhodes that he had been following Wanda to see if she was okay. The truth of what she and the others had been subjected to had made him sick. Tony had revealed that Steve, Wanda, Sam, Clint, Lang and Barnes were going to Siberia to stop Zemo from releasing a load of deadly assassins into the world. Their only crime was not doing it by the book. It did not deserve being drugged, strapped and shocked.

"You know, they're only criminals because you've chosen to call them that, right sir?" Rhodes countered.

"My God, Rhodes. Your talent for horseshit rivals my own."

"If it weren't for those accords, Vision would've been right here. He's only gone to them for help because he knew you would use him as your primary weapon, which as I had said, considering he has one of the weapons those freaks are after, is a bad idea."

"I remember your signature on those papers, Colonel. You having second thoughts?"

Rhodes turned his head towards the door where he saw Steve standing in the doorway, Wanda by his side, and Natasha, Sam and Vision behind them. "Not anymore."

"Mr Secretary," Steve said coldly.

"You have some nerve," Ross spat.

Natasha rolled her eyes and responded, "You could use some of that right now."
"The world's on fire, and you think all is forgiven?"

Steve's blood was boiling at this point. The man in front of him was responsible for hurting his friends and the love of his life. However, Steve was a lot more dignified and responded, "I'm not looking for forgiveness, and I'm way past asking permission. Earth just lost her best defender, so we're here to fight. And if you want to stand in our way, we'll fight you too."

Wanda was not so calm. The man had inflicted torture on her and she was not just going to stand there and let Ross get away with what he had done. "And while you are here, can you name the difference between you and HYDRA? There are none. You're deceptive, cruel and you only see us as weapons. I wonder how much the UN will support your role in the Sokovia Accords when they see that you torture people for your own amusement."

"And if you think we're bluffing," Sam added, "our friends in higher places have managed to obtain video evidence of what you did to us."

Wanda stood with her arms folded. "You call me scum, but at least I have more humanity than you do."

"Rhodes, arrest them!"

At that point, Rhodes terminated the hologram and Wanda let out the breath she was holding in. "Do you reckon that bought us some time?"

"Well, we still have the footage if needed," Sam replied.

Steve put his hand on Wanda's shoulder and Wanda laced her fingers with his. He asked, "You feel better?"

"Maybe if he got some actual justice," Wanda whispered. She took a deep breath and calmed down. Ross could wait. They had more pressing matters.

"You do know you lot are going to get me court marshalled," Rhodes joked as he held his hand out to shake Steve's hand. "Great to see you, Cap."

"You too Rhodey," Steve replied with a small smile.

"You guys must have had a rough night; you look like crap."

"It's what happens when you punch some creeps in the face," Sam replied.

"I think you look great," a voice said behind them. The six of them turned and saw Bruce Banner standing there, awkwardly shuffling and blushing slightly at the sight of Natasha. "Yeah, I'm back."

"Hi Bruce," Natasha said with the brightest smile that Wanda, Steve and Sam had seen for years.

"Nat," Bruce replied.

There was a brief silent moment until Sam commented, "This is awkward."

Natasha gathered her senses and looked toward Vision. She said, "We need to get a plan together."

"Good idea. Let's gather in the living room and talk," Steve ordered. Once they had gathered in the living area, Steve told Bruce, "Tell us what you know about Thanos."

"Thanos has the biggest army in the universe. And he is not going to stop until he... he gets..."
Vision's stone," Bruce explained looking at the android.

"Well, we have to protect it," Natasha summarized.

"No," Vision imputed. "We have to destroy it. I have been giving a good deal of thought to this
entity in my head, about its nature. Also, its composition. I think if it were exposed to a sufficiently
powerful energy source, something very similar to its own signature, perhaps its molecular integrity
will fail."

"But wouldn't that destroy you in the process?" Wanda asked.

"Effectively, yes. Eliminating the stone is the only way to be certain that Thanos cannot get to it."

"That's all well and good Vision, but we don't have the capabilities to destroy it," Sam pointed out.

"We do," Vision said nodding to Wanda. Everyone looked to her and she never wanted more to be
absorbed into the couch. "Wanda's powers were given by the Mind Stone. They are connected to
one another. You wondered why you were given these powers Wanda: it is to destroy the Mind
Stone."

Wanda's eyes flicked between everyone, who seemed to be pressing her for an answer. Wanda
eventually found some words to say, "I'm not sure I can."

"You managed to overpower the stone eighteen months ago," Vision countered. "You can do it,
Wanda."

"I don't think she's just talking about that Vision," Sam replied. "She doesn't think she can kill you."

"Well, it should be easy. If she concentrates-"

"Vision, she does not think she can kill you," Steve interrupted. "You as a person, because you are
her friend."

"To be honest, I am not sure how she could see me as a friend after everything I had put her
through."

Bruce looked around confused. Natasha whispered, "It's a long story."

Wanda looked confused. "You really think I don't care about you after everything that went down in
Edinburgh?"

Vision was about to respond when it appeared that Wanda's words had clicked in a logical sense.
"To be honest, I thought you would be more concerned about the stone."

"I was, but I didn't want you to die as well. I don't want you to die now."

"One life cannot stand in the way of defeating Thanos, Wanda."

"But it should," Steve countered firmly. "We don't trade lives Vision."

"Hold on," Bruce injected. "Wanda, wasn't Vision's body supposed to be for Ultron so he could
become more powerful?"

Wanda nodded and answered, "He wanted to use the vibranium so he could become indestructible."

"Even in his own body, Ultron was super strong and durable. He was a good fighter was he not?"
"I hope you've got a point here Bruce," Natasha commented.

"My point is that the Mind Stone is only a part of Vision. He's a combination of Ultron and JARVIS, so he's a good combatant. We don't have Tony or Thor, and Clint is stuck on house arrest. Thanos' goons kidnapped Doctor Strange and he was a good fighter. And Hulk decided he doesn't want to come out. We need all the help we can get and Vision can help us without the Mind Stone."

"What do you think Vision?" Wanda asked. "Is that a better plan?"

"The variables make sense," he responded.

"And maybe if we can't get it out…"

"It will have to be done."

The room was silent, until Bruce said, "Okay, I'll get to work immediately. Nat, I might need a hand with this."

Natasha nodded and helped him get Vision out of the room and towards the laboratory. This left Steve, Wanda, Sam and Rhodes in the living area, yet no one really knew what to say.

"What's the alternative if we don't destroy the Mind Stone, either way?" Rhodes asked.

"Thanos will wipe out half the universe," Wanda answered. "He's right. If they can't get the stone out then I am going to have to kill him." She sighed and ran her hands through her hair. "I need to go to my room."

"Do you need me to come with you?" Steve asked.

"Would you?"

Steve nodded and took her hand. They walked down the corridor to Wanda's old room. It had been untouched. The shelves where she kept her English class textbooks and various items on the shelf had gathered dust from eighteen months of not being used. She smiled a little when she saw the picture of Nathaniel. She wondered how much he had grown since she had last seen him. He would be two and a half now, but she wondered whether he would recognise her.

"You okay?" Steve asked putting his hand on her shoulders.

"I don't know. I know Vision is right, but I don't think he understands that this is not as easy as he is making it."

"Well, let's hope that Bruce can get the stone out before it comes to that."

"It could still kill him."

"Bruce did help create him. He should know how to get the stone out. And even if it doesn't work, we at least tried."

Wanda turned around to face him and pressed a kiss to Steve's lips. Steve wrapped his arms gently around her waist and pulled her closer. Even though she knew the timing was not really appropriate, there was just something about seeing Steve in his Captain America suit and the way he had stood up to Ross that had created a burning in her belly. Wanda's hands went to her shirt and she pulled it over her head.

"You sure you want to do this?" Steve asked.
Wanda nodded. Steve went to shut the door and lock it so they could not be disturbed. He grabbed the zip of his suit and removed the top half and kick off the boots. Wanda kissed him again and the two stumbled towards the bed. Wanda hissed as her bruised back hit the mattress.

"You okay?" Steve asked.

"Yeah, just that bruise." Steve lay on his back so Wanda could straddle his hips. Steve pushed the hair from her face and cupped her cheek. "What?"

"You're just too beautiful for words."

Wanda kissed him softly as she worked the zip of his trousers. Steve helped her get him out of them and he unhooked her bra. Wanda sat up and ran her hands up his torso and chest while Steve cupped one of her breasts in his hand, rolled it and pinched the nipple between his fingers. Wanda unbuttoned her jeans and Steve helped her out of the fabric, tossing them aside. Wanda smiled softly and cupped his cheek.

"You definitely sure you want to do this?" Steve asked. Wanda nodded and they removed the last items of clothing separating them. Steve let Wanda take the lead. She gripped him, pumped him a couple times before levelling her entrance with the tip. Gently, she lowered herself and took him all in. Sex had definitely had become a lot easier since their first time in Yekaterinburg, but the love between them had grown only stronger.

Forest green bore into pale blue as they gasped at each sway of her hips. This was not the heroic desire for orgasm like many of their previous encounters. This was an affirmation of their love for each other. While they had a plan, they did not know if it would work, and there was no guarantee that they would both make it out alive.

Steve placed his hands on her hips gently as Wanda moved her hips quickly, the tension building in her belly. A smile brightened her face and the sensuality of her riding him took Steve's breath away. Wanda leaned down to kiss him and she drank him in as their tongues melded together. Steve moved his finger to the spot between them and rolled her clit gently. Wanda sighed and relinquished her control and cried softly.

"I love you," she gasped as she released, her nails biting into Steve's chest. Her walls clenching around him felt too much for Steve and he released with her, stating his words of love as well. Wanda breathed deeply and pressed her lips against his. She pressed her forehead against his and reached for his hand.

"Been a bit of a day huh?" she whispered. She climbed off him and lay on her side facing her partner. Steve turned to face her as well and he laced his fingers with her. "Do you ever think about a future?"

"I do. Mostly you and I," he answered.

"What do you think about?"

"I see a house with a porch in Brooklyn. I see us on a Sunday morning in bed and then our kids might run in to join us. A little girl with your hair and my eyes. Actually, both kids would have your hair. Didn't you say a long time ago that you wanted to name our daughter Milena after your grandmother?"

"Yeah, though when I said it, I did not know she would be our daughter." Wanda squeezed his hand. "Maybe after all this is over, we can try."
"Try to have a baby?"

"I like that image of you and me with our kids. I think my bipolar is stable enough and if we go to a doctor who specialises in pregnancy and bipolar disorder, we will be able to reduce the risk of me falling into a relapse or possibly postpartum psychosis. Ross can't do anything to us now. I think we're ready."

Steve smiled and kissed her. "Okay, when this is done, we'll start trying."

Chapter End Notes

You see, I can provide some comfort in bad times. Anyway, one of my bugs with the movie was that Bruce did not even try to save Vision, even though he did have a role in creating him so it added to the rushed feeling to the Captain America side of the movie.
"The Reality Stone! Now!" Thanos demanded as he hovered over a strange looking man with tall white hair and large white eyebrows. The surroundings smelt of smoke and burnt corpses.

"I told you, I sold it! Why would I lie?" the man asked in desperation, though from the tone of his voice, he was clearly feigning what he knew.

"I imagine it's like breathing for you."

"Like suicide."

"So you do understand. Not even you would surrender something so precious."

"I didn't know what it was."

"Then you're more of a fool than I took you for. Last chance charlatan. Where's the stone?"

The beast looked to the left and saw the object he was looking for. He was staring directly at it and a sly grin coated his features as he removed his foot from his victim's chest. He strutted towards his target and smashed the case surrounding it. It floated around its siblings while the beast clutched it in his hand, crushing it until it formed a small oval shaped item that he placed into the gauntlet.

"Well now Gamora, come to me."

Wanda's eyes snapped open and she took in a sharp breath. That was stone number three. Thanos was halfway there. He could be after the fourth Infinity Stone that his minions had collected, assuming that Tony, Peter and Strange could stop him. She sighed and turned to face Steve. He was still sleeping and Wanda smiled softly at him. He was sleeping so soundly, she wondered whether it was worth waking him up to inform him that Thanos was getting closer. However, Steve was not the one that had to pull an Infinity Stone out of Vision's head.

She pulled the sheets off herself, grabbed some clean underwear and pulled on a clean pair of sweatpants and a top. She quietly tiptoed out of the bedroom and made her way to the laboratory where Vision was lying on the table in a possible state of sleep, Bruce was running simulations on the computer and Natasha had drifted off with her head resting on the table. There was some music playing in the background, and she was not entirely sure she recognised it.

'Always, no, sometimes think it's me, But you know I know when it's a dream. I think, er, no, I mean, er, yes. But it's all wrong. That is I think I disagree.'

"How are we doing in here?" she asked.

"I never thought I would say this but I need Tony," Bruce replied. "We created Vision together, and I have looked back on the plans we did, but I can't see where we put in a way to remove the Mind Stone if needed. I don't think we thought this through properly. Vision has been offering suggestions but the more we do the more it is hurting him and more likely to kill him."
"Maybe if it comes down to it you should kill him," Wanda joked.

"Either way, you destroy the stone. I'm only trying to save your moral conscious here since you seemed to have developed one in the last three years." Wanda looked down. She deserved that after what she did to him in South Africa. "Where's Pietro? I thought he would be running around somewhere. He could prove useful-"

"He's dead." Bruce stopped what he was doing and turned to face her. "He died in Sokovia. Ultron hacked the helicarrier guns and Pietro sacrificed his life to save Clint and a little boy."

"Oh god, Wanda, I'm sorry."

"Don't apologise Doctor Banner. I've made my peace with it. I still miss him, but it doesn't hurt as much to talk about him. In fact, I should be the one apologising for what happened in South Africa. It made you a scapegoat for something I did and endangered many people, something which I know you did not want to do. It's not you that's unsafe. It was me making you unsafe, and I did it because I wanted revenge on Tony, which was incredibly misguided." Bruce removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "I know that won't make up for what I did, but I just want you to know that the girl who did that is not the woman standing in front of you. Pietro dying made me realise that anger does more damage than it solves."

"It is a bitter pill to swallow I guess."

"It is."

"Maybe you can do that to me again, see if you can guide Hulk out? He's being a bit stubborn at the moment."

"You won't be able to control him though."

"Point."

"Anyway, I need to tell you something: Thanos has the third stone."

"How do you know?"

"My powers are linked to the Mind Stone. I have a psychic link so whatever that stone feels, I feel too. I'm just saying that he is halfway there."

"In other words, if we want to beat Thanos with as many people as we can gather, we need to get a move on with removing the stone."

Wanda nodded and Bruce returned to running simulations. Wanda looked over at Natasha and said, "She missed you. Like a lot."

"She said. I wish I could say the same. I've been Hulk for the past two years and Hulk does not handle puny feelings other than… well, Hulk smash."

"Do you know what is next for you two after this is over?"

"Well, we've been focused on trying to end this before we could even think about after. Why, are you thinking about after?"

Wanda gave a small smile and gently stroked the bottom of her belly, "You could say that."

"Hey," Steve said coming into the laboratory. He was wearing a pair of sweatpants and a white t-
shirt. "How are we doing in here?"

"Not great. Everything I try to run results in killing Vision," Bruce replied. "Vision insisted that it doesn't matter if he dies, but-

"We need him."

"Especially now Thanos has the third stone," Wanda said.

"He does?" Steve asked.

Wanda nodded. "I don't know how long it is going to take him to get the next one, but I think he is moving fast."

"Okay, I think I may have found an idea that could get the stone out without destroying Vision," Bruce said turning to the android on the table. "Wanda, you need to get ready to blow this as soon as I have it out." Wanda nodded and stood on the opposite end of the table. "Vision, you with us?"

"Have you got a plan?" the android asked.

"I think so. You ready?" Vision nodded and Bruce grabbed something to extract the Mind Stone and what looked to be a blow torch. "This may hurt."

He turned on a laser and gently moved it to the centre of the stone. However, it seemed the pain was becoming too much since it was connected to a major nerve that Bruce had to suspend the attempt. It seemed to have awakened Natasha as she stood to look at the others.

"That really hurt," Vision commented. "If I am going to be honest, Doctor Banner, I would just cut the attempt to keep me alive because we're running out of time."

Bruce hit the computer in frustration, and the others could see the hint of green in his eyes. Natasha put her hand on his shoulder and once he calmed, he explained, "I've seen what Thanos can do. He strangled Loki with his bare hand. He massacred half the Asgardians. Even Thor could not stop him."

Wanda looked between Bruce and Vision. As much as she believed Bruce's assertion that they needed all the hands they could get, Vision was just as right in saying that they were running out of time. She could feel it. However, she did value Vision as a friend. He was important to her, even after everything that had happened.

"I think I may have an idea: we take Vision to Wakanda," Steve suggested.

"That's actually a good idea," Natasha said.

"What does Wakanda have to offer?" Bruce asked.

"They are the leading experts of vibranium. Since Vision is made of vibranium, they can find a way to get the stone out. It's also far out enough that Thanos cannot target any major cities and can protect their civilians," Steve answered.

"Wouldn't that just be wasting time?" Wanda asked. She thought about the logistics of getting to Wakanda, which was not going to be a quick flight and then Shuri would have run the tests. Wanda knew that would take some time.

"Thanos has two more stones to find right?" Wanda nodded. "And from what Thor told Tony and
me, the Soul Stone can only be gathered if Thanos sacrifices a person he loves. That should buy us some time."

"Whom he loves I don't know," Natasha commented. Wanda had a suspicion. Thanos mentioned a woman named Gamora. Who she was to Thanos, Wanda was not sure (former lover, or maybe daughter), but he wanted her to come to him for a reason. "But I think it's a good idea. What do you think Vision?"

"Captain Rogers' logic makes sense in theory," Vision replied.

"If they are the leading experts in vibranium then I am in," Bruce added.

"Wanda?" Steve asked. "You okay with this?"

Wanda looked at Steve. She loved him and she did trust his judgement. He was right that Wakanda was the best shot of saving Vision and given them a chance against Thanos. However, she did have a lingering doubt that something would go wrong. It felt as though something was missing but she could not work out what it was. Yet against her better judgement, she said, "Okay."

"Okay, I'll get in contact with T'Challa. Hopefully, he will want to help. Banner, you are going to have to explain what the main issues are to Shuri, the lead scientist."

Bruce nodded and he followed Steve out of the lab. Natasha stayed and looked to Wanda and Vision, "Do you really think it is a good idea?"

"I'm going to have to blow the Mind Stone up either way," Wanda replied. "I don't know which stone he is going to go after first, but I think it may be the Soul Stone."

"But that's lost right?"

"I think so."

"Well, as Steve said, it might buy us some time. We only need to destroy one right Vision?"

"Yes," Vision replied.

"Even if he gets the other two, we still stand a chance of stopping his plan at least."

"I guess," Wanda replied. "I just hope it works."

Chapter End Notes

So yeah, more character development stuff that I wanted to address, specifically the clearing of the air between Wanda and Bruce. We're getting into the action now so hold tight.
Chapter Five

"Steve, I have a question of what we're going to do about me," Bruce announced as Steve was prepping the quinjet to go to Wakanda. Steve had changed back into his Captain America suit while Sam was also in the room making adjustments to his Falcon suit.

"What do you mean?" Steve asked.

"Hulk is still refusing to come out. I think he has had enough of saving my ass, so I don't think that throwing me off a cliff is going to do it, but I am not standing by and letting that monster destroy everything."

"Maybe you can help Shuri get the stone out of Vision. That would be really helpful."

"The way you described her she could do it with both eyes closed. As I said, you need more people on the ground. Tony still has the Hulkbuster suit right?"

"Do you really think that is enough protection?" Sam asked.

"Well, Tony made it out alive in South Africa so I think so."

"If you think it is a good idea then it might help," Steve replied.

"So what happened between you and Tony? I feel like I missed a lot."

Steve and Sam looked to one another, wondering where to start. Steve took a deep breath and began, "It's complicated." Steve explained the Sokovia Accords and what happened after Zemo framed Bucky for the bombing in Vienna, including the fight in the airport. "Bucky and I got out, but Wanda, Sam, Clint and a guy named Scott-"

"What can Scott do?" Bruce asked.

"He calls himself Ant-Man," Sam answered. "He can make himself grow and shrink."

"There's an Ant-Man and a Spider-Man?" Steve snorted. "Why haven't we called him?"

"I've been trying but his phone keeps going to voicemail."

"Okay, that's annoying. Carry on with what happened."

"They got arrested and thrown into the Raft," Steve continued. "Buck and I went to Siberia, Tony followed. Turns out Zemo's main plan was not to set the Winter Soldiers into the world; he wanted to
tear the Avengers apart because his family died in Sokovia."

"And he did…"

"Yeah. If we ever see Tony again, he can tell you the rest. It's not my place to tell."

"And so you busted the others out and have been on the run since?"

"Basically. I can't say it has been all bad." Steve turned to the window where Wanda was standing the other side of and he smiled softly. "We did have to leave Bucky in Wakanda because it was the best place for him to recover. I just don't know what's going to happen if Tony ever gets back to Earth. He does not have to forgive Bucky if he doesn't want to so I won't force him to do that."

"We'll work something out. He's had eighteen months to cool off hasn't he?"

"That is if he has cooled off," Sam commented.

"He seemed a little… okay, when he spoke about you in Strange's house. Maybe he has forgiven you." There was a pause before Bruce spoke again, "So, you and Wanda. How long has that been a thing?"

"Sixteen months. It's gotten pretty serious," Steve replied with a small smile.

"Like 'putting a ring on it' serious?" Sam asked.

"She said that once this is over, she wants us to try for a baby."

"Dude, that's awesome," Sam exclaimed, slapping him on the shoulder. "And are you?"

Steve smiled, "We are."

"Hey good for you," Bruce commented. "It seems like you have both been good for one another. Funny, before Strange and I came through the portal, I overheard Tony suggesting to Pepper that they have a kid. That would be quite neat if you both had kids around the same time."

"I guess it would be."

Steve felt his heart ache a little. He was happy that Tony had finally settled down enough that he would want to begin a family - and finally scrap being an Avenger. Steve wanted to do the same. He once this was over, he had done his duty. He could settle. He could go home. He had not told Wanda but he had a dream not long back and it was the most perfect dream he had ever had.

_Pumpernickel._ He could smell pumpernickel bread baking in the oven as he entered the house. Laughter filled the air as he saw a dark-haired little girl - not much older than two - run towards him.

"Daddy!" she exclaimed launching into his arms.

"Hi sweetheart," he replied as he kissed her cheek. He loved coming home to this. He loved coming home and hugging his daughter close to his chest. "How was your day?"

"Good," the toddler replied. "Mummy cookie."

"Mummy gave you a cookie?"

"Mummy did not give her a cookie," Wanda said emerging from the kitchen. Steve could not help
but feel his heart swell. His wife was glowing and beaming and he looked down at her protruding belly. His son's nest. "She's trying to say that I am cooking."

"Ah. Fair enough," Steve replied as he walked towards Wanda. Wanda smiled and kissed Steve on the lips. "It's so good to be home."

"Oam," their daughter echoed.

Wanda smiled and kissed her daughter's cheek. Home was a new word. Steve and Wanda kissed again, slightly squishing their daughter in the middle of them.

Milena Maximoff-Rogers did not mind. She had never known anything different.

At that point, Wanda walked into the room and looked between them. She was wearing her Scarlet Witch suit. It still fitted her much to her surprise given that she had lost a bunch of weight when they were in Wakanda and she did not think she was back to her weight before they had gone on the run. She asked, "What are you three talking about?"

"Nothing, just asking Steve if it was worth using the Hulkbuster suit," Bruce answered.

"Oh, okay. Steve, can I speak with you a moment? Alone?"

Bruce and Sam looked to one another and left the room. Steve put his hands on Wanda's waist and asked, "You okay Doll?"

"You know I love you right?"

"Of course I do."

"And I trust your judgement, I really do."

"But?"

"Steve, are you sure about this plan? I just have a bad feeling that something isn't going to go right."

"Do you know what it is?"

"No. It's like that feeling when you feel like you've forgotten something but you can't figure out what it is, but when you work out what it is it's something important like you have left the stove on."

Steve pushed the hair from her face and kissed her on the forehead. "We'll do the best we can. We have a lot more hands now. Like a lot. T'Challa is gathering all the tribes together."

"That's something at least. Listen, I've just been to the medic: I got the implant removed."

"You did?"

"They said it could take a while for the hormones to go back to normal so I thought I would give us a good start."

"Don't we need to get you checked out with a doctor first?"

"I never said we had to start trying this moment. We don't even have to have sex until we have seen the doctor. Though I know how difficult you find that; there are other ways." Wanda smirked and played with the hem of Steve's trousers. Steve chuckled and pressed a kiss to her lips. "But first, we have to save the universe. Make it a better place for our baby."
Steve kissed her again. It felt so refreshing for him to be able to see beyond a mission. Usually, he would only see the mission and pray for the hope that he would get through. Other than humanity, he did not have much to fight for. Now, there was the greater universe, but also a life with Wanda to fight for.

There was a cough that broke them apart and they both looked at Sam, Bruce, Natasha, Rhodes and Vision standing in a row. It seemed it had come from Natasha, dressed in her catsuit again, since she was one standing with her arms folded and her eyebrows raised.

"Okay you two, let's leave the baby making until later. We have a universe to save remember," Sam commented.

"Come on, we need to get a move on," Natasha ordered.

Once they were on the quinjet, they strapped in and prepared to take off. Steve took Wanda's hand as Natasha put on some music, this time Fleetwood Mac's 'Don't Stop'. Wanda put her head on Steve's shoulder and laced her fingers with Steve's. She allowed herself to drift off into a dreamland once they had reached the desired altitude.

However, it was Natasha that broke her thoughts, again, "You genuinely planning on having a baby?"

"Well, not yet," Steve answered. "You okay Nat?"

"Why wouldn't I be? You don't need my approval. I just thought you two would be the more marriage before the baby types."

Wanda and Steve looked to one another. Natasha did have a point. Steve had been raised on the idea that a child should be in a legitimate family though since he was raised in a single parent family, he did not hold it on a pedestal too much. Conversely, Wanda had lived with both her parents for ten years in a half-Roma, half Jewish household, but since her grandmother lost all her family, she had found love with Wanda's grandfather on her own terms, not through a traditional arranged marriage. If her family were still around there would be a high expectation for her to get married, but not the pressure that there usually would be.

Steve felt the eyes of Sam burning into the back of his head, as though he was telling him, "Dude, just do it."

Steve took a deep breath and was about to get out of his seat when Wanda went rigid all of a sudden. He put his hand on her shoulder but Wanda was staring into space, her eyes wide and her face coated with horror.

"Wanda?" Natasha asked shaking Wanda's other shoulder. Sam had also gotten out of his seat and he started clicking his fingers in front of Wanda's face in a bid to snap her out of her trance.

"Uh, guys, I think I know what is going on here," Bruce said pointing to Vision, who was pressing his hand against the Mind Stone.

Wanda's head meanwhile was watching the scene play out in front of her eyes.

"All my life I dreamed of a day, a moment when you got what you deserved. And I was always so disappointed. But now, you kill and torture and you call it mercy. The universe has judged you. You asked it for a prize and it told you no. You failed. And do you wanna know why? Because you love nothing. No one." There was the tear in Thanos' eye that caused the green woman - possibly Gamora - to pause and mock, "Really? Tears?"
There was a cold chilling voice that made her realise why she had been brought to this cliffside, "They are not for him."

The woman shook her head and said, "No. This is not love."

"I ignored my destiny once. I cannot do that again. Even... for you."

In the desperation, Gamora took out a knife but before she could kill herself before Thanos killed her, he changed it to bubbles and she screamed and fought in vain as he took her arm and hurled her over the cliff. Then she was silent.

The jolt of the Soul Stone joining its siblings on Thanos' gauntlet snapped Wanda out of her trance and she inhaled deeply as though she had been resuscitated. She could just about make out Steve, Natasha and Sam's faces before she breathed, "Thanos has the Soul Stone."

Steve cupped her face and pulled her into a hug. He knew that time was running out now. "Nat put the thrusters on max. We need to get to Wakanda as soon as possible." Natasha nodded and went to adjust the speed. Wanda was shaking in Steve's arms and he kissed her head and whispered, "It's okay Doll. We're going to finish it once and for all."

Chapter End Notes

I think this might be the best time to start doing some Kevin McCallister impersonations. We're heading for the final battle. Speaking of which, it's only two weeks until Christmas!
"When you said we were going to open Wakanda to the rest of the world, this is not what I imagined," Okoye told T'Challa as they walked toward the landing quinjet.

"What did you imagine?" T'Challa asked curiously.

"The Olympics. Maybe a Starbucks."

T'Challa smiled and snorted in amusement as the ramp to the quinjet lowered. Steve was the first to emerge, his hand gripped to Wanda's. T'Challa rolled his eyes and said, "I'll pay you later."

Okoye could not help but smile smugly as the two came towards them. Wanda appeared to T'Challa and Okoye to be a little shaky for some reason. Still, she regained some composure when she stood in front of them. She was eternally grateful to T'Challa for granting them asylum when he did not have to. She knew a kind man when she saw one, and T'Challa's kindness could be seen from his eyes.

Some of the Dora Milaje went to Vision to get him to Shuri's laboratory as quickly as possible so she could assess what she would be working with. When they met, Steve held his hand out to T'challa and said, "Seems like I am always thanking you for something."

Behind them, Bruce bowed, and Rhodey asked, "What are you doing?"

"We don't do that here," T'Challa insisted. Bruce stood up and tried to shake off the embarrassment as the group followed T'Challa. "So how big of an assault should we expect here?"

"Sir," Bruce said breaking through Steve and Wanda. "Sir, I think you should expect quite a big assault."

"How are we looking?" Natasha asked walking up beside Wanda.

"You have my King's Guard, The Border Tribe, the Dora Milaje and…"

"A semi-stable hundred-year-old man," Bucky said walking up to Steve with a large smile. Steve stopped short and took in the appearance of his best friend. Bucky had a twinkle in his eye. He had not seen that twinkle since the night they went to the Stark Expo in 1942. Wanda looked at Steve's face and saw how happy he was to see his best friend again.

The two men hugged and Steve asked as they broke apart, "How are you doing Buck?"

"Not bad, for the end of the world. So aside from this, what's been happening?"

"Quite a bit." Steve extended his hand out to Wanda and she went to take it again. "You remember Wanda right?"

"Yeah, you saved our asses a few times in Germany."
"So do you from the last time I saw you." It only occurred to Wanda that the last time Bucky had probably seen her was when she was sedated after Steve broke her and Sam out of the Raft. He looked down to the intertwined hands of Steve and Wanda and asked, "So I guess that you and Steve are an item?"

"Yeah," Steve replied. "Nearly a year and a half."

"You finally got this knucklehead to settle down?"

Wanda laughed, "Nearly. When all this is over."

"Speaking of which, we should get to the lab," Steve said. "I will fill you in on everything later. Right now we need to see what we can do to stop this. You, Sam and Rhodey keep watch outside."

Sam went to stand by Bucky and the two exchanged a look. When the others departed inside, Sam said, "Can you give me some space?"

"No," Bucky replied shortly. Bucky did smirk. Nothing had changed that much in eighteen months.

The rest of the group walked to the laboratory where Vision was already laying on the examination table while Shuri was running programmes. Bruce, Wanda and Steve walked up to the table and Shuri asked, "So what do you need me to do with him?"

"We need to get that stone out of his head so that Wanda can destroy it," Steve answered.

"But we have to do it without killing him," Bruce added. "It's the only way we can stop Thanos."

"It is not the only way," Vision mumbled. Wanda frowned in curiosity as to why Vision was so eager to sacrifice his life. She guessed it had something to do with him knowing that killing him with the Mind Stone in his head was the simplest way.

Shuri ran some programmes and came up with a three-dimensional image of Vision's head and then she separated the components to get a clearer view of what she was working with.

"Woah," Bruce commented. He had never encountered technology this advanced on Earth, let alone in an African country who put on the pretence of having a third-world economy.

Shuri furrowed her brow as she attempted to decipher the hologram of Vision's head. She moved it around so it was facing her and removed the holographic stone away so she could get a clearer image of what lay behind it.

"The structure is polymorphic," Shuri observed looking to Bruce for answers.

"Right. We... we had to attach each neuron none... none sequentially." Given the rush that he and Tony were in when they were placing the Mind Stone into what would become Vision's body, they had not really considered the logical order of each of the neurons. Unfortunately, they were caught between trying to save the world from Ultron and preventing a future threat. With some hindsight, Bruce thought waiting for Thor's opinion would have been beneficial given the circumstances they were now engulfed in.

"Why didn't you just preprogram the synopsis to work collectively?"

At that point, Bruce felt the eyes of Steve, Wanda, Vision, Shuri and everyone else burn into his
brain. He felt the blood rush to his face as he answered uncertainly, "Because, we, didn't… think of it?"

Shuri's smile was not patronising but reassuring as she stated, "I'm sure you did your best."

"But you reckon that you can get the stone out without killing him?" Wanda asked.

"And as fast as possible?" Steve added.

"Yes, but there are more than two trillion neurons here. One misalignment could cause a cascade of circuit failures. I can get it done, but it is going to take more than five minutes," Shuri answered. "I'll need as much time as you can give me."

"Well, that depends on which stone Thanos wants first," Natasha commented.

At that point, the intruder alarms started blaring. Okoye, who was looking out of the window, announced, "Something has entered the atmosphere."

"Hey, Cap, we got a situation out here," Sam informed through the coms.

The others looked out of the window where they saw a large ship hit the giant force field surrounding Wakanda, only to not be able to penetrate.

"Thanos?" Natasha asked.

"No, looks like it's our old friends, and they brought company," Sam replied.

"If Thanos isn't here, we may have some time to stop them and get the stone out," Steve said to Shuri.

"It's too late Captain. We need to destroy the stone now," Vision protested trying to get off the table.

"Vision, get your ass back on the table," Natasha warned. Wanda looked at Vision and the nerves that filled her before they left the Compound filled her.

"I'll need to get to work right away," Shuri said preparing her tools.

"We will hold them off," T'Challa told.

"Okay, new plan. Wanda, you stay here, wait for Shuri to be done and when the stone is out, blow it to hell," Steve said. Wanda nodded. "Everyone else with me."

"Evacuate the city, engage all the defences and get this man a shield."

Everyone began rushing to his or her tasks, only before Steve could leave, Wanda grabbed his hand to stop him.

"Wanda, I-" Wanda cut him off by placing a passionate kiss on his lips. Her hands ran through his hair, and Steve forgot where he was for a moment as he wrapped his arms around her waist. When they broke apart after a moment, Steve whispered, "Well, if this is a goodbye then that was something."

"Marry me," Wanda said.

Steve smiled and replied, "I thought you would never ask."
Wanda grinned brightly and kissed him again as a confirmation of their engagement to one another. Wanda had not known what had come over her. She guessed given that they did not know what was coming that it was now or never. She did not know whether she or Steve would survive this assault. It seemed so irrational but she did not care as she felt the warmth of Steve's arms and the feeling of his lips pressed hers.

"Guys, this is really romantic, if we weren't about to face off against the cast of Lord of the Rings," Natasha commented through the coms.

"She does have a point," T'Challa commented as one of the laboratory assistants brought in a shield for Steve. Steve removed his arms around Wanda's waist and went to take the shield and put it on his right arm. "I think you'll find it does just as well as your old shield."

"Well, they're both vibranium," Steve replied. "The only downside is that I can't throw this shield."

Wanda squeezed Steve's hand as he began to walk away. She gave it one last squeeze and he and T'Challa ran towards where others were forming. She smiled sadly, scared that this would be the last moment she would see Steve, Natasha and Sam. They had formed such a strong bond in the last eighteen months that one of them dying would feel like losing a limb. Wanda ran her hands through her hair and turned back to Shuri and Vision. Slowly, she walked over to the table.

"How are you holding up?" Vision asked.

Wanda smiled a little. He finally got what that meant. "Well, I just got engaged as the world is about to end, and I am scared that will be the last time I see Steve."

"Congratulations, or is this not the right time?"

"No, it's fine Vision. Takes my mind off everything a little."

"I probably should not be saying this, but those feelings I have for you have not gone away completely. I guess it is because I feel like I am going to die within the next hour so it is better, to be honest."

"I'm sorry for what I said to you in the interrogation room Vision. I was angry but I know you would never try to hurt me intentionally. I just could not try to process everything and I lashed out. So I am sorry if I hurt you."

"It was my fault. I did hurt you at the end of the day. When I say those feelings have not gone completely, I have come around to a few things. I obviously hurt you and you have your illness that I am not sure I have the capabilities to understand. I cannot give you children. You and I would not have been a good fit. Steve is much better for you."

"Well, you will be invited to our wedding. Though do us a favour: don't wear a suit."

Chapter End Notes

Okay, final battle next week. Stay tuned and I will promise a happy holiday fic.
Chapter Seven

Steve looked around as the various tribes of Wakanda formed. The Jabari were chanting with their leader, M'Baku, who shook hands with T'Challa. Natasha and Bucky were standing beside him as Bruce walked up wearing the Hulkbuster suit.

"Thank you, for standing with us," T'Challa told M'Baku.

"Of course, brother," M'Baku replied.

"I think we should go pay our friends a visit," Steve said to Natasha.

Natasha nodded and she and T'Challa followed Steve to the border of the smaller force field the Wakandans had put up around the city. On the other side of the force field, Proxima - the female hostile from their encounter in Edinburgh - was testing the strength of it with her sceptre.

"Where's your other friend?" Natasha asked. "Last time I checked, there were four of you."

"You will pay for his life with yours," she answered. "Thanos will have that stone."

"That's not going to happen," Steve asserted.

"You are in Wakanda now," T'Challa told them firmly. "Thanos will have nothing but dust and blood."

"We have blood to spare," the female responded. She threw her weapon to the air and four large ships revealed themselves from behind the trees.

"Okay then, have it your way," Natasha said as the three walked back to the armies.

"They surrender?" Bucky asked.

"Not exactly," Steve replied. He glanced up at the building holding the laboratory. He hoped that Shuri had made a substantial progress so that they could destroy the stone before they could break through the force field.

The ships opened up and hundreds, if not thousands of creatures scurried out frantically towards the force field.

"Yibambe!" T'Challa called.

"YIBAMBE!" the Wakandans responded.

"Yibambe!"

"YIBAMBE!"

"Yibambe!"
"YIBAMBE!"

As the creatures emerged from the trees, the only words that could come from Bucky's mouth were, "What the hell?"

"Looks like we pissed her off," Natasha commented.

The creatures clambered at the force field, trying to break through. One just about managed, only to be sliced in half.

"They're killing themselves," Okoye observed.

However, a few managed to break through unscathed. The armies prepared their battle stances and T'Challa ordered for them to shoot at the creatures, Bucky and Bruce included. Sam and Rhodes flew over their heads and began shooting.

"You see the teeth on those things?" Sam commented.

"All right Sam, back up. You're getting your wings singed," Rhodes replied. He dropped some grenades around the area where the creatures were penetrating and they exploded. However, the creatures were on the move around the perimeter.

"Cap, if these things circle the perimeter and get in behind us there's nothing between them and Vision," Sam told.

"Then we better keep them in front of us," Steve replied.

"How do we do that?" Okoye asked T'Challa.

T'Challa thought about it for a moment. He knew the city had been evacuated, so civilian life would not be endangered. The only way to stop them from getting to the laboratory was to fight them where they were standing.

"We open the barrier," he said. "On my signal, open North-West Section Seventeen."

From the laboratory, Wanda could see what was going on, and she could feel her anxiety growing. It was only going to be a matter of minutes before they all broke through the force field and everyone would have to fight them.

"Shuri, I don't want to rush you, but-" she began.

"I know. I'm working as fast as I can," Shuri interrupted as she frantically continued.

Wanda then saw everyone start charging towards the force field, Steve, Natasha, Bucky, Bruce, T'Challa and Okoye included, and a section of the force field opened, letting the creatures through.

"What are they doing?" she whispered. She lost Steve in the chaos and her heart started to pound.

They heard T'Challa ask through the coms, "How much longer Shuri?"

"I've barely begun, brother," she answered.

"You might want to pick up the pace."

'There isn't enough time,' Wanda thought. "Shuri, they're through the barrier."
"Are the armies holding them off?" Shuri asked.

"I don't know. There are thousands of people on the ground."

"Well, they are going to have to break through a load of Wakandan armies to get to us."

On the ground, the fighting ensued. Bruce was stomping around in the Hulkbuster suit, Bucky was shooting around, as was Rhodes. Both were knocked to the ground. The creatures were now starting to overpower the army.

"There's too many of them!" Bruce yelled as they attacked the Hulkbuster suit.

At that point, a bright light blasted to the ground, knocking some of the creatures away, and then something that looked like Thor's hammer flew out and started taking out some of the creatures. Only it looked more like an axe than a hammer.

"What the hell?" Sam commented.

"It can't be can it?" Natasha asked.

The light dissipated, and Thor stood strong, accompanied by what looked to be a walking tree and a raccoon wielding a gun.

Steve could not help but grin as he got to his feet. Bruce yelled, "HA! You guys are so screwed now!"

Thor ran towards the opening in the force field and bellowed, "BRING ME THANOS!"

The raccoon and the tree followed him and with one strike of his new axe, he decimated a load of the creatures. Wanda grinned brightly. It actually looked as though the battle could be turning their way.

"Come and get some, space dogs!" the raccoon yelled as he shot his gun. Bucky, who was standing by him, saw an oncoming assault, picked the raccoon up and began spinning around so the two were shooting from all angles. "Come on! Get some! Get some!" When Bucky put the raccoon down, he asked, "How much for the gun?"

"Not for sale," Bucky answered.

"Okay, how much for the arm?" Bucky glared at him and then walked off. "Oh, I'll get that arm."

In the meantime, Steve and Thor met each other on the ground. Steve observed Thor's length of hair and asked, "New haircut?"

Thor smiled and retorted, "Noticed you've copied my beard." At that point, the walking tree impaled several creatures in one arm. "By the way, this is a friend of mine, Tree."

"I am Groot," Groot protested.

Steve's head was not sure what to make of this. A talking tree and a raccoon would usually be a weird thing to comment on, but under the circumstances, it was the least weird thing he had seen today. He replied, "I am Steve Rogers."

Inside the laboratory, Wanda's feeling of nerves came back. She looked back at Vision and while it looked like the separation process had progressed, there was still too much to do. She looked back, outside. There seemed to be something moving through the trees and then it moved under the force field.
"I think there is something incoming," she said through the coms. It burst through the ground and a humongous machine with blades for wheels began to stream roll anything in front of it. "Oh no."

"Fall back! Fall back now!" T'Challa ordered.

Wanda ran her hand through her hair. She whispered, "I need to get down there."

"Wanda, how is it up there?" Steve asked.

"Still too far away from being done. Shuri is working as fast as she can."

"Focus that fire on the left flank, Sam," Rhodes ordered.

"I'm doing it," Sam replied.

However, Wanda could see the machine head towards Natasha and Okoye, who were too busy fighting the creatures to notice the immediate danger.

"Shuri, I'll be back in a moment," Wanda said as she threw something at the window to break it.

She took a deep breath and flew through the air, landed on the ground in front of the machine and used her powers to lift it in the air. She looked around, saw the oncoming assault and threw the broken part of the machine backwards, flattening the creatures.

Okoye asked, "Why was she up there all this time?"

"I need to get back up there. I've left Shuri defenceless," Wanda replied. However, she saw something crash through the window and the yellow cape indicated it was Vision. "No, no, no."

"Guys, we have a Vision situation here," Sam informed.

"Somebody get to Vision!" Steve yelled.

"I got him," Bruce said.

"On my way," Wanda replied. However, before she could attempt to run, she was knocked to the ground and Proxima stood above her.

"He'll die alone, and so will you," she mocked.

"She isn't alone," Natasha said. Proxima turned and saw Natasha and Okoye stand on either side of her. She went to attack both of them.

"Guys! Vision needs back up now!" Bruce yelled.

"I'm on it," Steve replied.

A few moments later, they saw something explode in the sky, but the fighting still ensued. Wanda got off her feet and saw part of the machine still rolling. By this point, Steve was running and could hear one of the hostiles say, "I thought you were a formidable machine, but you're dying like any man."

Steve bolted and took Corvus out. He saw Vision try to get up and ordered, "Get out of here! Go!"

Overhearing that Steve was with Vision at least, Wanda lifted Proxima off the ground like she had done with Rumlow all those months ago, only this time she deliberately smashed her into the
oncoming machine. Alien blood splattered onto Natasha and Wanda had to sit down a moment.

"That was really gross," Natasha commented. "Get to Vision. We'll keep you covered."

Wanda nodded and she flew across the battle towards the forest. Steve was fighting as hard as he could against the last remaining leader, only Steve was thrown to the ground and had a heavy foot pressed to his chest.

However, something impaled the creature above him and he was thrown aside. Vision then collapsed in front of Steve and Steve could see that the android was short-circuiting. Steve helped him up and said, "I thought I told you to go."

"It's for Wanda," Vision answered. "You're a good man Captain and she needs you."

Steve nodded and then placed Vision by the tree. Wanda then joined them, and she smiled in relief that both were okay. However, she stopped suddenly. The familiar feeling was back. Thanos now had five of the stones, and he was coming to Wakanda next.

"Wanda, what is it?" Steve asked.

"He's here," she answered.

"Everyone, on my position, we have incoming," he said into the coms. "What are we going to do? We could try getting him back to the lab."

"It's too late Captain," Vision said.

At that point, a blue light, similar to the portal from the Battle of New York appeared about three hundred yards from where Steve, Wanda and Vision were. Out came a purple being, with a gold gauntlet on his left fist and Wanda felt her heart pound in her ears.

"Cap," Bruce began, "that's him. That's Thanos."

"Okay, everyone," Wanda breathed. "I think we're going to have to perform Plan B. I'm going to have to destroy the stone while it's in Vision head."

Wanda was visibly shaking. She looked at Vision. He did give her a reassuring smile, "It's the only way, Wanda. It's going to be okay. I'm dying anyway, Wanda. This is our only option to save the universe."

"You sure?" Sam asked putting his hand on Wanda's shoulder. Wanda touched it and nodded. "Right, we'll keep him back as long as possible. Steve?"

Steve nodded. His heart broke for Wanda having to do this when they were so close to preventing it. He turned towards the rest of the team and ordered, "Eyes up. Stay sharp."

As the others began their assault on Thanos, Wanda sniffed and said, "Will it hurt you?"

"You could never hurt me," Vision answered.

"It's just not fair."

"I know. It will be okay. You have a life to move onto. It's funny. Now I know what it is like to be human."

Wanda's eye filled with tears and she held her hand up. The burning sensation in her hand began and
she started blast all her strength into the Mind Stone. She could feel it burning her on the inside. Whether that was due to the pure strength she was using or the fact she was killing the source of her powers, she did not know. It hurt so much.

She did not notice the chaos around her. Bruce had been melded to a wall. T'Challa, Rhodes, Okoye, Sam and Bucky had been thrown aside like bowling pins. Natasha was trapped under rocks. Groot's roots had been broken. Wanda dared look behind her and realised that Thanos was getting too close. She extended her other arm and used the power in that to destroy the stone - and Vision - faster. She looked behind again. Steve had his hands gripped around the gauntlet, but Thanos punched him, rendering Steve unconscious on the floor.

Their last line of defence was her. She was putting all her energy into what she was doing, but she needed more time. She could feel how close she was. Wanda extended her other arm towards Thanos. He used the other stones to protect himself from her blast. He almost looked impressed at the sheer power. Wanda was in agony now. She was trying to focus most of her energy on destroying the Mind Stone but a lot of it was trying to protect herself.

She could almost hear Vision say, "It's all right."

And then she felt a force blow her off her feet. It took her brain a moment to adjust to what had happened, but when she opened her eyes, she saw pieces of Vision's body sprawled on the floor. Relief swept over her for a moment.

She had done it. She had saved the universe. Her whole body still hurt and she groaned as she pushed herself up. She looked around. Bruce was out of the Hulkbuster suit and helping Bucky get Natasha out of the rocks. It looked as though Steve had come to. Her heart leapt. However, Wanda's whole body went cold when she felt a large hand on her head.

"You remind me of Gamora," Thanos said. "All that raw strength."

"You going to throw me over a cliff as well," Wanda replied bitterly. She did not know Gamora, but she had known what Thanos had done. "You wasted her life for nothing."

"I suppose I could say the same thing about you and him." Wanda turned to Vision and then back to Thanos in a state of confusion. "You wasted all that energy, for nothing."

Thanos walked towards the android and held his gauntlet out. It was then that Wanda knew what the last stone was: it was the Time Stone.

"NO!" she yelled. She tried to use her powers to stop Thanos, but she had expelled all she could muster. He pushed her away violently so her back slammed against the ground. Thanos reversed Vision's death, took him by the throat and snatched the Mind Stone from the android's head, crushing it in the process. Vision slumped in front of her.

Steve had gotten to his feet and ran over to Wanda. He then saw a flash of lightning in the sky. Thor was their last chance. Steve got Wanda to her feet and out of the way so that Thor could blast Thanos with his thunder powers and hit him square in the chest with the axe. They saw Thor dig it in further.

"I told you that you would die for that," Thor growled.

"Is it over?" Sam asked coming up by Natasha, who was helping Steve hold Wanda up.

"I don't know," Natasha whispered.
"That should kill him surely," Bucky said taking Natasha's place by holding Wanda up.

Steve held his breath and then his blood went cold as he heard, "Fool, you should have aimed for the head."

They could just hear Thor yell, "No!" before Thanos snapped the fingers of the gauntlet together. He disappeared after a moment.

Steve let Natasha hold Wanda up again and went over to Thor, "Where'd he go? Thor?" Where'd he go?"

"I don't know," Thor said.

"Steve?" Bucky asked as he noticed that his non-metal arm was turning to ash. He broke away from Wanda and stumbled forwards, turning into ash as he hit the ground. Wanda, Natasha and Sam looked a combination of shocked and horrified at what they had just seen.

Steve could only stare at the ashes of his best friend on the ground and he dared looked around. Many Wakandan soldiers were also turning to ash. He turned back around and saw T'Challa reaching for Okoye.

"Up, General. Up! This is no place to die," T'Challa ordered only for him to disintegrate to ash right in front of her.

"Hezvo?" she asked in shock.

Sam, Wanda and Natasha looked to their right when they heard, "No, no, no, no! Groot, no!" the racoon, whom Steve had learned was named Rocket, yelled as Groot began to turn to ash.

"I am Groot," Groot whined before blowing away in the wind.

All of a sudden, Sam put his hand on his chest and his legs gave way.

"No!" Wanda yelled dropping to her knees by Sam. She took his hand. Natasha knelt by her, tears now pricking in her eyes. "Sam, stay with us."

"It was fun right? We had a good time on the run," Sam groaned as his body began to disappear.

"Please," Wanda squeaked. The feeling on her hand disappeared and he was gone. Wanda clutched the ashes in her hand and burst out sobbing, Natasha hugging her close. Natasha looked away, close to tears as well and looked at Steve.

"He's gone," Natasha choked.

Steve felt sick. Two of his best friends were gone, they had lost Wakanda their king, and worst of all, they had failed to stop Thanos from destroying half the universe. Thor, Bruce and Rhodes walked around aimlessly in shock. Rocket had his hands buried in his face. Okoye looked as though she was bordering on a panic attack. Steve dropped to the floor by Wanda and Natasha in the area between where Bucky and Sam had disintegrated. He reached for Wanda's free hand and squeezed it. She gripped it and turned to him. They were both still there, but it dawned on him quickly that they had lost.

"Oh god," Steve finally breathed.

*End of Part Five*
Well, happy Christmas.

Jokes, I am not going to leave it there.

Okay, the final point of annoyance: Wanda should not have been killed off. Okay, the issue is not the fact they killed her off but it is a microcosm of the issues that have plagued Wanda’s character since the end of Avengers: Age of Ultron. The most notable being that the writers constantly throw trauma at her, but never actually think to address it or use it as meaningful character development. It’s the reason that I started writing this fanfic because I just knew that what happened in Captain America: Civil War would just be completely ignored before I even saw the movie.

So, yeah, I spared Wanda but kept Bucky and Sam’s death. Not to worry because they are still going to be there in spirit.

Just a few announcements:

1) The next chapter will be 13th January 2019. I have an assignment due that Monday so I will be dedicating my time to that. I have enough chapters to make it through to the premiere of Avengers: Endgame in the UK so I won’t fall far behind.

2) I will have a holiday fic ‘Fairytale of New York’ up later at 6pm GMT. It will be far fluffier than this believe me. I also will publish chapter two of ‘All is Merry and Bright’ at around 3pm GMT. Final chapter will be published 9am Christmas Day.

Anyway, happy holidays and I shall see you guys in the new year.
And we're back. Hope you all had a good Christmas or holiday. So from now on the update day will be on Sundays because Mondays are going to be rather hectic for me for the next semester. I have everything planned out until freaking July believe it or not.

This part is rather dark and hard emotionally so I will put trigger warnings in advance for alcohol addiction, psychosis and a suicide attempt.

Chapter One

Wanda could only stare vacantly into space as the people around her moved around and spoke. She was not registering anything that they were doing or saying. Her body seemed numb to everything. Pietro had gone. She felt like her body had lost a limb and part of her soul.

She had only been in the Avengers Tower for a day, but the shock had yet to dissipate. She had not moved from the spot on the couch and it seemed no one wanted to move her in fear of setting her off.

Her trance was broken by a tumbler being held out in front of her. She could smell orange peel, dried fruits, plums, and alcohol. When she looked up she saw someone she did not know but had a friendly smile on his face.

"Hi, I'm Sam," he said. "I thought you could do with a drink."

"Thanks," she whispered taking the whiskey.

Wanda could only stare vacantly into space as the people around her moved around and spoke. She was not registering anything that they were doing or saying. Her body seemed numb to everything. Sam had gone. She felt like her body had lost a limb and part of her soul.

She was sitting in the medical facility. Given the pain she was in after destroying the Mind Stone and fending off Thanos, the doctors - or the ones who survived - had recommended getting a scan for any internal injuries. Thankfully, it was nothing a little bed rest and some mild painkillers could not fix.

She could see Natasha and Rhodes on the phones, probably trying to get through to Clint and Pepper. She could just about see the news with the headline 'Half World Population Disappear'. It seemed that quite a number of world leaders had disappeared in the process. The United States had lost both President and Vice-President, then the images of the leaders of The United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Israel, Iran, Pakistan, Argentina, Nigeria, South Africa appeared on the screen. Finally, T'Challa. He was not the last. There were many more. Shuri had survived at least, so
Wakanda was not without an heir who could take the place as leader. Other countries were not so lucky

Wanda turned her head to Steve, who was sitting and staring into space just as vacantly as she had done. He had carried her to the medical room but had zoned out the second she had been put on the bed. She had never seen him look so old and worn out. He had just witnessed his best friend dying for the second time, and she had no idea what to say that could make him feel better.

"Please tell me this is all a bad dream," she said.

"I wish I could," he replied. He turned his head towards the window and saw Bruce was breaking down and Natasha was trying to comfort him.

"This is all my fault," she said.

"No, it's not. It's mine. I should have listened to Vision the first time he said that killing him with the Mind Stone was the best option."

"You thought you were giving us the best chance to beat Thanos."

"Yeah, and look where that has left us. Bucky, Sam, T'Challa and Vision are dead. We don't know about Tony, Strange, Peter Parker, Clint or Scott. We don't even know if any of our other friends had survived. I led this. It's on me."

"I could have said no to coming here. I could have said that I would destroy the Mind Stone in the Compound. I wanted to say it." At that point, Natasha came into the room, her eyes rimmed red. Wanda had never seen Natasha so badly shaken. It seemed like watching Sam die had hit her like a ton of bricks. Natasha sat on the edge of the bed and buried her head in her hands. "What's wrong with Bruce?"

"He found out that his ex-girlfriend was among those who disintegrated," Natasha answered. "Ross' daughter Elizabeth."

"Any word from Clint?" Steve asked.

"No. I can't get a hold of Laura either."

"What about Scott?"

"Nothing on that end either. Rhodey has managed to get a hold of Pepper. She's freaking out because half her department turned to dust. Thor's at a loss of where to start. I told him to check if Jane is okay. Has anyone called Sam's mother?"

"Not yet," Steve replied. "I should do that myself." Steve got out of his seat and walked out of the room. The way he was walking was like someone had put two-ton anvils on his shoulders.

"He's not coping," Wanda said. "He thinks that it's his fault that this happened. He's not right. It's mine."

"Don't ever think that. The only person to blame for this is Thanos."

"I jumped into the middle of the battle and left Shuri defenceless. If I had been there, I could have stopped them from getting Vision out of the laboratory."

"Wanda, you cannot be certain that if you were there they would have not been able to get to Vision."
This is Thanos’ fault. No one else's."

The way Natasha was saying it was though she was also trying to convince herself. There was a large catch in her throat on the last sentence and Natasha had to squeeze her eyes shut to stop herself from crying again. Except it was not enough. Wanda tried to sit up in the bed, but her body was so sore that it refused to budge. She could not even offer any comfort to Natasha and she felt useless as well as guilty.

"What do we do now?" Wanda asked quietly.

"There's nothing we can do. We just go back to the Compound."

"And then…"

"I don't know." Steve then walked back into the room. His eyes were brimming with tears as well. "Did you manage to get through?"

Steve nodded and replied, "She's broken. She's absolutely broken."

"I wish I hadn't dropped the ashes," Wanda whispered. "We could have brought part of him home to his mother. Something is better than nothing. There wasn't much left of my parents when they managed to identify them, but it was at least enough to put them in a box and bury them. It was a place to see them." Wanda choked a sob on the last word and Steve went over to lie beside her and enveloped her in his arms. "What about Bucky's sister?"

"I tried her. Didn't get an answer." Wanda sniffed and nested her head into Steve's neck. She felt so exhausted but she was scared of going to sleep in case she saw Sam's crumbling body again. "I don't know how to fix this."

"We can't fix it, Steve," Natasha said. "Thanos won. He beat us. We lost."

The tension in the room could be cut with a knife. Wanda looked between Steve and Natasha, wondering who would say something first. Sam would usually be able to diffuse the situation in a pinch, but it seemed like losing Sam meant losing a stabilising influence.

"I think we need to get some sleep," Natasha suggested. "That way we'll have clearer heads."

"I don't think I am going to sleep," Wanda replied.

"I'll see if there is anyone who can get you a sedative." Natasha stood off the bed and walked out of the room.

"Steve…" Wanda began, but what she wanted to say got lost before it could leave her mouth.

"I never really got a chance to see if he would be able to live a normal life. He was the happiest and healthiest I had seen him since… I just got him back." Wanda could feel water on the top of her head and she felt Steve's chest moving as he sobbed. "I just got him back, and he's gone."

"At least time he can't be turned into a weapon and abused," Wanda whispered. It was a lame attempt at comfort she thought. "At least he's at peace this time." Steve pressed a kiss to the top of her head and held her close. It was almost as though he did not believe she was still here. "Nat's right: you need to get some sleep."

At that point, a Wakandan nurse came in holding a small pill cup. "I was told you need a sedative?"
Wanda nodded and she swallowed the pill with water. She really hoped it would knock her out and not make her think about the day. She knew that Steve would not be affected by the sedative so she did not know if he would get some sleep on his own. He seemed drained and exhausted but that was not usually enough to get him to sleep.

The effects of the drug took hold of Wanda quickly and she felt her eyelids drooping. "I'm just glad you're still here," she whispered. Steve looked down and saw Wanda had fallen asleep.

Gently, he rolled her onto her left side and pulled the sheets over her body. He pulled the red strands of hair behind her ear and thought, 'I'm glad you're still here too.'

He stared at the ceiling. He could not sleep or even dare to try. He had done that the first time he had lost Bucky and all he had been greeted by the sight of Bucky falling from the train. It was that particular night that he had gone to the bar, drank five shots of whiskey, only by the fifth shot, it was evident he was not getting drunk, nor would he be able to get drunk. It did not stop him from drowning his sorrows in two bottles of whiskey. Peggy had found him, and he was glad he had her to pull him out of his funk. He had thought about the day he first met Bucky that night. Tonight, he thought back to the same memory.

"Hey fellas, look who it is," Lewandowski announced when his eyes caught Steve's.

"What do you want Lewandowski?" Steve asked.

"Well, I thought that since you tripped me up yesterday, I thought I would get my own back. Give me the money Pipsqueak."

"Is that the best you got?" Steve asked. "It was an accident, Lewandowski. You should have looked where you were going."

Steve was about to enter the bakery when he felt Lewandowski grab him by the back of his collar. "Listen here you little shit, you give me the damn money now or I am going to break your face." Steve was lucky that he was shorter than Lewandowski because it meant that he could punch Lewandowski in the stomach and make a break for it. As he bolted away, a winded Lewandowski ordered his minions, "Get him!"

Steve on managed to get to the bottom of the street before his lungs started to hurt and he had to stop. Unfortunately, it meant Lewandowski's goons had caught up with him and had shoved him against the wall. He tried to push them again but his lungs were burning so much he was struggling to stand.

"Hey, why don't you pick on someone your own size," someone said shoving them away from Steve.

"What are you going to do about it Barnes?" one of them jeered.

The kid managed to pummel them one handed and they both ran back towards the bakery. After they had disappeared from sight, Steve had to sit down to regain his breath.

"You okay kid?"
"Asthma," Steve gasped.

"Okay, take some deep breaths. Though what you were thinking of trying to take them on I don't know."

"Someone has to stand up to them. Thanks for helping."

"Well, as you said, someone has to stand up for the little guy. I'm James by the way. Steve right?"

"Yeah. Steve Rogers."

"Nice to meet you, Steve Rogers."

Steve smiled to himself softly at the memory. His eyes were still brimming with tears and there was a heavy weight pressing on his chest. He felt hot and uncomfortable and he realised he was still in his Captain America suit. He yanked the clothing off, leaving him in just his boxers. He turned to Wanda's sleeping form. It reminded him so much of when he brought her to Wakanda after breaking her out of the Raft. The drug-induced sleep made her look so peaceful. He could see her eyes were puffy and her face was sticky and red from the tears.

In all the chaos and confusion of the day, he had forgotten that they had gotten engaged. It seemed so weird to think they had gotten this far, to be able to marry at last, only for their happiness to be shattered not even an hour later and the uncertainty of their future had returned.

Steve just did not know if they could ever be normal after this.
Three days later, Wanda felt like she could physically move again and she, Steve, Natasha, Bruce, Rhodes, and Thor decided to leave Wakanda to mourn the loss of their king and prepare for Shuri's coronation in peace. They felt like they had reeked enough pain onto the country. They were unsure what to do about Rocket since he seemed to shut down emotionally at the loss of Groot, but since he was a friend of Thor's, they decided that he would be better with them. In addition, they were going to take Vision home. They were not sure what to do with him though.

Just before they boarded the quinjet, they were greeted by Shuri and her mother Romanda, with the Dora Milaje, led by Okoye behind them. Everyone looked a bit bewildered by the week's events, almost as though the shock of losing their beloved king had not quite hit them.

"Captain," Shuri began walking up to them.

"Shuri - Your Highness," Steve replied, remembering now that Shuri was now queen.

"I know that you did your best to stop this from happening, so you are always welcome to return."

"Thank you. We're genuinely sorry that this has happened to you, so we thought it was best to allow you and your country to mourn."

"Thank you, and can I say sorry for your losses as well. Sergeant Barnes was a good man."

They shook hands and the group boarded the plane. As soon as Natasha got them into the air, she can back to the group, who were all silent and not certain what to say to one another. Eventually, Rhodes broke the silence and asked Rocket, "So how is it you can talk?"

"Genetic modification," Rocket answered. "Lab experiment."

Rhodes nodded, satisfied with the answer. Wanda looked around and played with her sleeve, wondering who was going to speak next. Eventually, she said, "I'm sorry about your friend Rocket."

"Thanks, I guess. Not the first time I have lost him so this hurts a little less. Or maybe it hurts a little more because at least he had something to grow back from then."

Thor then petted Rocket gently and said, "He went out like a valiant warrior Rocket."

Steve turned his head to Bruce and asked, "How are you doing?"

"Me? Not exactly great knowing Betty's gone. She didn't deserve that."

"No one did," Natasha added.

Wanda then stared at the area where they had laid Vision's broken body. She still could not believe how corpse-like he looked. The large hole in the middle of his head only gave away the fact he was an android. It reminded her of when she first saw Pietro's body after the Battle of Sokovia. Pale and not quite human.

"What should we do with Vision's body?" she asked.

"I don't know," Bruce answered. "I guess I could try to work on bringing him back."
"He won't be the same," Rhodes pointed out.

"Honestly, I think we should let him rest in peace," Steve said. "Give him that dignity at least."

"Not exactly dignified when he had his brain ripped out," Natasha replied.

"Listen, I need to get off this planet," Rocket announced. "I need to find my friends, assuming they are still alive as well. Last time I saw them they were off to get the Reality Stone from Thanos. Since he got it…"

"Was one of them called Gamora?" Wanda asked. "Green woman?" Rocket nodded, and Wanda could see from his eyes that he knew what was coming. "I'm sorry Rocket. Thanos threw her over a cliff to get the Soul Stone."

"And the others?" Thor asked.

"I don't know. Thanos had already gotten the Reality Stone and he said that he wanted Gamora to come to him."

"Well, if he got her, he must have got rid of the others too," Rocket replied grimly.

"You can stay with us," Steve said. "If you want."

"Thanks, I guess."

The silence returned until Rhodes said, "Oh, congratulations on the engagement."

Wanda had completely forgotten that she had asked Steve to marry her and she felt guilty that she had done that. However, she feigned remembering it and replied, "Thanks Rhodey."

She turned to Steve and she leaned into his body. Steve wrapped his arm around her and he kissed the top of her head. It felt like a lifetime ago that they were thinking of their future. Marriage. A baby. She still wanted a baby, but she was not sure whether Steve felt the same under the circumstances, so she would not approach him about it. Granted, she could not even think of planning a wedding at the moment. They needed to mourn their friends and reconcile with what had happened to them.

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The second the hanger opened, Rhodes rushed to hug Pepper. Wanda looked stunned. Pepper usually looked so put together but the sight of the red-headed woman in sweatpants and a messy bun threw Wanda through a loop. It seemed the stress of the last two days had impacted on Pepper, and from the looks of it, there was still no sign of Tony.

Steve was apprehensive as he approached Pepper. He did not know her opinion on what happened in Siberia. He seemed braced for a slap.

"Pepper," he said softly.

"Hey Steve," Pepper replied. "I take it that you have had no contact from Tony either."

Steve shook his head. "I want to say he'll turn up. He's Tony, after all."

"But you can't tell me if he was among those who disintegrated."

"I don't know, I'm sorry. All we know is what we've been told or seen ourselves." It was then that
Steve noticed the sound of phones ringing. Multiple phones. "I take it that they haven't stopped."

"Half the world disappears and they need a comment from the Avengers on what they are going to do about it."

"Yeah, because we weren't there trying to stop it." Steve went over to the nearest phone wire and yanked it out. It cut off the ringing and he could hear himself think. "If anyone wants me, I'll be in the gym."

Wanda felt the need to follow him but she still felt achy. She was just about standing but her legs were struggling to hold herself up for long periods. She was using Natasha as a support and it seemed Natasha wanted to speak to Pepper.

"How are you doing Natasha?" Pepper asked.

"Not too bad all things considered," Natasha answered.

"Wanda," Pepper acknowledged.

"Not great if I'm going, to be honest," Wanda replied. "I should see if Steve is okay."

"I think we should give him some space," Natasha suggested. "You need to sit down and take a painkiller."

"And watch the news? No thanks."

"Actually while I was waiting, I put on Say Yes to the Dress," Pepper interrupted. "I could not watch the news either."


Wanda sighed and nodded. She did reluctantly settle on the couch after taking some paracetamol. While she was not actively planning her wedding, it did take her mind off everything. Natasha and Pepper surrounded her and Natasha felt the need to grip Wanda's hand. Thor seemed intrigued so settled with them. Finally, Bruce and Rhodes joined them. Rocket had been kept occupied by building something out of scrap metal parts in the research and development labs.

In the meantime, Steve had burst some punch bags in a bid to get his head clear. It was not helping. He kept seeing the images of Bucky, T'Challa and Sam crumbling in front of him. When he managed to destroy all the punch bags, Steve was drenched in enough sweat he could flood the gym. He still felt no better. As he walked towards the shower his phone rang and saw that it was Sam's mother. He pressed the answer button and said, "Mrs Wilson? You okay."

The rest of the group had gotten to their fourth episode of Say Yes to the Dress when Steve walked in and stood in front of the television.

"Hey, we need to know if she says yes to the dress," Natasha said annoyed.

"Sam's mother called. She's planning a memorial service for Sam, and she wants us to come down to New Orleans," Steve announced. "Basically, all I am asking is who wants to come down with me?"

Everyone put their hand up. While Bruce and Thor did not know Sam as well as he, Wanda, Natasha, Pepper and Rhodes had done, it was mostly for moral support, which Steve appreciated. "Okay, well it is next week."

Steve did not say much else as he walked out of the lounge. Wanda could see something in his eyes
that seemed sad about something other than what had just happened. She then realised that Bucky had no family left to give him a memorial service. Wanda managed to get out of her seat and followed Steve to his room where she could hear the shower running in the en-suite.

Gently, she knocked on the door and said, "It's me."

She heard the door unlock and she opened the door. The room was filled with steam and Steve was standing there, completely naked. He usually looked so strong and powerful, but he looked so meek at that moment. Wanda's hands went to the bottom of her top and she removed it. She pulled off her leggings and removed her underwear. Steve saw how badly bruised her body and she seemed smaller somehow.

Wanda broke the tension and placed a kiss on his lips. Steve placed his hands on her hips and lifted her onto the counter. Wanda's hand reached towards his twitching member and began to pump him until he was solid and steel in her hand.

Wanda leaned back and watched as Steve entered her. She wrapped her arms around Steve's neck and her thighs around his hips, and he pulled her close. Her whole body felt sore so it was difficult for her to really feel the positive sensations with each thrust. Steve dropped his head to her shoulder and groaned as he felt the tightness build. He had to bite back some tears but Wanda could feel it on her flesh.

"I love you," he whispered. He had gotten so close to losing her as well that just the feeling of her in his hands felt so unbelievable. He did not know what would have happened if she had gone as well.

Wanda kissed Steve again. She could feel him trembling and she knew he was close to the brink. When they broke apart, Wanda whispered, "I love you too. So much."

It seemed her words lit something in Steve because he came, gasping and trembling. Wanda pressed kisses along his neck and rubbed his back. They stayed there a while as he tried to regain his breath. Once he gathered his senses, Wanda pushed herself off the counter.

Wanda switched the shower off and began to run a bath. Once she felt the temperature was right, she and Steve climbed in, only they sat on opposite ends of the bath. The water actually helped with the soreness in her body and she actually could feel herself relax for the first time in days. It was very quiet between them. Steve still seemed away with his thoughts.

"Steve, speak to me please," she whispered.

"There really is nothing to say, Wanda," he replied. "I just… I need to get a bit of perspective. I still have you."

"Doesn't mean you are not allowed to grieve."

"Yeah, well. It's not like anyone is around to grieve with me. Peggy's gone. Howard's gone. His sisters have gone. I thought he was dead for years so this is nothing different."

Wanda felt her throat dry up. She knew he was not meaning what he was saying. He just was struggling to accept that Bucky had actually gone. While she did not know how to help him, she did have an idea that might help.

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The next morning, Wanda was the first to get up. It was very unusual that she would be the first to wake up, but the idea she had was swimming around in her head and she needed to consult someone
about it. She brewed some coffee for everyone and took a cup to Natasha.

"You know I do value sleep," Natasha commented taking the mug from Wanda.

"Sorry, I just had an idea and I wanted to run it by you," Wanda replied sitting on the bed. "I think we should do a memorial service for Bucky. I think it could do Steve some good, you know just to put Bucky's life in a context and share good memories of him."

Natasha pondered what Wanda had suggested when she took a sip of the coffee. "I guess it could be a good thing for him. He's... I don't think bottling his emotions has helped. I've seen the gym, and I don't think punching is going to help anything either."

"Okay, well, I need to find a good photo of Bucky. Not the Winter Soldier. Maybe something from the 40s."

"I know this used to be a Stark Industries storage hold. I remember when we were cleaning it out that there was a box of photo albums that Howard must have kept over the years. There has to be some from the 40s in there. We should ask Pepper."

Pepper, while not entirely comfortable with the idea of a memorial for the person who killed Tony's parents, did seem to want to help. She led the two to the storage area that Tony had shoved all the important memorabilia that he was not ready to look at. There were boxes of stuff. Film reels. Photo albums. Medals. Wanda, Natasha and Pepper took the boxes down but there did not seem to be any structure to the way Howard had stored anything so all the albums had been mixed up and they were unlabelled in regards to what period in Howard's life it was.

"Typical," Natasha commented as she took two of the boxes. There were four boxes all together and the three took them to the lounge to look through.

It was not hard to spot which was the period after 1970. Those seemed to be composed mostly by Maria Stark because there were many baby photos of Tony.

"You would never think he was once kind of adorable," Natasha commented showing Tony's first day of kindergarten photo.

Pepper managed to crack a smile at the picture of a tiny Tony with an oversized backpack. "He looks so happy."

Wanda put down the photo album that was from the 1960s and picked up the next photo album. As soon as she turned the first page, she found a photo of Steve and she told Natasha, "I think I have got it."

"Here, this one," Wanda said taking the photograph out of the album.

"Good choice," Natasha commented. Pepper seemed confused because the image she had of Bucky was someone dark, emotionless and downright evil. The Bucky in the photo was almost angelic. "So what's next?"
"Find a frame and a couple candles. We should do it inside the faith room."

Natasha nodded. As the three got up, Pepper said, "I know this sounds a little selfish but I can't go. He did kill Tony's parents and... Well, Tony isn't quite over it. I know he's not here but... I don't want to betray him. Do you get what I am saying?"

Somehow, Wanda completely understood. She had felt the same about Tony. At the same time, however, she felt a bit of frustration because Bucky was just as much a victim of HYDRA as Howard and Maria Stark were. However, under the circumstances, she did not want to get into an argument over it.

"Okay," Wanda said nodding. "I understand."

"Maybe see it as supporting Steve?" Natasha suggested.

"That's the thing, I haven't quite forgiven Steve for not telling Tony the truth about his parents' death."

Wanda bit her lip. She sighed and said, "Steve has felt a load of guilt over it. He said he should have been honest from the beginning. It probably doesn't change anything but Steve knows he should have told Tony about what to Howard and Maria."

The two women looked at one another before Wanda said, "Steve sent a letter. I remember when we were in Wakanda, I was having nightmares over what happened on the Raft. Steve and Sam were taking it in turns to keep an eye on me. I woke up and needed the bathroom and I found Steve in the kitchen writing a letter. He said he needed to make peace with Tony somehow."

Pepper frowned. Tony had not mentioned a letter. Come to think of it, he never really mentioned Steve since coming back from Siberia. She remembered finding Tony in a bar and that was how she found out about Bucky. If there was a letter, it would be in Tony's old room.

An hour later, Steve came into the kitchen and he noticed that everyone was not there. It felt weird. Wanda had not been beside him, and he found that unusual as he was usually the first one of the two to wake up. It felt eery. He then heard some music coming from down the hallway and he walked down to the faith room. Confused, he opened the door and saw on the table a photograph of Bucky from before his fall, surrounded by candles, and then he saw Wanda and Natasha, the former playing with a CD player and Natasha arranging chairs. The song was 'Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?'

"What's going on?" Steve asked.

"Hi, um, we thought that we might do a memorial service for Bucky," Wanda replied walking up to him. "Do you mind?"

"I just... I don't really know what to say."

Wanda turned to Natasha and she asked, "Nat, can we have a second?" Natasha stopped what she was doing and nodded. Once she left the room, Wanda said, "I'm worried about you Steve. Since we got back from Wakanda, you've... I don't think you know how to process what has happened. After Pietro died, I was like you. I bottled everything up, smashed my fist into a wall, and I repressed so much of my emotions that I had a panic attack. Talking with Doctor Ahmed helped. So maybe I thought you could talk about Bucky and give him the memorial he deserves."

Wanda could see the tears prick in his eyes and he sniffed. He gently pulled her in for a hug and squeezed her tightly. Wanda struggled to breathe but she wrapped her arms around his waist and kissed his neck.
"Thank you," he whispered into her ear. He pressed a kiss into her hair and rocked her from side to side.

"Come on. We should get dressed. Service starts in an hour."

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"I don't know if I should be doing this," Rhodes commented as he walked into the faith room. "Pepper might be right."

"Why?" Bruce asked.

"He did kill Tony's parents. I sort of feel like I am betraying Tony by doing this."

"Well, think of it like you're not here to celebrate Bucky's life. It's to give Steve some emotional support. You've forgiven Steve for not telling Tony about what happened. And you were more than willing to work with him in Wakanda."

"Well, it's what soldiers have to do."

The two gathered by the chairs which were in a crescent shape around the table where the photograph and candles were. It was not quite formal, but Steve wore trousers and a shirt, while Wanda was in a black dress. Everyone was in some form of black or grey. In the background, the sound of 'Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?' filled the room. Wanda squeezed Steve's hand and he smiled nervously as he stood at the front. Wanda felt for him. She had done a eulogy for Pietro in a room of people who did not really know him. Clint had said she was so brave, but she felt like she wanted to scream at them. She turned her head towards the door when she heard it open. Pepper walked in holding a sheet of paper. The two women exchanged a nod as Pepper took a seat by Rhodes.

"You know, I never thought I would actually be doing this. I… Bucky and I first met when I was trying to fight off some thugs from stealing money. Even though I was a scrawny asthmatic who did not know when to quit, Buck was always there if I needed back up, even if I thought I could handle it myself. Bucky was my best friend and brother. He would never have left me unless he felt he had to. I honestly hated him a little bit when he was drafted because I could not go with him, no matter how much I tried, and I tried. He always said I was too dumb to walk away from a fight and he was right. I…" Steve sniffed and had to bite back a sob in his throat. "Bucky was the only family I had left after my mother died. He said he was going to be with me until the end of the line. I just thought that line would not end so soon. Much less the line end twice. For a moment, it looked as though I had my best friend back. He looked like he did in that photo there. He sounded like how I remembered him. I just thought after everything, he would be able to live a normal life. And I cost him that. I made a judgement call that was wrong and it led to Bucky and many other people dying. I should have listened. I should have-"

Steve broke down and Wanda got out of her seat to hug him. "I know," she whispered. While she was glad that Steve was not bottling up his emotions, she wished that she had not done this so publicly.

"Maybe we should call it a day," Bruce suggested. Wanda nodded in thanks. Rhodes, Bruce, Thor, Pepper and Natasha left the room.

Wanda rubbed Steve's back and whispered, "It's all right. It's not your fault."

"It is my fault, Wanda. I should have listened to Vision."
"You did what you thought was best. We didn't know what stone Strange had. Listen, Bucky would not want you to blame yourself for his death. Neither would Sam or T'Challa. Like Nat had said, nobody is to blame but Thanos. No one told him to erase half the universe with a magic glove."

Steve pulled back and pushed the hair out of her face. He pressed a kiss to her lips and she could feel how sticky Steve's face was. Wanda pulled back and kissed his forehead. Softly, he said, "I don't know what I would do without you."

Wanda smiled sadly and pulled Steve back into a hug. She did not know what she would do without Steve either. "I'm sorry I made you do this," she whispered.

"No. You were right. I needed to allow myself to grieve." Steve rummaged in his pocket and pulled out what looked to be a ring. "This was my mother's wedding ring. She said she wanted me to give it to the one woman who manages to know my worth. It's not the best time I know, but I just found it and I thought we would make it official."

Wanda smiled softly and presented her left hand. Steve slid the ring onto her ring finger. She looked at the ring. It was a very simple white gold ring with a diamond but it was perfect for them. Steve kissed her hand and smiled softly at her.

When the two came out of the faith room, they found the others in the living area, watching what looked to be The Great British Bake Off on Netflix. It seemed they were trying to distract themselves with something that was not the news. Wanda squeezed Steve's hand and led him to a gap between Natasha and Thor. Wanda leaned against Steve and he pressed a kiss on the top of her head. They still had Sam's memorial service to attend, but they seemed to have found a support network with each other and with their friends.
Chapter Three

Wanda felt her hands shake as the plane prepared to descend into Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport. She still hated flying. She felt like the plane was going crash. It had not helped that among the news stories following Thanos’ erasure of half the universe, there had been many reported plane crashes. Steve took her hand and whispered, "It's okay. Just breathe."

She wanted to say that it was easy for him considering that he did not suffer from anxiety that was often made worse by her bipolar disorder. She knew he was only trying to be helpful. She inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly until she could feel her heartbeat level out. She looked out of the window and saw the city of New Orleans. She remembered news reports from thirteen years ago about how the city had been flooded by a hurricane, and she could not believe that the city in front of her eyes was the same city she saw on the television.

"Have you ever met Sam's mother?" she asked.

"Once. Sam invited me for Thanksgiving dinner back in 2014. She was under the impression that we would be incredibly hungry because of the food portions above Virginia."

Wanda snorted, "Sounds like my mother. She used to give us big portions. I was actually quite fat until..."

Wanda stopped. She could not think about the missile hitting her apartment block, especially since she was on a plane. One of her major panic attacks as a child came on 11th September 2001. It had been nearly two years since her parent's death and she was in her third foster placement. That afternoon, her foster father had put the news on and it showed the image of the burning World Trade Centre with the headline 'NEW YORK PLANE CRASH'. It had been the first tower. However, within minutes of the report being switched on, the second plane hit the south tower. Wanda had felt the impact despite it being thousands of mile away. She had known the feeling of being blown back by something flying into a building. Her foster parents and Pietro had tried their best to calm her, but it had been useless. They had tried to refer her to a child psychologist but Wanda refused. She had gotten good at feigning the impression she was okay at that point.

"You okay?" Steve asked, snapping Wanda out of the memory.

"Sorry. I just remembered something. Nothing important."

Once the plane landed and they were finally let out of the stuffy, claustrophobic cabin, they went through customs. Natasha, Pepper, Bruce, Thor and Rhodes were not far behind them. When they came to the arrivals lobby, Wanda had to blink in case she was hallucinating. There was a man standing with a sign that said 'Rogers' and he looked almost the double of Sam. That was when she realised that it must have been Sam's brother. Steve recognised Sam's brother instantly.

"Gideon," Steve said moving up to shake the other man's hand.

"Hey, Captain. Nice to see you."

"Wish it could be under better circumstances. Gideon, this is my fiancée Wanda Maximoff, and these
are Natasha Romanoff, Pepper Potts, Doctor Bruce Banner, Thor Odinson, and Colonel James Rhodes."

"I remember Sam speaking about Natasha," Gideon said shaking everyone's hand. "Sam undersold how pretty you are," Bruce coughed. "You okay Doctor Banner?"

"Yeah, just dry throat," Bruce replied.

"Subtle dude," Rhodes muttered.

"We're sorry for your loss," Thor interrupted.

"Didn't you have long hair?" Gideon asked.

"It's a long story involving a sister I didn't know about and a very scary tunnel. I will tell it at a more appropriate time."

Pepper seemed curious what the story was but snapped out it, "Hi, Gideon. Sam spoke a lot about you a couple of Thanksgivings ago."

Gideon nodded and said, "Come on. Mom won't be happy if I am late."

The car ride was rather short. The Wilsons lived on the outskirts of the city in a red detached house with a porch. It looked a relatively new build but given that the original building was likely to have been destroyed thirteen years previously, it did not look out of place. Wanda noted in her head that Gideon was playing Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly* and when 'Alright' began to play, she smiled at the memory of her and Sam sitting in the kitchen in Edinburgh and rapping along with the lyrics. It also hurt, however. 'All right' were Vision's last words.

"Sam loved this song," she told Gideon.

"Well, he always liked the political stuff," Gideon replied.

When they were out of the car, Gideon led them to the house. Steve took Wanda's hand as they entered the house and they noted the chaos of what looked to be Sam's numerous relatives rushing about the house in a bid to get the wake ready for after the service.

"Well, it's usually one thing to bring the family together and it's funerals," Gideon commented. They followed him to the kitchen where they saw a frail-looking elderly woman hovering over the counter.

"Mom, let me do that."

"Oh Gideon, you don't half fuss," Mrs Wilson replied. She then noticed Steve and went over to him.

"I wish it were a better day."

"I know. How are you?" Steve asked.

"As well as one can be. I'm just glad he wasn't alone." Wanda had to bite back some tears as she remembered Sam disintegrating in front of her eyes. She rubbed her hand in hope that she could still feel the pressure of Sam's hand on hers. "Service starts at 12:00 so if you want to freshen up you have time."

"Thanks, Mrs Wilson."

Half an hour later, everyone had cleaned up. Steve and Rhodes had decided to wear their army uniforms since Sam was also an army veteran, and many of his airforce comrades were coming in
their uniform. Steve wondered whether Sam would have wanted it since the reason Sam left was that of his disillusionment with the military after Riley's death. However, it seemed the most respectful way to dress for a serviceman.

"You know you look really handsome in that uniform," Wanda commented softly.

"Thanks," Steve replied as he buttoned his coat up. "Been years since I have had to wear this. Surprised it still fits."

Wanda put her hand on Steve's cheek. The beard was gone. His skin was bare and it felt really bizarre beneath her palm. She played with the knot on Steve's tie and took off a piece of dust on his shoulder.

"There. Perfect," she said. "I should probably get changed myself but Thor seems to be taking his time in the shower. He doesn't even have that much hair to wash now."

"Well, he always was a little high maintenance."

"Who's high maintenance?" Thor asked knocking the door. He was dressed in a suit that had been rented since he did not possess smart clothing on Earth.

"No one," Steve replied.

"The bathroom is free now if you would like it, Wanda," Thor told.

"Thanks," Wanda said as she walked past holding her black dress.

She made her way to the bathroom, though when she locked the door, she felt a mild cramp in her lower belly. She knew the cramps were familiar as she undid her jeans and saw a red dot in the middle of her white knickers. Her periods had started again. It felt strange. The last time she had a period was when she was seventeen. Pietro and Wanda had left the care system by that point and were on the streets with little food. Her dramatic weight loss meant that her periods had stopped altogether and since she went straight onto the implant when she became an Avenger, it meant that she still did not get periods. Now she had removed it, it seemed her cycle had kicked in, and she had no sanitary protection.

Wanda rummaged through the cupboard looking for a tampon or a pad. She did find a pad eventually. It was a mild relief that it meant she was still capable of having children, but she did regret her haste in removing the implant since she really did not think she would be ready to have a child so soon after everything that had happened. Once she was showered, changed and looking presentable, she walked back to the kitchen where everyone had gathered. She stopped by Pepper who put a reassuring hand on Wanda's shoulder. Natasha spotted her and walked over to her holding a glass of water.

"You okay?" Natasha asked.

"Yeah, I'm just a little crampy," Wanda replied. "I got my period for the first time in eleven years."

"I do have some mild painkillers if you want," Pepper said digging into her bag.

"I'm fine. It doesn't hurt. I managed to find a pad in the cupboard so-" At that point, she was hit in the stomach by a flying basketball. "Ow!"

"James Wilson, you know not to throw that ball in the house," Gideon shouted. "Are you okay Wanda?"
"Yeah. Just took the wind out of me." Wanda managed to straighten herself, though the pain in her stomach combined with the menstrual cramps was making it difficult. "Is that your son?"

"James? Yeah. Little rascal doesn't know when to stop. You have kids?"

"Not yet," Wanda replied. She twisted her engagement ring with her thumb and finger nervously. "I'm fine honestly. It wasn't that hard."

"Still, he should know not to throw things in the house. Sam always used to let him get away with murder." There was a silence between the three before Gideon spoke again, "How was he in the last couple of years?"

"Same as us really: didn't want to be a fugitive but he made the best of the situation. He was kind of the rock of the group," Natasha answered. "Do you hate him for going on the run?"

"Well, I don't agree with the Sokovia Accords and I know Sam would never agree to them. I admire that he stuck to his principles. There is something off about Ross that I can't put my finger on."

"Oh I could tell you a few things," Bruce commented coming up beside Natasha. "I used to work with him of a project that was designed to recreate the serum Steve was given, only it turned me into the Hulk."

"Ross only cares about making us into weapons," Wanda added. "Sam saw through the Sokovia Accords from the outset. He stuck to his guns. He only wished that he had not done it while your mother was so sick because he was scared in case she died and he would not know."

"You do know he was in contact right?" Gideon asked.

"He was?" Natasha responded.

"Yeah, he sent a disposable phone. He used to let us know he was okay."

"He never said."

"I guess he knew he was taking a risk in case the FBI decided to do a search. We just let him know how Mom was mostly and checked if he was okay. He never really said where you were. He was smarter than that." Wanda smiled sadly. She had wondered why Sam seemed okay for the most part while they were on the hiding, and she happy that he had that comfort. However, Natasha did look a bit put out. She did not know the reason but it might have had something to do with Sam potentially putting them all in danger. "It's 11:45. We should get moving to the church."

On the way to the church, Wanda asked, "You okay Nat?"

"I'm fine," Natasha replied.

"Is this about the disposable phone?" Natasha did not answer. "He only wanted to know if his mother was okay."

"It's not the fact he put us in danger. I had no one for eighteen months. You and Steve were your own little bubble, and Sam was in contact with his family."

"You had me." Wanda felt a little upset that Natasha had said that considering the number of days and nights they spent bonding. "Or do I not count?"

Natasha instantly regretted her words because she did value Wanda's friendship. They did have a
sister-like bond. "I'm sorry," Natasha said. "I just don't like funerals."

"Me neither."

"How are the cramps?"

"Okay, I think. It feels odd more than anything."

"So what are you going to do? Stick to the plan and try for a baby now you know your uterus is working?"

"I don't know. I think I was way too hasty with this plan. We didn't think we would lose."

"I guess that makes sense. You both need to make sure you are both okay before you think about trying to take care of a child."

The church was bustling when they entered. Sam clearly was well-regarded in the community and there were a few other air force officers around. Rhodes was chatting with them. Wanda spotted Steve at the front staring at a picture of Sam in his air force uniform. She walked up beside him and took his hand.

"You okay?" Wanda asked.

"I think so," Steve answered. "We'll see how it goes. How are you?"

"Trying to hold it together."

"If you need to cry, just cry."

"I feel a little self-conscious. These people knew Sam better than I did."

"Doesn't mean your grief is worth less."

There was a call for people to take their seats. Wanda and Steve found the rest of their friends, Wanda taking a seat by Thor. He was looking at the order of service with curiosity.

"So these hymns are songs?" he asked.

"Basically," Wanda replied. "These are spirituals. The one they picked is also the song that fans of the England rugby union team sing during matches. Sam told me that when we watched the first game of a tournament called the Six Nations. Sam said it was slaves trying to find solidarity with God. Though I am not sure how one does find solidarity with God when in that situation." She felt odd speaking about her ambivalence about religion to an actual Norse God, but Thor did not seem too familiar with Christian, Jewish or Islamic doctrine to raise this point with her. "I'm not really that religious in any way so… I mean my father was Jewish but not orthodox though we did celebrate Hanukkah. My grandmother was technically Christian but she never baptised my mother. Long story. Said she lost faith… I'm rambling aren't I?"

"A little," Thor answered but being polite he smiled at her. "I guess trying to find solidarity with God is meant to bring comfort to people. Gives them a purpose."

Thor's answer made sense. Wanda's lips went thin and she said, "I'm sorry about Loki."

At that point, the sound of Nina Simone's 'Why? (The King of Love Is Dead)' and they turned to the centre of the room. They saw Gideon walk down the aisle with his mother in the wheelchair, followed by his wife Lisa and their son James. Wanda felt the tears prick in her eyes as she heard the
'Even if they have to die. Even if they have to die at the moment, they know what life is. Even at that one moment, that ya know what life is. If you have to die, it's all right, 'Cause you know what life is.'

Once Sam's family were seated at the front and the song had finished, the minister began the service, "We're here today to recognise the life of Samuel Thomas Wilson. He was a great friend to us all, served his country and his planet with great bravery and today we honour his life with gratitude. I am not sure what words I can offer as comfort, however the Book of Revelation does state, 'Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them'. Sam is at rest from his labour; he is at peace."

Wanda wanted to scream that Sam's death was not peaceful. It was painful. She felt the pain when he touched her hand. She could not find her voice, and the tears were coming down harder. Steve and Thor had taken her hands. Steve was trying his hardest to hold it together, but he was finding it hard. He and Sam had been through a lot together, so the fact he was at Sam's funeral did not seem real to him.

"And now," the minister continued, "Sam's family have chosen Sam's favourite spiritual, 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot' as we take a moment to reflect on Sam's life."

The gospel choir stood as a video began detailing Sam's life from birth. "Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home. Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home. Coming for to carry me home. As each picture passed, Wanda turned her head and saw Natasha had broken and was crying into Bruce's shoulder. Pepper seemed to be biting back the tears, Rhodes seemed to be trying to hold back his emotions while Thor swayed with the music a little. "I looked over Jordan, what did I see (Coming for to carry me home)? A band of angels coming after me (Coming for to carry me home)."

Wanda finally broke.

After the service had finished, they all returned to the Wilson residence for the wake. While Thor, Bruce, Natasha Pepper and Rhodes were chatting among the other guests, Wanda could only lean against the breakfast bar and stare vacantly as people moved around her. There was a lot of alcohol around, and Wanda felt the urge to drink in order to take the edge of her emotions off. Her hand shook as she took a sip of her water.

She took a deep breath and walked towards the bathroom. However, she caught sight of a bedroom she had not seen before. There was a poster of Martin Luther King Jr and that caught Wanda's curiosity. She opened the door and figured it must have been Sam's room. There loads of American History books that looked to be from Sam's days at college on the desk. There was also a stack of CDs and a few vinyls on display including Nina Simone, Aretha Franklin and N.W.A. Wanda smiled as she ran her hands across the CDs.

Meanwhile, Steve was trying to get some air on the porch while sipping his whiskey. He really wished he could get drunk at times like this. He had tried to hold it together in the church but now it was hitting him that Sam had actually gone. The irony was that Sam would have known what to do in situations like this. When Sam accompanied him to Peggy's funeral, he had reassured Steve that Peggy would not be in pain anymore and that she was probably dancing up in heaven. It had been a nice thought. He did not know where Sam and Bucky would have gone, though he did imagine that there would be some bickering involved. As much as he wanted his friends to get along, he would
have given anything to hear one of their squabbles again.

"Sam did this a lot after his father died, and then Reily," a voice said behind him. He turned and saw that it was Sam's mother. "I guess it must be a thing among servicemen."

"Mrs Wilson, I need to apologise," Steve said.

"What for?"

"I decided to go against the UN and the Sokovia Accords. I dragged Sam into a fight that was not his. It meant he was declared a war criminal. Though I don't get how that is possible. There wasn't a war declared."

"Ross declared it but forgot to inform you it seems. You seem to forget that Sam was an adult with his own life choices. I could not stop him from going to Afghanistan, but like what everyone thought after 9/11, it felt like the right thing to do. Sam would not have gone with you if he did not feel like it was right."

"I know, but he should have been here with you. I robbed him of a chance to be with you. Granted he was offered a chance of taking a guilty plea like Clint and Scott, and I told him to take it."

"As I said, he had his own choices. Whether you believe it was the right choice, well, that is your opinion."

Steve smiled softly. "He was a good man. He deserved better."

At that point, they were interrupted by Bruce crashing through the door and he said, "Steve, we have a problem. It's Wanda." Steve followed Bruce up the stairs when they found Wanda curled up on the floor, exhaling deeply with Natasha kneeling beside her trying to calm her down. "I think she's having a panic attack."

Steve got down on his knees beside Wanda and helped her sit up. "Okay Doll. Deep breaths. It's okay."

"I'll see if I can find a paper bag," Natasha said. "Come on Bruce, let's give her some space."

Bruce and Natasha left and Steve let her brace her hand on his shoulder. "That's it. Gently does it."

Wanda's breaths returned to a level pace after a few moments and Steve rubbed her back. "Okay. You feel better?"

"What do you think?" Wanda asked sarcastically. Her breaths were still uneven and tears were brimming in her eyes.

Steve snorted, "Yeah. Stupid question."

"I think it all just hit me. On the flight, I thought back to a time when I was in a foster home and 9/11 happened. It reminded me of the shell hitting my home and I had a panic attack. Then there was the service and I just kept picturing Sam turning to ash… I held it in for so long because you were broken about Bucky. I was trying to be the strong one."

The speed of her voice seemed rapid. Steve rubbed her back until he was confident that her breaths had levelled out. Steve pressed a kiss to her forehead and stroked her cheek. "You don't have to be the strong one. We can both be weak together." Wanda smiled softly and pressed her forehead to his. "Do you need some water?"
Wanda nodded. Steve kissed her nose and got off his knees. He smiled at her a moment before leaving. Wanda glanced towards the bed. She thought she spotted something underneath when she was in the midst of her panic attack and before Natasha and Bruce had found her. She reached under the bed and pulled out a bottle of Irish whiskey. The urge she felt earlier returned, only the voice was louder and more dominant now.

'Go on. One sip would not hurt.'

Wanda gave in and opened the cap of the whiskey and took a large swig. The alcohol burned her throat but she felt more relaxed than she had done in a long time. She took another swig. Then another. And another.

Chapter End Notes

Trigger warning for alcoholism from now.
By the time February came around, it felt as though the world was getting back to normal. Pepper had to go back to New York for work after Sam's memorial, but everyone else seemed stuck in a fog of boredom. They tried to find ways to keep busy but nothing seemed to arise. While they could have started training again, there just did not seem much of a direction they could go. Steve had spent hours and days staring at a computer screen trying to draw up a training rota but his heart was not a hundred percent into it. Natasha had tried to help but she was just as lost. Rhodes had dipped in and out, dealing with some of the fallout at the Pentagon, which did keep him somewhat occupied. Bruce would spend days in the research and development laboratory, mainly staring at Vision's body and wondering if he should make the effort to bring him back. Rocket was also in the R&D labs, trying to take his mind off his friends. Thor mostly stayed out of everyone's way. Wanda had developed a weird routine. She would wake up late, pick at her breakfast, sit and stare at the television, usually sipping Diet Coke in a water bottle, barely eat her lunch and dinner and return to watching the television, and often she would collapse on the sofa.

Steve had noticed something was off about Wanda. Everyone had noticed. However, they assumed that since they were out of sorts then Wanda was no different.

One night, the dinner table was silent as everyone ate the pasta dish that Rhodes had prepared. Wanda twisted the spaghetti with her fork but she was not interested in actually lifting it and putting it to her mouth. After ten minutes of playing with the food, Wanda pushed the plate away and said, "I'm full."

"You only had three bites," Bruce commented.

Wanda pushed herself out of the chair and replied, "I just don't feel hungry."

"You humans seriously eat this junk?" Rocket asked looking at his sloppy sauce and pasta.

Wanda walked to the fridge and grabbed her water bottle that contained Diet Coke. Wanda walked out of the kitchen and went to sit in the lounge. She turned on the television and turned on E!, not caring what the show actually was. She only cared that it was not going to remind her of what had happened in Wakanda.

Wanda sipped her Diet Coke without much thought. She did not want to think. Thinking would cause the anxiety inside her to build. Thinking would make her think she was guilty of letting Sam and Bucky die. Thinking would make her believe there was no way out of the hole. The tense edge she was feeling started to loosen a little with each sip of cola.

"Wanda?" a voice asked. Wanda turned her head and saw Rhodes standing on the other side of the couch.

"I'm sorry Rhody. It was nice. I just… I haven't had much of an appetite since… You know."

"I'm not offended. I know that you struggle with food when something bad happens."

"Is it that obvious?"
"Well, it wasn't until Vision pointed it out after you came back from Lagos. You didn't want to eat much then."

"Hmm… That explains the paprikash." Wanda sipped her drink again. "I guess it all links back to my parents' death. We were sitting down to dinner and then the floor caved in."

"Well, I get not wanting to do anything that reminds me of something awful. After 9/11, I could not answer a phone for about two months. I was in the Pentagon and the plane hit the section I was in. I was trying to get a hold of Tony and Pepper. They were in New York. Luckily they were in a hotel in midtown so they were away from the chaos by the World Trade Center."

"I remember seeing Tony on the news that day. I remember not listening to what he said because I hated him so much. I know that he is your best friend but when you have to wait for two days, unable to move, eat or drink, dying of sepsis and smelling of piss, for someone to rescue you from a shell that had the name Stark Industries plastered in big bold letters, it hardly paints a good picture. I don't hate him now. I don't feel anything towards him."

Rhodes sighed and sat down next to her. "The first day I met Tony was a class on robotics at MIT. He was thirteen and I felt envious because I thought I would be the youngest graduate. Then this obnoxious kid walks in and ends up teaching the class. I guess we ended up friends because we understood what it was like to be isolated. I was an army brat so when Dad got a new station we had to move. I didn't make friends because I knew I would have to leave them behind. Tony felt lonely because he had blasted through school and no one wants to be friends with a nine-year-old when you're sixteen." Wanda blinked. She always wondered why Tony overcompensated when it came to making friends. "I know you have always seen him as a monster but he is human."

Wanda took a deep breath and then a large swig of Diet Coke. "He did not push the button to set off the shells, but he did give them to the forces who did. He is still complicit. There is only one winner in war and it is those who profit off selling weapons."

Rhodes struggled to come up with an argument to counter her. Tony did profit from the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars. Countless civilians had lost their lives. In fact, he remembered the decision in 1999 when Nato decided to bomb what was left of Yugoslavia without clearance from the UN Security Council. Wanda's parents would have been among the resulting civilian casualties. While he was Tony's friend first, Rhodes understood Wanda's position as someone who could have been a victim.

Wanda sipped her drink again. Rhodes had noticed that Wanda had been sipping a lot of Diet Coke lately through a water bottle rather than the bottles of Diet Coke that were already in the fridge.

"Is there something about the water bottle that improves the flavour of the Diet Coke?" he asked.

"No. Just indicates that it is my Diet Coke."

Rhodes did not know how to respond to that so just let it slide. There was something that was off about Wanda. While he had not known her to be a sunshine and rainbows person, he wondered whether the recent stress of Sam and Vision's deaths were having an effect on her bipolar disorder. He did not know if she was on medication, but it seemed as though she was in a low episode if she was off her medication.

In the meantime, Natasha and Steve were washing and drying the plates while Bruce waited for a moment where he could confide his thoughts to Steve. He wondered whether he should mention it to Natasha as well given how close she and Wanda had become over the last two years. Eventually, he said, "Something isn't right with Wanda."
Natasha and Steve stopped what they were doing and looked at Bruce. Natasha sighed, "We know, but I don't know what to do. She seems to be taking her medication but honestly, we've been caught up in our own shit that we haven't noticed if she has stopped. I'm scared to ask in case it looks as though we can't trust her."

"I have looked at her medication organiser and it looks as though she has been taking her lithium," Steve inputted. "But as Nat said, I can't make it look like I can't trust her."

"Well, you two do know her better than I do," Bruce commented. "It feels weird. She seemed fine after we got back from Wakanda, but since Sam's memorial, she's been on edge, depressed and off her food."

Steve remembered the last time Wanda was on edge, depressed and off her food. That was in Wakanda before her diagnosis. The more Steve thought about it, it seemed as though Wanda had not taken her lithium since they were in New Orleans.

"Okay, I'll speak to her later," Steve said. "Hopefully we can nip it in the bud before it gets worse."

Later that evening, Steve was brushing his teeth when he saw Wanda lying in bed and staring vacantly at the television screen. Her eyes looked heavy and expressionless. They had lost the sparkle and it reminded Steve of the first night after the Battle of Sokovia. After Pietro had died. After half of Wanda's soul had been ripped out of her body.

Steve walked into the control area of the helicarrier where S.H.I.E.L.D agents were bustling with trying to find places for the Sokovian refugees to live. There were quite a number of families to rehome. Steve wondered why logistics was in the name, and he guessed this was the reason.

He found Natasha and Clint sitting around the table and trying to keep themselves awake. He strolled over to them and asked, "Has anyone seen Wanda?"

"Not since I left her in the morgue," Clint replied. "She wanted to be left alone so…" Clint rubbed his face. "That quick bastard."

"You okay Clint?"

"Yeah. Just a bit of a day that's all."

Steve nodded and began to walk towards the morgue. It was a few floors below the main deck. He did not know what to say to Wanda if she was there. He guessed he understood how she felt given he felt as though he had lost a part of himself when Bucky had fallen into the mountains, though whether she would take that as comfort or throw it back in his face, Steve did not know.

When he entered the morgue, he saw the mortuary slab with Pietro's body laid on top. The colour had drained from his face, but the expression on his face seemed to be at peace. He then turned and saw Wanda slumped on the floor and nursing a bottle of whiskey.

"Does it help?" he asked.

"I'm not dead yet so no," Wanda replied. "Just leave me."

"I don't think I would forgive myself if I did." Steve sat beside her. He kept a reasonable distance so she was not uncomfortable with his presence. "He died a hero."
"Is that meant to be of some comfort to me?"

"I guess not, but what I am going to say is that I have lost one member of the team today and I am not losing another."

Wanda swigged the whiskey and grimaced. "This is my fault."

"No, it's not."

"I showed Stark his worst fear. He built Ultron in response. Ultron killed Pietro. I started this so it's my fault."

"Ultron made his own choices. It's no one's fault but his." Wanda was too drunk to even notice Steve's assertion. The alcohol was fogging her brain. She could not think clearly. When she tried to stand up, she stumbled and the back of her head hit the wall. Steve helped her to her feet and hooked her arm around his neck. "Come on. You need to sleep this off."

"I'd rather just keep drinking," she slurred. "I want to stay with him."

"I'm not letting you sleep on the floor. You can come back in the morning when your head is clearer."

He held her up until they got to the bunks. He had his own room and he thought that would be the best place to let her sleep off the alcohol. Wanda stumbled over to the bed, pulled off her jacket and started undressing. Steve turned his head away and went to the cupboard. There was a pair of grey jumper and sweatpants and he presented them to Wanda without looking at her.

"You best put these on. You'll feel more comfortable." Wanda looked confused as she took the clothing. She was just stood in her red bra and panties and she was confused why Steve was respecting her privacy when so many other men would have taken a look at her. "I'm going to leave now."

"You could stay," she said. "I don't want to be on my own."

"Once you're dressed, I'll come back in."

"I'm confused. You bring me to your room but you don't want to fuck me?"

Steve had to turn his head towards her. Her face, sticky with tears and eyeliner running down her red cheeks. She seemed perplexed, almost as though she was expecting to be used.

"Wanda, you're upset, drunk and incredibly vulnerable. I don't want to take advantage of you."

"It wouldn't be taking advantage if I have consented."

"We'll both regret it in the morning. A drunken fumble is not what you need."

"And what do I need?"

"Depends on what you really want."

Wanda scrunched the grey material in her hands and sniffed. She pulled on the sweatpants and jumper and sat on the bed. "I guess what I really want is not to be alone."

Steve grabbed a washcloth and dampened it with water before walking over to her. He sat next to her and began wiping her face. "Your face is looking sticky and I don't want you to be sore in the
morning." Wanda nodded. Once Steve was satisfied her face was clean he helped pull her hair back. He noticed how thin she was under the clothing. The sweatpants were hanging off her hips. "Are you hungry?"

Wanda shook her head. She lay her head on the pillow and Steve saw her eyes close. Once he was certain she was asleep, he got off the bed, changed out of his Captain America suit into a spare set of sweatpants and jumper and lay on the floor beside the bed.

"Doll?" he asked snapping Wanda out of her trance. She blinked and looked directly at Steve. "You feeling okay?"

"Tired," she responded. "I always feel tired though. Tired of the world mainly."

Steve's lips went thin. He walked over to the bed and sat beside her. He cupped her face and stroked her cheek and pressed a kiss to her forehead. "I'm a little worried about you Wanda."

"Everyone keeps saying that."

"When was the last time you took your lithium?"

"This afternoon," she said. Steve pushed the hair out of her eyes. "Do you not believe me?"

"It's not that. When we were hiding in Wakanda, you did not really eat and you just stayed in the safe house watching television. Since we got back from New Orleans, you've not eaten much and you seem to just be watching television. I was just wondering whether we're back to depressed Wanda." Wanda was silent. A wave of guilt washed over her and she started weeping. Steve kissed her on the head. "Hey, it's okay. I'm not mad. I just want you to be okay."

"I don't think I'll ever be okay again. Not after everything. I've been drinking to numb the pain."

"I haven't seen you drink alcohol."

"I've been sneaking vodka into the Diet Coke."

"What?"

"I'm sorry," she whispered. Her hand was shaking and her weeps became full-blown sobs. Steve was stunned and a little angry since she knew the risks of drinking alcohol with her bipolar disorder. Nevertheless, he enveloped her in his arms and rocked her gently. "When we were in New Orleans, I found a bottle of whiskey in Sam's room. There was a voice in my head telling me to drink it, and I knew it would not stop until I did."

Steve thought there was something off about Wanda's behaviour after the panic attack, but he had put it down to the panic attack. He sighed but kissed her head. "You could have spoken to me."

"I thought you already had too much on your plate without me adding to it."

"You're my fiancée Wanda. I will always be there for you no matter what." Wanda sniffed. "I just need you to meet me halfway. Stop drinking and be sure you take your lithium." Wanda nodded. She sniffed and grabbed her medication divider. She took one of the pills and put it into her mouth. She opened her mouth to show Steve that she had swallowed it. Steve smiled and kissed her head. "Try to sleep and we'll work out a plan in the morning."

Wanda nodded. She turned on her side away from him and discreetly spat the pill out. Wanda closed her eyes. Sleeping was the worst because she could hear the voices in her head more clearly. The
voices were more distinct than random voices.

Sam.

Bucky.

T’Challa.

Groot.

Trillions of other souls merging together. Languages she did not know, but it all seemed to be ways of pleading for help. It was like they were trapped in another world and Wanda was helpless to save them.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, from here it's going to be quite hard going. Warnings for mania, psychosis and suicide attempt in the next three chapters.
Chapter Five

When Steve woke up to find Wanda's side of the bed empty, he was worried. Usually, he would be the first one up so waking up to an empty bed raised some alarm bells. He threw the sheets over himself and ran around the Compound trying to find her. She was not in the kitchen or the living area. She was not in the gym either. Then he saw the skylight was open and wondered if she was on the roof. He jumped and pulled himself up until he was on the flat roof. He saw Wanda sitting on the edge and he walked over to her.

"Wanda?" he asked softly. Wanda turned her head towards him. The dark circles and bags under her eyes were significantly pronounced and her hair was wild. She was also shivering because of the February chill. It reminded him so much of the morning after Pietro's death. She did not seem hungover this time (she had not had a drink for a week) but she looked just as timid, lost and confused. Not to mention that she looked thinner than she had done back then. He sat on the edge beside her and tried to touch her face. "You're up early."

"Been up since four," she whispered. She coughed rather violently and Steve had to rub her back to help her through the coughing fit. Once she stopped coughing, she gained her breath back and patted her chest. "I thought coming up to watch the sunrise would be more productive than laying in bed."

"But it's also twenty-eight degrees. You're going to freeze out here."

"I feel hot." Steve could see the sweat on her brow and he put the back of his hand against her forehead. She did feel oddly warm and feverish. He wondered if she was ill given she had just had a coughing fit. "I thought I was going to throw up this morning."

"Maybe we should get you inside and get you to take some Tylenol. It might cool you down."

"I don't know. I feel a lot more peaceful out here. My mind doesn't feel as cluttered." She took a deep breath. Wanda turned her head towards Steve. "You and I should just go live by the sea."

"Sounds a nice idea."

"We don't even have to look back. We could just forget about everything and everyone." She sniffed and she said, "But that won't happen will it?"

"It can happen.""No. Because they won't let me forget."

"Who?" Wanda shook her head and got to her feet. Steve stood up quickly and took her hand. "Come on. Let's get inside." Wanda nodded. Steve took her to the skylight and helped her down. He took her to the couch where he settled her under a blanket. He knelt beside her and asked, "Do you want anything to eat?"
Wanda shook her head. "I'm not hungry."

"Doll, you have to eat something."

"I know. I just don't feel like it."

Steve sighed. He nodded but he vowed to try again later. He did not know why Wanda was in this odd mood. She had been taking her medication and he had not seen her drink alcohol since she had confessed to sneaking vodka into her Diet Coke. He wondered for a moment whether Wanda needed her dosage increased but that could only make her worse.

"Okay. You just stay there and I'll see if there is any Tylenol," he said.

Wanda watched as Steve left the room and then she threw the blanket off. Her head was racing. Her heart was pounding. All of a sudden, she felt her stomach turn and she ran for the nearest bathroom. She heaved and she felt herself break out in a cold sweat. It seemed Steve had heard her because he was standing at the door with a worried look on his face.

Wanda pressed her head against the cold basin of the toilet. She said, "I'm fine."

"No, you're not Wanda. We need to see a medic."

"Trust me I know I'm okay." Wanda managed to lift herself up and she looked up at Steve. "I'm late."

Steve looked at her face in confusion before it dawned on him what she was telling him. "Oh."

"I don't know for certain but it makes sense."

Steve got on his knees in front of her and cupped her face with one hand. "Is this a good thing? I know we said we would try but with everything that happened…"

"I don't care. This is the one good thing to happen to us." Wanda smiled brightly and pressed a kiss to Steve's lips. Steve allowed himself to smile as well and pulled her close. When Wanda pulled back she rested her clammy forehead against Steve's. "A baby Steve."

"I know." He kissed her forehead and asked, "Have you taken a test or anything?"

"No. I just put all the symptoms together."

"I think we should just take one to confirm or go to a medic to confirm."

"I don't know. I feel like it should just be our secret."

"We just need it in black and white. We can still keep it a secret until you're ready."

"If you're sure."

"I'll buy a pregnancy test. You get some food into you."

Wanda smiled as Steve kissed her and got to his feet. Wanda sat back and rubbed her belly. She could not believe that she had something to hope for at last. She got to her feet and went to her laptop. Without thinking, she went to look on websites for baby clothes. She had a feeling it was a girl so she looked primarily at girls' clothes. There were so many adorable pink and purple dresses and onesies that Wanda just could not resist. By the time Steve returned, Wanda had purchased $100 worth of clothes and a crib.
Steve handed her the box, she shut the laptop and she went to the bathroom. No one else was up yet it seemed. Steve waited until Wanda called him into the bathroom to wait with her.

"I think it's a girl," Wanda said.

"How can you tell?" Steve asked.

"I don't know. I have a feeling." Wanda tapped the test in her hand and looked at it. The blue line that indicated the test was working was clear. She wondered how long she had until the test had until it showed the result. "Has it been three minutes yet?"

Steve looked at his watch and nodded. Wanda looked at the test. She frowned and shook it. Steve watched her, stopped the hand that was shaking the test and he took the test from her. There was no second line. The test was negative. Wanda was not pregnant.

"It has to be a faulty test," Wanda asserted.

Steve looked up and shook his head. "I don't think the test was faulty Doll." Wanda's eyes brimmed with tears as if any hope she possessed had been shattered in an instant. Steve put the test down and pulled her in for a hug. "It's okay Wanda. I'm disappointed too."

"I was so certain… My period, the vomiting…"

"There are probably other reasons for it."

"No. I have to be pregnant… I have…." Wanda started sobbing into Steve's shoulder. It seemed such an extreme reaction but Steve knew that this could have been their one bit of hope. He stroked her hair and kissed it.

"I know Doll. I think we should go to a medic and see what is going on."

-O-

Wanda kept tapping her fingers against the medical bed as the doctor gave her a full work-up. Doctor Bayer looked increasingly worried as he took her vitals and measurements and Steve became nervous. Weight and height measurements. Blood tests. Pulse. Breathalyser. After half an hour, Doctor Bayer sat down and read the results.

"Wanda, the reason you haven't had your period is that you're significantly underweight. You're eight kilos under where you should be," Doctor Bayer explained.

"And the vomiting?" Steve asked.

"It looks to be a bug, but since her weight is so low, her immune system is struggling."

Wanda scowled and jumped off the bed. "I can't listen to this."

"Wanda," Steve said but Wanda was already out of the door. "I'm sorry. I need to go after her."

"Captain, I don't think she's taking her lithium. The blood test showed no presence of lithium."

Steve looked confused. "I've seen her put the pills in her mouth. She shows me that she is swallowing them."

"She could be hiding them under her tongue and spitting them out. I think I need to speak to our psych consultant, but I think you need to consider committing her to a psych ward."
Steve remembered the promise that he had made to Wanda that Christmas Eve in London. He had made the promise to commit her if she became too out of control. He did not think they would get to that point but it clear that Wanda was beyond the point of Steve and everyone being able to help her without professional help.

In the meantime, Natasha had woken up and was in the process of checking if Wanda was still sleeping. However, when she got to Wanda's room, she found Wanda sitting on the bed, holding a needle and a foil wrapped condom.

"What are you doing Wanda?" Natasha asked walking over to her.

"These are stopping me having a baby," Wanda said. Her speech seemed shaky and angry.

"So you are going to poke holes into all these condoms so when you and Steve have sex it'll break and you'll have a baby?"

"Wouldn't you do the same?"

"No." Natasha took the condom and the needle from Wanda's hands and put them aside. "Did you not consider Steve's feelings before you did this?"

"Steve wants a baby too."

"Not like this." Wanda's face crumbled and Natasha wondered whether she should take cover in case Wanda decided to throw something at her again. "Please don't hit me, but you're not well. You've been off for weeks and the Wanda I know would never do this."

"I'm fine," Wanda asserted. Wanda got off the bed and went to the wardrobe. She stripped off her nightdress and Natasha winced as she saw Wanda's ribs. Wanda pulled on a pair of jeans and a top and announced, "I'm going out."

"No, you're not."

"If you dare try to stop me, Natasha, then I will hurt you."

"I'm a trained combatant Wanda, I can stop you."

Natasha went to the door and locked it. The glare in Wanda's eyes was almost like a bull who had seen red.

"You better let me out Natasha," Wanda warned, her eyes glowing and an energy ball formed in her hand.

"What's going on in there?" Bruce asked through the door.

"Bruce, find Steve. Wanda's-"

"Lost her mind? Gone psycho? Go on! Finish that sentence Natasha!" Natasha looked scared and worried now. She knew that Wanda could explode at any moment and there was a chance that she could hurt herself. "Just let me out."

"I can't do that Wanda."

"I thought you were my friend."

"I am, and that's why I am doing this."
Wanda looked towards the window. All of a sudden she grabbed the television and threw it through the glass. Before Wanda could make a move, Natasha pulled her away. The two women scuffled until Wanda elbowed Natasha in the face and she managed to escape out of the window. The door burst open and Steve and Bruce ran to Natasha. It seemed Thor and Rhodes had been alarmed to the commotion and they appeared in the doorway.

"Nat, are you okay?" Bruce asked. Natasha's nose was bleeding profusely.

"I taught her too well," Natasha commented.

Steve had jumped out of the window to see if he could catch Wanda. Only he heard tyres screeching and Sam's car appeared from the garage. Wanda was in the driver's seat but before he could attempt to stop her, she drove off. Without even thinking about it, he ran to his bike and attempted to pursue her.

Thor, Rhodes and Rocket were watching the outside and then Rhodes announced, "We need to help him."

"I agree," Thor said.

"You seriously want to go after that crazy woman?" Rocket asked.

"Rocket, she's not well and needs our help."

"I'm okay now. I should come with you," Natasha replied.

"You sure?" Bruce asked.

"I'm not worried about me. Wanda's more of a risk to herself."

-0-

It had been three hours since Wanda had run away from the Compound, and Natasha could not imagine where she would have gone. They thought Steve may have managed to intercept her but it seemed that he had not had much luck.

"I lost her near Monticello," Steve said to Natasha over the phone.

"I just wish I knew where to start. I mean what if she's driven across a state border or been stopped by the police?" Just then, Natasha's phone beeped. "Steve I have another call coming in. I'll call you back." Natasha looked at who was calling her and she frowned. "It's American Express." When Natasha put her phone to ear she asked, "Hello?"

"Hi, is this Natalia Alianovna Romanov?" a cheery woman asked on the other end of the phone.

"This is she."

"Hi, Ms Romanov. I am calling you today because we have noticed some unusual activity on your American Express card in the last couple of hours. It appears your card has reached its limit quite rapidly."

"That can't be possible. There is $300 on that card and I have not used it."

"Okay… Ms Romanov, is there a chance your card has been stolen?"

Natasha pondered it for a moment. Natasha had taken Wanda out for some lunch a couple of days
previously. Only Natasha's bag had become quite full and Wanda had offered to take her wallet and put it in her bag. Wanda had taken her bag with her when she ran off.

"Shit, I think I know what's happened," Natasha said. "Can you tell me where it was last used please?"

"It appears that your credit card was last used a few minutes ago at a bar in Poughkeepsie. It's called Mahoney's Irish Pub & Steakhouse."

"What street?"

"On the corner of Main Street and North Water Street. Do you need me to ring the police?"

"No. Thank you. I think there has been a misunderstanding." Natasha hung up and told Rhodes, "Mahoney's Irish Pub & Steakhouse, Main Street and North Water Street, Poughkeepsie."

"On it," Rhodes replied as he pulled away. "What do we do with Wanda when we get to the bar?"

"Assuming she is still there. I'll let Steve know but we are nearer."

"There's five of us and one of her. It should be easy," Rocket said. Natasha, Thor and Bruce looked at him. "What?"

"You saw her hold off Thanos on her own. She's more powerful than the four of us combined and given how manic she is at the moment…" Bruce pointed out.

"I think we should not go in as though we look as though we are going to hurt her," Thor suggested. "She needs to know we want to help her."

"Thor has a point," Rhodes said. "So maybe one of us should go in and convince her to come home."

"It would be so much more simple if Sam was here," Natasha murmured. Around half an hour later, Rhodes pulled up outside the bar and Natasha took a deep breath. "I don't know if I should go in."

"It might help prevent an altercation," Bruce replied. "Thor, Rocket and I will go in."

Bruce, Rocket and Thor got out of the car and went through the doors to the bar. The two looked around. They heard a woman yell, "Get away from me!" The voice sounded like Wanda and they ran to the source of the commotion where it looked like a blonde woman in a black dress was trying to push away a drunken middle age man.

"Hey!" Bruce yelled as he, Rocket and Thor went to aid the woman, only when they managed to separate the two, they realised the woman was Wanda. Only she had managed to dye her hair in the last three hours and bought a number of clothes, including a black dress she was not wearing when she ran off. The blonde hair looked patchy, and the dress looked to be hanging off her thin frame. It was her eyes more than anything. She looked terrified and angry at the same time.

Thor put his hand on her shoulder in reassurance but Wanda pushed it away and backed up against the bar. Rocket pointed out what looked to be a gun at the drunk while Bruce's eyes went green, as though he was threatening the drunk.

"What the fuck is wrong with this whore?" the drunk asked. At that point, Bruce punched him in the jaw.
"Hey, no one speaks about my friends that way," Rocket yelled pointing the gun.

"It's okay Wanda," Thor said trying to give her his best reassuring smile. "We're going to take you home."

Bruce was shaking the hand that had made contact with the drunken letch's face and he was horrified at the state of Wanda. "Oh my god."

Thor took off his jacket and attempted to wrap it around Wanda. He gently soothed, "It's okay. You're safe."

"Do I need to call the police?" the bartender asked.

"No. We'll take her home," Bruce replied. Thor had managed to put the jacket on her and it seemed Wanda was responding to his care. She looked very dazed and confused. "Okay, Wanda. We're going to take you outside, we're going to get into Rhodey's car and we're going to drive home. Is that okay?"

Wanda did not answer. She kept looking around as though she was hearing something that nobody else could. Thor took her hand only before he could lead her out of the bar, Wanda said, "Wait." She stumbled over to the drunken man still on the floor and spat on him. "Scum."

"Okay, we need to go now," Bruce said grabbing the rest of the bags. "Sorry about this everyone."

They made the deal to keep Wanda in the backseat between them since they both stood a chance of restraining her if she bolted again. Bruce put the bags in the trunk and after Thor helped fasten her seatbelt joined them. Rocket had taken a seat on Thor's lap. Wanda stared around the car. Natasha was sitting in the front seat with a look that seemed more worried than angry. She coughed softly and patted her chest. All three men in the back seat looked concerned at this. Bruce dared put his hand on Wanda's forehead and she was hot to the touch.

"Where do we go Nat?" Rhodes asked.

"We take her home," Natasha answered.

Bruce looked at Wanda and wanted to say they should take her to a hospital (granted he was not sure if they should take her to the emergency room or the psychiatric unit) but he knew it was ultimately Steve's decision about how they should help her.

When they arrived back at the Compound, Natasha said she would take care of Wanda. She was sluggish and slow. Natasha thought it would be best to give Wanda a bath. She did not know why but it seemed a good idea. Natasha turned the taps on Steve's bath on and put the plug into the drain hole. She put some bubble bath in the water and turned back to Wanda who looked spaced out. Natasha sighed and got to her feet.

"Wanda, do you want to take your clothes off and get into the water?" she asked. Wanda pulled off Thor's jacket and then the dress. Her arms looked like sparrow's legs and Natasha feared that one gust of wind would blow Wanda over and she would break like a china doll. Wanda looked so unwell that Natasha thought that taking her to a hospital would have been better. "Come on. The water is warm."

Wanda climbed into the water and wrapped her arms around her legs. The steam filled her senses it eased the bile in the back of her throat. Natasha grabbed the shower lily and lathered it with shower
gel. Gently, Natasha began to rub circles on Wanda's back with the shower lily.

"If you wanted to try out a new look, you could have asked," Natasha said gently. Wanda stayed silent in response. "You had really nice hair before we dyed it in Wakanda. Dark as a raven."

"I didn't mean it," Wanda whispered. "Everything I did this morning.

"I know. I should not have locked you in the room to be fair."

"Why did I do it if I didn't mean it, Natasha?"

Natasha was about to answer when she saw a haggard and relieved Steve in the doorway. "Steve is here. Do you want him to take over?" Wanda nodded and Natasha went to take the dress out of the room. "I don't really know what to say, Steve. She's really unwell."

"I know. The doctor suggested that we look at committing her to a psychiatric unit."

"Well, I think that might be the best solution, or we give her another chance to get better. It's your call, Steve."

Steve nodded and he walked over to the bath. The woman in the bath in front of him did not look like the woman he loved. The life just seemed to disappear from her eyes. Wanda had always been rather pale but there was no colour in her cheeks, so the blonde hair made her seem washed-out.

"Doll?" he whispered as he got to his knees. Wanda blinked and there was something in her eyes that seemed to recognise him. "Bit of a day huh?" He picked up the shower lily and washed her shoulders. "You know that I love you right and that I just want you to feel safe?"

Wanda nodded. She breathed deeply and whispered, "I'm just so tired Steve. I'm tired of everything. I'm tired of my head making to do stupid things. I'm tired of having no hope left in the world."

Steve knew that she was talking about the negative pregnancy test. It was not the whole reason why she had suffered a breakdown, but it was the straw that had broken the camel's back. It was the only glimmer of hope that Wanda had, and she felt as though she had failed to make that hope happen.

"Maybe we should take a break from trying for a baby," he said softly. "At least until you feel ready."

"I was ready."

"I know." Steve soaked Wanda's hair and massaged shampoo into the roots. He grabbed the shower head and washed the shampoo from Wanda's hair. Steve grabbed a towel, helped her out of the bath and wrapped the fluffy white towel around her. "There we go. Much fresher. Now, let's get you dry and into something comfortable eh."

Wanda nodded. Steve led her to her room where it seemed Natasha had laid out a pair of grey pyjamas. Steve patted the excess water off Wanda's body and helped her into the pyjamas. He grabbed the hairdryer and hairbrush from the dresser and began dry and brush her hair. Wanda was stock still like a statue through the process. Once he was certain that her hair was dry, he turned to her and stroked her cheek. It felt hot and Steve wondered whether he should get some Tylenol to reduce what was more than likely a fever. He rummaged in his bedside and found a pack. He grabbed a glass of water and gave her the pill. She looked at it nervously but she took the pill anyway.

"What do you want to do Wanda?" he asked in a soft whisper.
"I don't know," she replied. "Tell me what I should do."

"Do you think you could sleep?" Wanda looked at the pillow and nodded. Steve pulled back the covers and allowed Wanda to lie down. Steve pulled the covers over her and lowered the blinds. He kissed her cheek and whispered, "I love you, Wanda."

Wanda did not respond. She stared vacantly at the lamp and gripped the pillow tightly. Steve lay on top of the sheets beside her and watched her breathe. He waited until her breathing had slowed down until he leaned over and saw she was asleep. Once he was certain that she was in a deep sleep he wandered to the kitchen where everyone was sitting around the breakfast bar. They instantly went quiet when they saw him.

"She's asleep," Steve said.

"Well, I need to go to return all these clothes," Natasha said. "I can't do much about the black dress but the rest have not been worn so I can get my money back. Have you thought about what I said?"

"I made her a promise that if she fell so ill again that we were unable to help her then we should hospitalise her."

"So…" Bruce began.

"I am sticking to that promise. Wanda needs professional help."
Chapter Six

"It does look the perfect place for her," Natasha commented as she and Steve left the car. They had both visited a psychiatric unit thirty miles away and it did seem to be the best care that they could offer her. "It does not look cheap though."

"Well, she should be on my medical insurance so some of that will cover the fees," Steve pointed out. "It's quiet, the staff have a supportive plan specific to her needs, and the other patients don't look drugged out of their minds."

"I guess that is the most important thing." When they entered the Compound, they noticed bags and bags of clothing in the hallway and Natasha picked up one of the bags. "Carter's? Isn't that a clothing store for babies?"

"Shit," Steve whispered and he walked to the living area where Wanda was sitting on the couch and staring at a large box. Her hair had been pulled from her face in a messy bun and she was wearing Steve's grey sweatshirt and a pair of black leggings. Bruce was sitting on the couch looking confused at what the box was.

"I got all this when I thought I was pregnant," Wanda said. "I forgot to mention it. I'm sorry."

"Hey, I'm not angry. I just don't know what you want to do with all of it."

"Well, she screamed at the delivery man to take them back," Bruce said. "We can send it back if you want."

"What exactly did you get Wanda?" Natasha asked.

"Clothes. A crib," Wanda whispered. Wanda sniffed and coughed, and Steve could see her hands were shaking. Steve sat down next to her and laced her fingers with his. "I was just so sure."

"I know Doll," he said softly. "I'll put it all away somewhere. Maybe it could be used in the future. Listen, how about you and I get out the Compound for a couple hours. Maybe go for something to eat in New York City?"

"Do I have to get changed?"

"Not if you don't want to." Wanda nodded. "Okay, I'm just going to put all this baby stuff in… I'm going to put it in Sam's room."

"So we just turn his room into a storage room?"

"Well, Gideon is coming up here to help us sort through Sam's things this weekend. I know it's not right but I don't know where else to put them. I could put them into your room, you know since you
are sleeping in my room anyway."

Wanda nodded as though this was acceptable. "Sam would complain if we did put all the shit in his room. I can hear him now telling me to tell you not to put it there." The other three frowned at this. They were not sure if it was Wanda remembering Sam or whether she was hearing voices in her head. Natasha looked at Steve and her eyes questioned whether Wanda should leave the Compound all things considered. Wanda got out her seat, coughed and said, "I think I'm ready to go."

"Okay," Steve said taking her hand. "We won't be too long."

Bruce and Natasha nodded as Steve led Wanda out of the living area. They both looked to one another and Bruce asked, "How was the psychiatric unit?"

"It's the best one. I think that's why Steve is taking her out. So he may break it to her. I could do with something to eat."

"Me too."

-o-

Steve found a quiet corner of the diner he had chosen to take Wanda for lunch. Wanda was shaking even though she was wearing three layers and the heating was on. Her fingers tapped the table rapidly as she looked at the menu and Steve had to put his hand over her hand.

"It's okay," he reassured. "Trust me."

"It isn't," Wanda whispered. "I can hear everyone thinking and I know they're looking at me." Steve had forgotten that Wanda was a telepath and given that she was unable to control her brain at that point in time, it was unlikely that she could control her powers. "This was a bad idea."

"I know. I'm sorry," Steve said. "Do you want to leave?"

"No. I'm fine." She coughed again and Steve wondered whether he should have brought her out in the cold. Wanda's eyes flicked over the menu. All the meals seemed so big. She did find a green salad so she ordered that. It was not much, but it was more than she had eaten in the last few weeks.

"Wanda, I do need to speak to you about something," Steve began. "Natasha and I went to a psychiatric unit this morning." Steve pulled out a brochure and pushed it across the table. Wanda read the name carefully. Acres Recovery Hospital. "The staff are great and it's out in the open. We thought it was the right space for you to recover." Wanda did not appear to know how to react. Her eyes kept flickering between the brochure and Steve. "They have a space for you ready. I said that we would check you in tomorrow."

"You make it sound like a hotel."

"It kind of is. They have a pool. The beds aren't like hospital beds. The only thing that makes it a psychiatric hospital is that they have doctors and nurses." Steve squeezed her hand. "Would you like to go there tomorrow?"

Wanda looked down on the brochure again. The pictures were of a redbrick building and there were people walking around with nurses in green scrubs. There were so many trees around the building that she wondered whether they were to hide away the crazy people. It did seem nice.

"Okay," she whispered.
"Good. It's good because you can take your own clothes and some things from home, so maybe this afternoon we can start packing some things?" Wanda nodded. "I need to go to the bathroom. Will you be okay if I leave you for two minutes?" Wanda nodded. "Okay. I'll be back."

Steve got out of his seat and Wanda started tapping her fingernails rapidly against the table. She kept looking at the brochure. The unit did look amazing but she did wonder whether it was all a facade. It could be like the Raft. She could be drugged, strapped in a straitjacket and locked in a cell all alone.

"Green salad?" the waitress asked. Wanda snapped out of her thoughts. She looked at the plate in the waitress’ hand. Wanda nodded and the waitress put the food down in front of her. She did not have much of an appetite and while she did try a few rocket leaves, she put her fork down after a few bites.

Wanda looked out the window and chewed her nails. She squinted when she saw something across the street from the diner and she had to blink three times. The figure across the street looked just like Sam. In fact, it was Sam.

She grabbed her bag and ran out of the diner. She did not know where she was running to but it had to be somewhere away from the ghosts. People were looking at her and some were trying to stop her and ask her why she was running. Her lungs were burning and she was sputtering out her coughs. There was nowhere safe for her. Her heart started to pound in her ears and she wanted to vomit. It was then she looked up and saw it: the old Avengers Tower. It was somewhere away from everything around her.

Since the building was not as secure as it once was, she was able to enter it with no issue. She took the elevator up to the top levels and entered the lounge. It looked bare. While the building had been sold off, it seemed that the new owners had not made any drastic developments as of yet. It was quiet. Wanda sat on the step, regained her breath, and looked in her bag. She had the bottle of whiskey in her bag that she had bought in Poughkeepsie. Single malt scotch. Wanda preferred Irish whiskey. It was smoother than scotch but she was that desperate that she bought the first drink she saw.

Wanda swigged the dry drink and she felt her nerves calm. Her phone rang and she saw it was Steve. He had called at least ten times. She pressed the green button and put the phone to her ear.

"Wanda, is that you?" Steve's voice was frantic with worry and it broke her heart that she had caused it.

"It's me," she said.

"Where are you? Are you safe? Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine. I'm sorry Steve."

"Where are you?"

"Steve… Do you still love me?"

"I do. Please Wanda, just tell me where you are."

"You'd be better off without me. You could find someone who's not fucked up."

"I love you, Wanda. I don't want anyone else but you."

Wanda's eyes welled with tears and she sniffed. "I love you too." She hung up the phone and turned
it off. She took another swig of whiskey and then another. Steve was better off without her. He deserved better than her.

"Wanda, that man loves you to the sun and back," a voice said beside her. She turned her head and saw Sam sitting on the step. He seemed so real and Wanda lifted her hand to touch his face. "How are you doing?"

"A little bit shit."

"Do you really think the alcohol helps?"

"Nothing else helps. I still hear you and all those souls Thanos stole."

"It's not too bad. Barnes is a pain in the ass but it's bearable."

"You shouldn't have died. It was all my fault."

"Hey, you held him off the longest. If anything, you were the least to blame."

"It wasn't enough. No one should have died."

"I think we underestimated Thanos, but forget about him."

"How can I? He's probably living on a beach somewhere in the universe looking so proud of what he has done."

"Well, maybe think about the good times we had. Remember that time where we just bopped around the kitchen listening to Kendrick Lamar?" Wanda smiled and her eyes brimmed with tears. "I'm fucked up, Homie, you fucked up, But if God got us, then we gon' be alright."

"I'm not sure I am going to be alright again."

"You can be. You just have to call Steve and tell him where you are."

"I loved you, Sam. You were like a brother to me. You always made sure I was okay. I remember when we were in Wakanda and Steve had gone to see why the alarm had sounded. You were trying so hard to keep me calm..."

"Well, I did my best."

"Your family... They miss you so much."

"I miss them too. How is Jimmy? I bet he's grown like a weed."

"He's quite big. Lively."

"Good. Just tell him that his Uncle Sam loved him."

"I will." Wanda blinked and when she opened her eyes Sam was gone. "Sam?" He was gone again. Tears escaped her eyes. She had lost him again. She took a large swig of the scotch in the hope it would drown out the memory but she coughed violently and she had to spit some bile out. When she opened her eyes, the person in front of her was not Sam.

"Hello Wanda," Vision said.

"Vizh?" Wanda asked. She had forgotten how she had come up with that alternative name for Vision
"but it seemed to resonate with the figment in front of her. "My brain must really fucking hate me."

"How so?"

"It's imaging the person I had to kill, and I did not want to kill you."

"It had to be done."

"It was a waste. Thanos even said that I wasted all that energy for nothing.' Wanda took another sip of her drink and said, "I know that you and I did not have a great relationship towards the end, but it was not easy to kill you."

"I know. I did think that after everything that you would have no qualms with killing me."

"You may have come to some understanding of humans but you still don't get us."

"I guess that is true. I guess that when Ultron looked into the history of humanity, he transferred information through JARVIS and that is how I managed to take away the idea that humans have no problem with murder."

"Well, we do. There are laws against it. You were my friend… But I do wonder what would have happened if we had listened to you."

"We did not have the variable of the Time Stone. He might have been able to reverse it. Don't feel guilty about it. I'm not in any pain. Quite frankly, it's peaceful."

"Sounds nice. I wish I could have that."

"I would not recommend it for you, Wanda. You have people who love you and who would miss you."

"Do you honestly think we don't miss you?"

"Well, to consider the variables… Captain Rogers is your fiancé and his primary concern is you. Natasha cares about you and Doctor Banner the most. Speaking of Doctor Banner, he thought I would only be useful in combat. Sam did not like me. Colonel Rhodes was really my only friend."

"I was your friend Vision."

"I hurt you so much Wanda that I thought you could never consider me a friend again."

"I think I might be more forgiving than I realised." Wanda managed to crack a smile. "I never hated you. At least, sane me did not hate you. Sane me was angry at you but did not hate you. I hate what you did, but not you. I know you don't process things the same way I would."

"It's probably why we would be incompatible, as you said."

"I was angry then."

"I do still love you, Wanda. Saying 'I love you' brought me peace in the end."

Wanda looked confused. "I thought your last words were trying to reassure me that it was all right."

"I said it so quickly that you must have missed it. It seems irrational given that I knew your heart belonged to someone else, but it did bring comfort to me before my first death."
"That's good." Wanda was on the verge of sobbing. While it was not romantic, she did love Vision in the same way she loved Sam and, while she did not know him as well, Bucky. "I'm glad."

Wanda sniffed. She closed her eyes. When they opened, Vision was gone. She was scared of who could come next because she had no doubt it would be Pietro. If it was going in order of those who had died recently, Pietro was next.

She stood up and untied her hair. She ran her fingers through the dirty blonde roots and looked at her reflection in the window. Her cheekbones looked hollow. Even when she was on the streets, she was never this thin. Her jacket looked like a giant bag around her. She pulled it off and then Steve's grey sweatshirt. She was just wearing a grey t-shirt and leggings. The need to cough came again and she had to brace herself against the window. She needed to blink but if she did then she would see Pietro. She did not know why she did not want to see Pietro. She would have given everything to get her brother back, but she did not want him to see her like this.

She could not keep her eyes open much longer and she blinked. She kept them shut for a few moments, took a sip of her whiskey and took a deep breath. Wanda opened her eyes and she saw Pietro standing beside her in the reflection in the window.

"It does not suit you," he commented.

"I thought I would be able to become someone else," Wanda replied. "The white hair did not really suit you either."

Pietro smirked, "I looked better than you do." Wanda tried her hardest to crack a smile. "Why are you doing this to yourself?"

"I don't know. It stops the guilt, the shame, the disgust... I haven't felt this much shame since..."

"Since I died?"

"Maybe even before that. Remember when we were so desperate for food that I considered selling myself on the street?"

"I told you not to. I don't regret telling you not to. I know we were desperate but I knew you could never look at yourself again."

She took another drink. The bottle was half empty now and Wanda was just about feeling the buzz. "Do you think bad of me for getting myself into this mess?"

"You're my sister Wanda. I could never think ill of you."

"I miss you so much."

"I'm always going to be with you."

Wanda shook her head. "I felt half my body being ripped out of me the day you died. I lost you completely."

"But you still have a life to live. You're not alone," Wanda sniffed and played with the necklace around her neck. She looked at the engagement ring on her finger and she felt disgusted with herself. "He loves you and wants you safe."

"I know, but he deserves better than me."
"Call him. Tell him that you are safe and you want him to get you."

Wanda switched her phone back on. She saw that she had at least a hundred calls from Steve, Natasha, Bruce and Pepper. At that point, Steve's number flashed on the screen. Her thumb hovered over the green answer button. However, her phone suddenly went black. Her battery had died.

"No, no, no, no!" she yelled and smashed the phone on the floor. She turned her head and saw Pietro had gone. This was so sudden that she started sobbing at the thought of her losing her twin again. She opened the balcony door and stepped out into the cold air. She shivered, coughed to the point where her lungs felt they were going to explode out of her chest but she walked closer to the edge. The sun was setting and the lights of the city were starting to illuminate the night. It was such a beautiful sight. Wanda kept sipping and swigging the whiskey. The bottle was nearly empty and Wanda was struggling to stand.

"Dušica?" a woman's voice said behind Wanda. Wanda's breath hitched and she turned around. Her parents were standing before her. "Oh, dušica."

"Mum," Wanda sobbed. She wanted to hug her parents but she knew they were a figment of her imagination.

"You were always the one we worried about the most," Django said. "Even the day you were born you had to be put into an incubator because of how small you were."

"Did you think I could be ill like Mum and Baka?"

"We suspected when you were five that you might develop it in the future," Marya explained. "Those nightmares you had after Srebrenica happened were the first sign, but then you stopped and we thought it was a phase. Then Baka passed away and you started having them again. We were actually going to take you to the doctor the day after…" Wanda sniffed and shivered. "Wanda, you don't look like my beautiful baby girl. I wish I could be there to help you and keep you safe."

"I'm so tired Mum," Wanda said tearfully.

"I know, but I have seen that you are strong and you are loved. You need to remember that because it's how I got through it all."

Wanda turned to her father and said, "Daddy…"

"I know dušica," Django reassured. "I wish I could take it all away, but you have a good man who loves you. And always remember that we love you no matter what."

"I just feel like I have failed you both."

"Don't feel like that. We have never been more proud of the woman you have become."

"What is there to be proud of? I never finished school, I joined HYDRA, I sided with an omnicidal robot, I killed people and I failed to save the universe. At least Pietro died a hero."

"Ljubav prema porodici i divljenje prijateljima mnogo je važnija od bogatstva i privilegije. Remember that Wanda."

Wanda sniffed and she closed her eyes. She knew her parents would be gone. She wondered what her father had meant. She was not wealthy, nor particularly privileged. The alcohol had fogged her brain so much that she was struggling to walk straight. She sat down and shook the bottle. It was nearly empty. She took a final drink and threw the bottle to the ground. It smashed into shards of
glass. Wanda stared at them. They refracted the light from the sun and they made beautiful pink patterns on the wall. All of a sudden, she coughed so violently that when the bile came up, it looked to have some blood mixed in.

"I remember the day you were born," a voice said. Wanda did not want to look up but she had to. The voice was someone she had not heard speak for nearly twenty years. It was her grandmother. She sat in front of Wanda and Wanda shook from the cold and the emotions building inside her. "Pietro came out bawling his eyes. You came out twelve minutes later but you were breech. You did not cry at first and when you did it was so weak. I remember them putting you into an incubator and wheeling you away."

"Why are you telling me this Baka?" Wanda asked.

"Because I want you to know that you can get through anything. You had such a rough start in life and you have proven that you can get through anything life has thrown at you."

"I just can't take it anymore. I hate feeling like I have no hope at all. I wish I was dead because at least I would be with you, Mum, Dad and Pietro."

"But how would that make Steve feel? He's lost so many people he loves, and all he has is you."

The guilt engulfed her and Wanda buried her head into her lap and sobbed. "I'm an awful person."

"No, you're not Iubirea mea. You're not very well and it is messing with your judgement. You do have hope. I've seen it. Listen, I know what it is like to feel like you have no hope. When you are sitting in a cold, damp, stinking hut with people dying around you, it's hard to think of anything in the future, and I was one of the lucky ones." Wanda looked up, tears streaming down her face. "Your life will be so much better than it is now. You just have to let people help you."

Wanda started to feel really tired and she lay on the cold tiles. It was then that her grandmother started singing an old lullaby. "Heaven's gift to me just the way you are, A new aged child from a distant star. It feels so good just to be, So close to your love. You are heaven's gift to me. You are so sweet and pure just the way you are. Mama's precious jewel. Daddy's rising star. There's so much in life for you to see. And so much to be. You are Heaven's gift to me." Wanda felt herself drifting out of consciousness but could just hear the balcony door open. "I love you, Wanda."

"Baka-" Wanda gasped.
Chapter Seven

The second Steve saw that the booth where he and Wanda were sitting was empty, his blood went cold. Wanda had run off again it seemed and the first thing he did was call her phone. It went straight to voicemail.

"Hey, did you see where my fiancé went?" he asked the waitress.

"I don't know. Word of advice, if you have an anorexic for a girlfriend, don't bring her to a diner," the waitress suggested coldly.

Steve sighed and walked out of the building. He called Wanda again. Voicemail. He tried again, again and again. Finally, on the eleventh try, he got an answer. He asked frantically, "Wanda, is that you?"

"It's me," she said. She sounded out of breath and terrified and Steve thought he could not be more freaked out as he was now.

"Where are you? Are you safe? Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine. I'm sorry Steve."

"Where are you?" He ran his fingers through his hair and walked back and forth across the pavement.

"Steve… Do you still love me?" The doubt in her voice broke his heart.

"I do. Please Wanda, just tell me where you are."

"You'd be better off without me. You could find someone who's not fucked up."

"I love you, Wanda. I don't want anyone else but you."

"I love you too."

The phone line went dead and Steve yelled, "Wanda? Wanda? Shit." He tried ringing her again it went straight to voicemail. He was terrified now. Wanda had just told him that he deserved better, which meant that she could potentially hurt herself. He needed help and he called Natasha, only for her and Bruce to pull up in front of him. "What are you doing here?"

"Doctor Bayer came to find us. He's been looking at Wanda's medical tests over the last week: she has pneumonia," Bruce explained. Steve felt the colour instantly drain from his face. He could not believe he had been so blind and stupid, especially now. "Where is she?"

"I don't know. She ran off when I went to the bathroom. I managed to get a hold of her but she didn't tell me where she was and I am scared she is going to hurt herself."

"Okay… Think, did it sound like there was traffic?" Natasha asked.
"No. It sounded quiet."

"Well, she can't have gotten far," Natasha said running her hands through her hair. "She must be in Manhattan."

"I have no idea where to start."

"Maybe we should ask Pepper," Bruce suggested.

Steve got into the car with Bruce and Natasha and they drove to Pepper's new apartment. Once they found the floor, Steve rapped on the door until Pepper answered looking irritable and rather unkempt in her pink sweatpants and what was probably Tony's ACDC shirt.

"I heard you the first time," she said.

"Have you seen Wanda?" Steve asked quickly. "She ran off again and I think she's going to…"

"She is incredibly manic," Natasha added.

"I haven't. I'm sorry," Pepper replied. "Do you need help finding her?"

"We could do with more hands. I'll call Rhodey and Thor. Thor was able to calm her down last time," Bruce suggested. However before he could get his phone out, F.R.I.D.A.Y interrupted the conversation.

"Ms Potts," the AI spoke, "I have been noticing a disturbance in the old Avengers Tower."

"What sort of disturbance F.R.I.D.A.Y?" Pepper asked.

"There seems to be someone wandering around the lounge area. I think it may be Miss Maximoff."

"I thought Tony had sold it off," Natasha said.

"F.R.I.D.A.Y hasn't been taken out yet," Pepper said grabbed her jacket and keys. "Come on, we might be able to get to her in time."

Steve felt everything move in slow motion as they drove through the streets of New York. The traffic meant they had to stop at every red light much to Bruce's frustration. He wished there was a siren that meant they could get through traffic. The air was becoming incredibly cold and the sun was going down meaning that it was going to get colder. Bruce pulled up outside the old Avengers Tower haphazardly and they four ran into the building and into the lift to the lounge. Steve tapped his foot on the floor rapidly wanting the elevator to go quicker. Eventually, the doors opened by the lounge was empty.

"She's not here," Natasha observed.

"Right, let's look around because she cannot have gotten far," Pepper suggested.

The four dispersed. Steve looked around and saw the balcony door was slightly open. He walked to it and that was where he found Wanda, slumped on the ground and slightly blue. Glass surrounded her. Her eyes were fluttering and he just about heard her say, "Baka."

"Wanda!" Steve yelled as he ran to her. "Doll! Can you hear me?" Steve touched her arm and felt how ice cold the flesh was. He could just about smell the alcohol on her breath. Wanda was falling in and out of consciousness and she did not seem to notice he was there. He lifted her up and carried her inside. "Nat, Bruce, Pepper, I've found her."
"Oh my…" Natasha said running to them.

"Nat, Pepper lay the coat on the floor, and Steve lay her on top of it," Bruce ordered. "She might be hypothermic." Steve laid Wanda onto the splayed coat while Bruce tried to give her a quick examination. He felt her wrist, trying to find her pulse. "I think we need to get her to the emergency room."

"Shall I call 911?" Pepper asked.

"We'd be quicker driving," Natasha said.

"We need to wrap her up before we take her outside," Bruce said. Steve took his coat off, wrapped it around Wanda and then put her own coat on her. "Okay, let's get her to the hospital."

Steve lifted Wanda up. Soon they were in the car with Steve's arms around a drooping Wanda. Natasha had her fingers on Wanda's pulse. It seemed the warmth had perked her body up and her pulse was stronger. Pepper had called the emergency room at Mount Sinai Hospital and as soon as they arrived, there was a medical team waiting. Steve and Natasha got out of the car while Bruce and Pepper went to park it somewhere safer.

Steve helped Wanda onto the gurney and he could only watch as they pushed her into a treatment room. Natasha took his hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze. "Come on, she needs us." Steve nodded and the two walked to the area where Wanda was being treated. The nurses got to work trying to set her up with an IV and heart monitor.

"So she's hypothermic…" the doctor asked pressing a stethoscope to Wanda's chest.

"She has pneumonia," Natasha answered.

"She's got bipolar disorder and she's been going through a severe manic episode. We were going to admit her to a psych unit tomorrow."

"She's also been drinking," Natasha added. "Not just tonight, but for the last few weeks." At that point, Wanda threw up over the side of the bed and onto the floor. The doctor rubbed her back and made sure Wanda was on her side to stop her from choking on her own vomit. "Is she going to be okay?"

"We'll have to perform some tests to see if she has any liver damage," the doctor replied. "You said she has bipolar disorder and is the process of a manic episode?" Steve nodded. "Has she been showing signs that she may be suicidal?"

Steve honestly did not know, though it may have been possible given everything that had happened in the last few weeks. It may have been too much for her, and Steve had to step away and stand outside. He gripped his hair in his hair and screamed. Mostly, it was anger at himself for failing to stop Wanda from harming herself. She had desperately needed him, but he was too caught up in his own shit to really notice the woman he loved was suffering.

"Steve?" Pepper asked softly. Steve lifted his head and Pepper saw his eyes were brimming with tears. "Is she okay?"

"She tried to kill herself," Steve announced. "She became so desperate that she thought killing herself was the best option. I let her down."

"You don't know that. You can't blame yourself when Wanda has no control over her brain."
"I should have noticed her going into a downward spiral."

"Well, you can either blame yourself, or you could go back into that room and be there for her now."

Steve took a second to compose himself before he walked back into the emergency room. Wanda had fallen unconscious and the doctors had gotten to work intubating her. "Captain, we are going to take her up to an intensive care unit so we can assess her condition."

Steve nodded. All he could do was take her hand as they started to wheel her away. He thought he felt a small squeeze on his hand but when he turned and saw Wanda, she was dead to the world. They pushed her to a room a few floors up to a private room and the doctors and nurses got to work removing her clothes and putting on a hospital gown.

"Okay, so when we tested her body temperature, it was below 95 degrees. She's hypothermic so we need to keep her as warm as possible," the doctor explained. "We've pumped her with some antibiotics and inserted a catheter."

"Will she be okay?" Steve asked as Wanda was wrapped in three layers of blankets.

"I think the next twenty-four hours are touch and go. She drank a whole bottle of what I can presume is whiskey and sat out in 28.4-degree weather while having pneumonia. Since this is a likely suicide attempt, we're going to ensure someone from psych stays in the same room with her. You were going to take her to a psych unit right?"

"Acres."

"Okay, we'll help by monitoring her and sending information over. Assuming her place is held of course." Steve turned his head and saw Natasha, Bruce and Pepper standing in the doorway. "It's only one visitor at a time in the ICU."

"It's okay, I'll go out for just a second," Steve replied. Once he was outside and the door was shut, he said, "They said the next twenty-four hours is critical."

"Are you okay?" Natasha asked.

"I don't know. I'm mad. A little at her but mostly at myself for failing her. I should not have taken her out. I took my eye off her for one second..."

"When... If she gets better, we'll work out what caused her to run off," Bruce said softly. "Steve, we all failed her. We knew how sick she was. And besides... It could have happened in the Compound."

Steve took a deep breath and said, "You guys should go and get some sleep. I'll stay with her."

"You sure?" Natasha asked.

"Yeah. I'll let you know if anything changes."

The two women hugged him and Bruce gave a reassuring pat on the shoulder. Steve returned to the ICU and saw Wanda's unconscious form. She looked as though she had aged twenty years. She looked so frail. She had not been eating enough but having had pneumonia himself, Steve knew that her lack of appetite was in part down to pneumonia. He sighed and walked over to the bed and pressed a kiss to her forehead.

"I'm so sorry Doll," he whispered, "I love you, and you are going to get better I promise."
Steve rubbed his face and his head felt so light he had to take a seat in the chair beside the bed. He felt so drained and heavy and all he could do was drift off to sleep.

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Wanda could feel her senses coming to but her whole body felt heavy. Lifting an arm was like lifting a ton of bricks and her throat felt so dry. She could hear things around her. Footsteps, chatter, hums and beepings. Then there were the smells. Anti-bacterial gel. Flowers. She choked on what felt like a tube down her throat and then there was a rush of people around her trying to remove the tube. She coughed and spluttered. Her throat felt so dry and her chest felt so sore. There was also a dull, throbbing pain on her right side. She felt herself drift back off after something, possibly strong pain medication, was injected into her IV.


Wanda was not sure how long she had been asleep when her eyelids fluttered open and her eyes adjusted to the harsh light. She turned her head to the left and saw Steve asleep in the chair. He looked drained, exhausted and as though he had aged ten years. He had a faint stubble as well that suggested he had not been back to the Compound. It took her a minute, but she realised that she was in a hospital. It was also then that she realised that she was restrained with cuffs on her wrists. There was a nurse in green scrubs in the corner looking at a chart with Wanda's name on the top.

"Steve?" she asked groggily.

It seemed the sound of his name snapped him awake because he looked directly at her. "Hey," he whispered getting out the chair and he sat on the edge of the bed. He took her hand and squeezed it. "How are you feeling?"

"Confused. Where am I?"

"You're in Mount Sinai Hospital. You were admitted two days ago."

"Two days?"

Steve nodded, "You had mild hypothermia, alcohol poisoning and pneumonia." That explained the shivering and the pain in her side - her liver. "Since you were in the midst of a severe manic episode they put you under sedation and restrained you so they could be able to treat you. They also gave you an antipsychotic hence why you're not lashing out."

"I don't remember anything."

"Nat, Bruce, Pepper and I found you at the old Avengers Tower. You were on the balcony, you'd clearly been drinking and that and how thin you are made it worse. The only thing I remember you saying was 'Baka'."

Wanda tensed. She now remembered the hallucinations of Sam, Vision, Pietro, her parents and her grandmother coming in quick succession. She remembered how she wished she was dead and her grandmother trying to snap her out of it.

"I'm sorry Steve," she whispered and sniffed. She was sorry for putting him through that and for thinking about dying and leaving him to pick up the pieces.

He smiled softly and pressed a kiss to her forehead. "We're going to get you the help you need. Your place at Acres Recovery has been held under the circumstances."
"How did you find me?"

"F.R.I.D.A.Y's systems are still in the old Avengers Tower. It sensed you were there." Steve pushed the hair from Wanda's eyes and kissed her forehead. "Do you need to go to sleep?"

Wanda shook her head. "Was that everything that happened?"

Steve tensed and replied, "Yeah. That's everything." Wanda was not sure she believed him. She wanted to push further but they were interrupted by Natasha knocking on the door. "Hey, Nat."

"How are we doing here?" Natasha asked.

"There should only be one visitor at a time," the nurse instructed.

"It's okay, I'll get some coffee, Nat can stay," Steve insisted. He kissed Wanda's forehead again and said, "I'm not too far if you need me."

Steve left the room and Natasha went over to the bed. She was holding a few envelopes. "You have more people who care about you than you think." Natasha sat down and started opening the cards. "Dear Wanda, hope that you get well soon, love from Rhodey. Wanda, you are stronger than you believe, Thor."

Wanda listened to each message and she felt better to know that there were people that did care. "Nat, can you tell me something?"

"Sure."

"What have the doctors said about me?"

The colour in Natasha's cheeks seem to disappear and that was when Wanda knew that something awful must have happened. "They think it's possible that you tried to kill yourself on the balcony. They've put the restraints on you to stop you from hurting yourself and they have a psych nurse in to ensure that you don't try to hurt yourself," Natasha explained. Wanda did not know what to say. "They said you were lucky because if you had one more drink your liver would have been permanently damaged." Natasha's lips went thin. "What happened when you were on your own Wanda?"

"I spoke to Sam." If Natasha's face was pale before, it was now as grey like stone. "I spoke to Vision. I spoke to Pietro and my parents and my grandmother. I know they're all dead but they were right in front of me, clear as the last time I saw them."

"What did Sam say?"

"That he loved Jimmy - his nephew. That Steve loved me so much. Everyone was telling me that Steve loved me and me dying would leave him alone when he has lost everyone." Wanda's eyes started weeping and she sniffed, "I'm such a selfish bitch."

"No, you are not, Wanda."

"Steve lost Sam and Bucky as well, and I've been making it about myself."

"You're not well and you were out of touch with reality for a while."

"How would Steve have felt if I had died?"

"Don't think about it. You're safe and that is all that matters."
Wanda looked at the psych nurse and asked, "Are you making a note of this?"

"I have to keep track to ensure your case team at Acres gets everything," the nurse replied.

"Don't. This is a private conversation."

"Miss Maximoff-"

"Wanda, I know this sounds invasive but they need this to get everything so you get the best treatment. We're going to get you better. You are not going to feel like this much longer. You'll be able to have some hope back." Wanda turned her head away from Natasha and the only thing the older woman could do was push the hair from Wanda's eyes. There was a knock on the door and Natasha saw Steve stand in the doorway. Natasha got off the bed and walked over to Steve.

"Thanks, Nat for bringing the cards."

"I have her stuff packed and ready to take to Acres. The one thing I am worried about is how long it'll take her to respond to treatment."

"I'm not going to rush it. Wanda deserves better. I want her to take as much time as she wants."

"If you're sure." Natasha put her hand on Steve's shoulder in reassurance.

Once Natasha was gone, Steve asked, "Can you take the restraints off her?"

"Captain-" the psych nurse protested.

"There isn't anything in there that she can hurt herself with is there?"

"I guess not."

The nurse went over and took Wanda's wrists out of the restraints. Wanda did not lash out but her face was clearly angry at having been held back against her will. Steve climbed onto the bed beside Wanda and gathered her into his arms.

"Can we have a moment alone please?" Steve asked. The nurse walked out of the room and Steve rubbed Wanda's bony back. "How are you feeling Doll?"

"I hate myself," Wanda replied. "I was so selfish."

"You were ill, Wanda."

"It doesn't matter. I did not care about you."

"Doll, I don't know what to say. You really scared me."

"I'm sorry. You deserve better than me."

"The thing is Wanda, I took my eye off the ball and did not notice you slipping. I should have been there for you. But I wasn't."

"It's not your fault. Bucky... Sam... they were your friends first."

"I know, but I should have been there for you no matter what."

"So what happens next?"
"You got to Acres, and we work on whatever treatment plan they have prescribed for you."

Wanda nodded. She buried her head into Steve's neck and inhaled his scent. He felt so real. She knew he was real but given everything that had happened in the last week, Wanda was struggling to make sense of what was real and what was in her head. However, she knew Steve was there, solid and secure.

"You're my wonderwall," she whispered.

Steve snorted and pressed a kiss to her head. He did not know what it meant but he knew it was someone who was going to save someone else from themselves. He did not think he could save Wanda from her bipolar disorder, hence why he had sought professional help. Still, he whispered the lyrics to her. It was their song after all, and it seemed to bring Wanda some comfort.

Wanda then began singing the lyrics, "Because maybe, you're going to be the one that saves me. And after all, you're my wonderwall."

End of Part Six

Chapter End Notes

And that was Part Six. I know it has been quite depressing but it was necessary to address the impact of Infinity War, especially on Wanda as her trauma is so often ignored in the films. The only way is up for Wanda, even if it is going to take up a lot of Part Seven for her to get to a good place. Wanda needs to space to address so many life long traumas before she can reach a place of genuine happiness again.

And it may occur sooner than you think.
Part Seven: breathin'

Chapter Notes

Okay, so Part Seven is going to be focused more on Wanda's recovery, so yes, we are going to get better as they go and I promise that in six weeks we will have a very special chapter for mark reaching 50 chapters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Part Seven: breathin'

Feel my blood runnin', swear the sky's fallin'.
How do I know if this shit's fabricated?
Time goes by and I can't control my mind.
Don't know what else to try, but you tell me every time:

Just keep breathin' and breathin' and breathin' and breathin'.

Chapter One

Wanda was not sure she wanted to get out of the car. The large redbrick building in front of her looked intimidating and she feared what was on the other side of the doors. She had been in a similar looking building as a child: the children's home that she and Pietro lived after their parents' death. It looked fine on the outside, but it was unpleasant, and Wanda had learnt by now that appearances could be deceptive.

"You okay?" Steve asked.

"I don't know," Wanda replied.

"Maybe we should head in and get you admitted and settled. I've seen it, Wanda, it's a really good hospital with nice staff." Wanda nodded. Steve got out of the car and opened the passenger door so Wanda could climb out. She felt weak. She still was not eating, though given she had just recovered from a bout of pneumonia, it was not much a surprise. He took her hand and led her up the stone stairs to the door. He gave it a reassuring squeeze. They walked into the reception area and Wanda glanced around the bright room and saw a kind-faced nurse behind the desk. "Hi, this is Wanda Maximoff. She's checking in today."

"Hi, Wanda. Welcome to Acres. I'm Susan. I have some forms for you or your partner to fill out while I call your case leader down to meet you," Susan said handing Steve a clipboard and pen. "It's just personal details, insurance forms and any known allergies."

"Hi, Wanda. Welcome to Acres. I'm Susan. I have some forms for you or your partner to fill out while I call your case leader down to meet you," Susan said handing Steve a clipboard and pen. "It's just personal details, insurance forms and any known allergies."

"Thank you," Steve said. He and Wanda took a seat in the seating area as Wanda watched Steve fill out the forms in his striking penmanship. He filled out Wanda's details and the insurance forms. He knew Wanda had no allergies. "You still feel nervous Wanda?"

"It… looks very nice I guess," she answered.

At that point, a middle age woman in a white coat came over to them with a welcoming smile.
"Wanda?" Wanda nodded. "I'm Doctor Mathieu. I'm the lead doctor on your case. Do you want to come to my office?" The doctor led Wanda and Steve to an open space office where there were two other women waiting. One was a redhead and the other was wearing a hijab. "This is Doctor Uzair. She is going to be your therapist, and this is Kate your dietician. Take a seat on the couch and we'll talk you through the plan." Wanda felt as though she wanted to sink into the couch. There were four pairs of eyes on her and she did not like being the centre of attention. Doctor Mathieu grabbed a tablet from her desk and sat in the chair in front of Wanda. "So, Wanda, how are you feeling?"

"I'm not sure, to be honest," Wanda answered.

"So, you were diagnosed with bipolar disorder in August 2016 and had been taking lithium carbonate to stabilise your episodes of mania and depression?" Wanda nodded. "And you were fine on the dosage prescribed to you?"

"Once I had made some lifestyle changes," Wanda replied. "Less junk food, more exercise."

"But you stopped taking it recently? Why so?"

Wanda honestly was not sure why she had stopped. She had not decided to stop taking the medication, but in all the chaos of what happened when they tried to stop Thanos, Wanda had simply forgotten to take the medication.

"I just forgot," Wanda answered quietly. It was starting to make a load of sense in her head now. The voice telling her to drink the whiskey that sent her into a downward spiral, the panic attack she had in Sam's bedroom, and Wanda felt disgusted that she had been so stupid.

Doctor Mathieu made a note on her tablet and said, "So you are currently taking aripiprazole to help with your psychotic episodes, but if the lithium is working, then we should get you back on that, though on a higher dose than you were taking."

"Isn't that risky? What if it over stabilises her?" Steve asked.

"We can adjust it if that is the case. Now, we got your report from Doctor Chan about your weight. Your lack of appetite is because of your condition, so while we are treating you for your condition, you will be put on a food plan. Kate, do you want to continue?"

"Yes," Kate answered. "So, with that in mind, your diet plan is not about breaking a cycle. It's more about increasing your weight in a healthy way." Kate passed a sheet to Steve who showed Wanda.

Wanda read the sheet carefully:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Breakfast:} & \quad 2 \text{ carbohydrates, 1 protein, 2 fruits, 1 dairy, and 1 fat.} \\
\text{AM snack:} & \quad 1 \text{ carbohydrate, 1 fruit.} \\
\text{Lunch:} & \quad 2 \text{ carbohydrates, 2 proteins, 2 fruits, 1 dairy, and 1 fat.} \\
\text{PM snack:} & \quad 1 \text{ carbohydrate and 1 fruit.} \\
\text{Dinner:} & \quad 1 \text{ carbohydrate, 3 proteins, 2 vegetables, 2 dairy and 3 fats.} \\
\text{Evening snack:} & \quad 2 \text{ fruits and 1 protein.}
\end{align*}
\]

"I'm not sure what this all means," Wanda said.

"That's fine, so I have given you an example of a breakfast you will have," Kate replied taking her tablet. "So, you will have something like porridge oats, a slice of toast, a banana, blueberries, a pot of yoghurt, butter on the toast and some scrambled eggs."

"That sounds a lot."
"It does sound a lot but it's all so your body gets all the nutrients back into your system. You don't have to eat it that way if you don't wish. You can pick what you want to eat out of a list we will provide. You will be monitored at mealtimes by myself to ensure you're actually eating the food, and you'll be weighed once a week. Is that okay?"

Wanda nodded. Doctor Mathieu smiled and turned to Doctor Uzair. "Fareeda?"

"What we do here at Acres is that we have three forms of therapy. We have a one-to-one, group therapy and family therapy," Doctor Uzair explained. "The one-to-one we will do three times a week, group therapy is twice a week and family therapy is once a week. It can be done over the phone or in person."

"I'd rather do it in person," Steve said.

"Good. It's good that she has a support network at home. Speaking of which, visiting hours are between one and three," Doctor Mathieu stated. "So now that we have explained all this to you, we now need to get you down to medical to get your measurements and an overall health check."

Wanda was led down to the medical room where another nurse named Lynda was sitting at a desk holding a file with Wanda's name on. She smiled and handed Wanda a medical gown. "Put this on sweetheart and we'll get started." Wanda stripped out of the baggy dress she was wearing and put on the gown. She sat on the medical bed as Lynda put on a blood pressure cuff. "Okay, you're blood pressure is seventy over forty, which means it's extremely low. Your pulse is also a little faint. Are you feeling dizzy at all?"

"A little lightheaded," Wanda answered.

"Okay, just some general questions. Are you having regular periods?"

Wanda shook her head. "I was underweight before, and then I had a birth control implant. I had it removed and I did get a period, but I haven't had one since."

"I'm going to take a blood test to see if you need extra supplements such as iron because I can see that you might be anaemic." Wanda nodded. She presented her arm, but the nurse found it hard to find a vein. Eventually, blood was drawn, labelled and put aside. "And now for your height and weight." Wanda took a deep breath and walked over to the height chart. She was then asked to stand on the scale. Her heart pounded and then she heard the verdict. "Thirty-eight and a half kilos, and you're one hundred and sixty-three centimetres tall, so your BMI is fourteen point three."

"Is that bad?" Wanda asked.

"A healthy BMI should be between eighteen and twenty-five. You're eleven kilos underweight." Wanda sniffed and she had to sit down. "Sweetheart don't worry about it. The only way is up."

Wanda nodded. She put her dress back on and was allowed out of the medical room. Steve and Doctor Mathieu were waiting on the chairs. "Okay, so now that you're all checked out, Lucy will show you to your room and you can meet your roommate Calliope."

Steve had gone to get Wanda's stuff, so he was carrying a large holdall. It was as though she was packed for a long holiday. Wanda and Steve followed Lucy to a room on the second floor. The room was large and had two single beds on either side. On the bed in the far corner, there was a woman with black hair, possibly Hispanic, reading a book and she looked over when she saw the three people standing in the door.

"Hi Calliope, this is Wanda. She's your new roommate. Wanda, this is Calliope," Lucy stated.
"Okay, we need to go through some rules. No water bottles are allowed overnight. No sharp objects or anything that could be used to hurt yourself. Room searches will be done without letting you know in advance. Lights out at 22:30. Breakfast is between 8:00 and 9:00. Lunch is 13:00 until 14:00 and dinner is 17:00 until 18:30. Are you okay with these rules Wanda?" Wanda nodded. Steve put the bag on the bed and Lucy said, "Okay, I'll leave you to settle."

With Lucy gone, Wanda was unsure what to do. She sat on the bed as Steve began to unpack her bag. She and Calliope glanced at one another, and that was when Wanda noticed the angry red cuts on Calliope's arms.

"So..." Calliope began, "what's wrong with you?" Wanda was a little taken aback by the question from someone she had just met. Even Steve was thrown by the question.

Wanda looked to Steve and said, "I don't know about this Steve."

"It's a little strange I know but once you've gotten into a routine, you'll be okay," Steve replied softly. "I'll come to see you every day, so you have that to look forward to."

Wanda did force a smile. When Steve had unpacked the clothes and Wanda had looked through the books Natasha had packed, Lucy returned and announced, "It's nearly lunchtime. Wanda, have you chosen what you want to eat?"

Wanda looked through the lunch choices Kate had given her. It was mostly sandwiches. "The chicken sandwich, please."

"Okay, if you tie your hair back and roll your sleeves up, you can come down when you are ready."

Wanda was confused by the rules, and she looked to Calliope for answers. The woman answered, "It's to stop people from hiding food."

"Are you ready to go down?" Steve asked taking Wanda's hand.

Wanda took a hairband from her wrist and pulled her hair into a ponytail. "I'm ready."

The dining room was rather busy when they arrived down. There were two kitchens, a brown and a blue. Kate was sitting in the brown kitchen where some of the other patients were staring at the plate in front of them.

"The two kitchens we have are for levels of supervision. Brown means you will be supervised while eating. Blue means you can be trusted to eat on your own. We're only putting you in the brown for a few weeks until you've settled."

"Okay." Wanda sat down and Kate pushed towards a chicken sandwich that had a side of a banana, an apple, yoghurt and what looked to be a carton of chocolate milk. "What's this?"

"It's a protein supplement."

Wanda looked at the food. It seemed a lot for what she would usually eat but nevertheless, she took the sandwich and bit into it. She chewed it thoughtfully and then her brain made the connection that it tasted okay and it was safe.

"I can do this," Wanda said, mostly to herself. She managed to finish the sandwich, the banana, the yoghurt and the protein supplement before her stomach felt full. She could not face the apple, but she did take a couple of bites out in determination.
"Well done Wanda. So, what we will do with the protein supplement is we will give it to you every lunchtime until you've gained enough weight. Right now, I need your choices for dinner. Would a stir fry be okay?

"Yeah." Wanda looked to Steve who smiled at her. "What am I supposed to do now?"

"It's free time. You can go into the recreation room or you can go back to your room."

Wanda decided to go back to the room. Calliope had not returned so she and Steve had some privacy to talk.

"You were right," she commented when she sat on the bed. "This place is nice."

Steve smiled and sat down with her. "I think you're going to do great. It won't be long, I promise." He pressed a kiss to her lips and cupped her cheek. "I love you."

"I love you too."

"Listen, I don't want to go but I should probably leave you to settle on your own." He kissed her forehead and said, "I'll see you tomorrow okay?"

"I'll see you tomorrow."

Steve got off her bed and looked back at her in the doorway. Wanda gave a brave smile and watched as Steve left the room. She worked out the room was at the front of the building, so she walked over to see Steve's car pull away.

"That man of yours is fine," Calliope commented as she walked into the room.

"He's more than just fine. He's perfect," Wanda replied.

"Listen, sorry, if I was a bit upfront earlier. It's a common question when new people come in."

"It's fine. I have bipolar disorder."

"I have obsessive-compulsive disorder, so if I switch the lights on and off twenty times, don't freak out."

"How long have you been here?"

"A month. You're my second roommate."

"Did the first one get better?"

"I'd say so. You sound like you have a lot of shit to deal with."

"You don't want to know."

"Me? My mother is a smotherer who craved attention from anyone. She always had to feel needed."

"Well, when I was nine, my grandmother died from cancer. A year later my parents were killed in a shell attack with my brother and I just barely surviving. I lived on the streets, was manipulated twice by people who claimed to want to change the world. My brother died. I was thrown into an underwater prison strapped to a shock collar that was used to torture me. Then recently, I had no choice but to kill a good friend to save the universe, only for it to be in vain and I lost another friend as a result."
There was a moment's pause before Calliope commented, "Fuck, is it any wonder you turned out the way you did?"

Wanda snorted. "Yeah. I'm actually surprised I did not get it earlier."

"So, now that you've settled in this room, do you want to come down to the rec room?"

Wanda shook her head. "I think I want to take a nap."

"Okay, but if you want to come down, it's the largest room on the second floor."

Wanda smiled softly as she watched Calliope leave the room. She walked over to her bed and drew back the duvet. She changed into something warmer and more comfortable before climbing into the bed and being engulfed by the warmth. She looked to the first book on her bedside table. The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath. Wanda had been meaning to pick it up upon Pepper's suggestion for books by female writers.

She took a deep breath and opened it to read the first lines.

'It was a quiet, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York.'

-0-

The second Steve entered the kitchen, he was bombarded with questions from Natasha, Bruce, Thor, and Rhodes.

"How was she?"

"Did she like it?"

"How did they seem with her?"

"Have they drugged her?"

"Whoa, guys, at least let me have a drink of water before I answer your questions," Steve insisted as he walked to the sink. Once he grabbed a glass, Steve turned and replied, "I think she's going to be fine. She was nervous but she ate an actual meal. They were just explaining how everything is going to work."

"Group therapy and all that?" Natasha asked.

"Loads of therapy. Her first session is tomorrow. I'll head up for lunch tomorrow. I think she will get through. I just need to give her space and time. Rushing won't get us anywhere."

"Good thinking Steve. Okay, why don't you rest?"

"Maybe… I guess I should try to get some work done. Keep my mind occupied."

Steve left the kitchen and Natasha sighed. "I think he hates that it has resorted to this."

"Like we said when Wanda was brought into the ICU: Wanda could have easily tried to hurt herself in the Compound," Bruce pointed out.

"I think he needs help himself," Rhodes commented. "He said so himself that he was caught up in his own shit when Wanda needed him most."
"We all were," Thor pointed out. "Maybe we should look into getting help ourselves."

"It isn't a bad idea," Natasha replied. "We'll have to talk to Steve about it but we should make a deal: while Wanda is in treatment, we should get some help as well."

In the meantime, Steve had entered his room and sat on his bed. The room was so clear and open, but Steve did not like it. Especially without Wanda. He had gotten so used to her being beside him that her being away from him – even if it was the best thing for her – felt so painful.

Sam would have said something to cheer him up. Hell, Bucky would have reassured him. However, they were gone.

He sighed and flopped on the bed. The only reassurance he could take was that Wanda was going to get the help she needed, and that was all that mattered.

Chapter End Notes

So nothing much more to say except go out and see Captain Marvel. It's female-led, set in the 90s, it has Nick Fury, Phil Coulson and an alien cat so there is no excuse.

I may have something up on Friday to mark International Women's Day so stay tuned.

Also, thanks to everyone who left a kudos, as we have now reached 200 kudos on this fic. It is very much appreciated.
Chapter Two

Wanda had survived the first night. She ate most of her dinner, slept through the night with the support of a prescribed estazolam. Before breakfast, she took her lithium and she managed to battle through her hearty breakfast of scrambled eggs, two slices of toast with butter, some strawberries and a banana. Now that she had eaten three decent meals, she was finding that her appetite was returning gradually.

"So, your one-to-one with Doctor Uzair is at 10:00," Kate explained as she made a note in Wanda's file. "Is there anything you would like for your morning snack?"

"I'll have the rocky road cereal bar and an apple please," Wanda answered.

"Good. So, what are you going to do for an hour?"

"I'm not sure. I guess I could sit in the recreation room and watch television."

There were some other patients in the recreation room that were watching the television and Wanda quietly sat down in the chair by the window. She worked out that the show was the reboot of *One Day of a Time*. After one episode, she found herself liking it. While she was not Cuban American, there were some features she could identify with. Her mother was a nurse. Her father was a carpenter whom people could call upon to fix things. She had a brother, and she had a live-in grandmother who helped in the home.

During the second episode, she glanced at the clock. It was 09:55 and she needed to find Doctor Uzair's office. It was on the third floor in an office on the far end of the corridor. Wanda knocked on the door and a voice told her to come in.

When Wanda opened the door, Doctor Uzair was sitting at her desk and gave a small smile to Wanda. "Hi Wanda, how did you sleep last night?"

"Quite well," Wanda answered as she closed the door. She found a seat on the long sofa and waited for Doctor Uzair to sit in the leather chair. "My last therapist had a chair like that."

"Doctor Ahmed?" Wanda nodded. "Yes, she sent your notes over from the sessions you had in 2015. That was when you were initially diagnosed with depression and anxiety, and possibly post-traumatic stress disorder."

"Yeah, that was after The Battle of Sokovia and my brother's death. I took antidepressants and went to therapy until Christmas." Wanda started picking at her nail varnish and waited for a question.

"So where do you want to start?"
"Me? Don't you usually lead the questions?"

"Well, this is more about you and your recovery. You can decide to where to start."

"Where to start? You mean like from my birth?"

"Depends if you could remember that far back."

"Well, I know that when I was born, Pietro came out fine. I was in the breech position and had to spend some time in an incubator. I couldn't really tell you how that felt."

Doctor Uzair smiled, "I wasn't expecting it."

"Actually, the root of my issues goes back to when I was five. Sokovia was under Yugoslavia at the time, and Srebrenica happened in July 1995. I wasn't too sure what had happened, but a few days after the first reports came through, there was an image in a newspaper. It was a man and a young boy together. I think they must have been a father and son. The man had been shot and his head punched to the point where he did not look recognisable. I should not have seen it, but it was sewn into my brain and I had nightmares of the Serb forces coming into our home and taking Dad and Pietro."

"So, what did your parents do?"

"They did not know what to do. They must have thought about sending me to therapy, but the nightmares stopped after a week. My grandmother… She was a Holocaust survivor and I did not know what the Holocaust was when I was five, but what happened in Srebrenica must have reminded her of what she had seen. I forced myself not to sleep because I did not want to see that image again, but my grandmother was awake. We had a chat and I managed to sleep well for a few years."

"And then what happened?"

"My grandmother died of cancer when I was nine." Wanda's lips went thin and she had to take a sip of her water. "My parents really did not know what to do then."

Doctor Uzair noted it down on her pad and asked, "Do you remember the day she died?" Wanda took a deep breath. "I'm sorry if that is a difficult question, but it helps put things into a context."

"No, it's fine. The last time I saw my grandmother was two days before she died."

"Do you think this is the right thing to do Marya?" Django asked as they led Wanda and Pietro down a white corridor. Wanda was confused about what was going on. She thought she was going to see her grandmother, but this hospital was different from the one her grandmother was being treated in.

"I know Django, but they need to say goodbye to her," Marya answered. They then stopped outside the room and Marya bent down to her children's level. Wanda could see the tears brimming in her mother's eyes and she wondered what was going on. Marya took a deep breath and explained, "Okay, Grandma might not look like Grandma when we go into the room. Try not to be scared. Try to talk to her and tell her that you love her."

Pietro took Wanda's hand. He put on a brave, happy face while Wanda remained rather confused. Marya got to her feet and opened the door leading into the hospice room where her mother lay. Pietro led Wanda in, and she had to hold back a scream. Her grandmother looked thin, grey and frail. There was a cannula in her nose, and she was hooked up to machines. She did not look like
their grandmother.

Pietro took a few steps forward, but Wanda could not move. She was stood so still she could almost be a statue. She did not know what to say. She wanted to scream and cry. She wanted her father to pick her up and take her away.

"It's okay Wanda," Django whispered as he tried to nudge her forward.

"No. I can't. I'm scared, Daddy."

"Django, maybe you should take her outside," Marya suggested. Django nodded and lifted Wanda into his arms, rubbing her back to soothe her.

"I didn't go back into the room," Wanda explained. Her eyes were filled with tears and she had to grab a tissue from the box on the coffee table. "My father tried to convince me that if I didn't say goodbye then I would regret it, but I couldn't. But my grandmother wasn't like that. She was grey and I thought that she should be this colour." She choked on the last word and pointed to her face. "I'm sorry."

"There's nothing to be sorry about Wanda. It's good to let your emotions out." When Wanda regained some semblance of composure Doctor Uziar asked, "Do you regret not going in to say goodbye to your grandmother."

Wanda sniffed, "Yeah, because I think that's what finally broke my grandmother. She had one more chance to see me for the last time and I ran out of the room."

"You seemed very close to her."

"You know what I was saying the nightmares stopping after I spoke to my grandmother? She always knew what to say to set things right. However, the more I found out about the Holocaust, the more I realised she understood what it was like to see something that horrific. I worked out about a year ago that she must have had bipolar disorder, as well as my mother. And the only time I remember my mother losing her mind was after my grandmother died. I didn't think of it much until I had been diagnosed."

"How do you feel knowing that?"

"A little scared. I want to have a baby, but I'm scared that my daughter - because I am convinced that if it is genetic then it's on the X-chromosome - will have it in later life. It sounds dramatic."

"No, it doesn't. It's a reasonable fear to have."

-0-

"Sounds like therapy took a lot out of you," Steve commented. He was sitting with Wanda in the brown dining room while Wanda picked at her lunch.

"Yeah," she replied as she ate a piece of bread. "I think it was beneficial though. It helped me make sense of my feelings about my grandmother's death for the first time in nearly twenty years. Can't wait to get to my parents' death."

Wanda sipped her protein drink - today strawberry - and ran her fingers through her hair. "How's everything in the Compound?"
"Not bad. I think everyone is a little aimless. I feel as though I should get them into some training routines, but I haven't led them in a training session for two years."

"I guess it would give them something to focus on."

"The thing is, I don't know what we would even be focusing on."

"I guess there is that."

"I will be able to work it out, but maybe not just yet. I have a couple of things I need to work on before I could even think about working on missions again." Wanda pushed away her plate and gave a soft smile. "You finished?"

"Yeah. I don't know what you want to do."

"We could take a walk around the grounds if you want."

"I'm not sure. I think that it might burn calories."

"Okay, that's fine. Maybe there is a quiet room where we can talk."

"Calliope's family is here so she'll be out our room for an hour." When they came to Wanda's room, Wanda sat near the head of the bed while Steve sat at the foot of the bed. She gave a soft smile and she wrapped her arms around her legs. "You know that our first family therapy session is next week, right?"

"I know," Steve replied. "You seem nervous about it."

"I'm not. I just don't know whether you count as my only family or I need to bring in Nat… Well, it's just Nat now."

"I can ask Nat if she wants to join a session."

"Thank you." Wanda took a deep breath. "I remember when my parents told me that my grandmother was ill. I didn't really get what cancer was, but I remember that her curtains were this horrible dark red. It started as breast cancer that metastasized to her brain. She used to get migraines so she would sleep in her room with the curtains drawn, and the sun would shine through and it would make the room look like blood." Wanda sniffed and her eyes started to well. "It's funny, isn't it? What your brain remembers. I can't remember my eighth birthday all that much, but I can remember blood red curtains."

"I know what you mean. When my mother died, I just remembered the smell of the room. They had bleached the room so much that I felt it burn the inside of my nose."

"You never really speak about her death."

"There isn't much to say: it was rather quick. Though… When she died, she was coughing up so much blood that when they took me to see her, the blood was still on her gown and around her mouth." Wanda could see in Steve's eyes in pain as he recounted this memory. "I think I was lucky though. I was eighteen and she had taught me to look after myself."

"Well, I am not looking forward to recounting my parents' death."

"You seem to be eating well enough."

"I'm eating because I have to, not because I really want to. You know it's a process in my brain: I
need to eat so I can get my periods back so that we could have a baby."

"Wanda, I told you we need to take a break from trying for a baby."

"I know, but it gives me something to aim for."

"And that is good, but we need to ensure you are completely well before we can even consider trying for a baby."

Wanda looked at him and she said plainly, "You're not ready to be a father yet."

Steve sighed, "It's not that. I just don't think I am in the right headspace myself. I just want to be able to think about Sam and Bucky without shaking, which would be really hard if we had a boy."

"Why?"

"It doesn't matter."

"You wanted to name our son James or Samuel, didn't you?"

Steve gave a small sad looking smile. "They were like brothers to me, so I wanted to honour them."

"Milena and James do sound nice together."

"I guess so, but I think we should focus on getting married before we consider trying again."

Wanda looked down at her engagement ring. She guessed that was something more feasible and it was a compromise. "Okay. I'll try not to look like a bony bride."

Steve smiled and leaned over to press a kiss on her lips.

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When Steve arrived back at the Compound, Natasha and Bruce were tucking into Thai food and watching a movie. He felt shattered from the drive to and from the hospital that he could have fallen asleep in the chair right there and then.

"How is she?" Natasha asked.

"I know she's only been there a day, but she actually seems to be a lot better," Steve answered. "She's eating at least, and she had her first therapy session today. It seemed to do her some good. Speaking of which, Wanda has a family therapy session next week and she wants you to be there."

"I thought it meant next-of-kin."

"Well, she sees you like a sister," Bruce pointed out. "I would go because it sounds as though she wants to speak with you. I guess to clear the air since you two… Well, you know."

Natasha's nose, while better than it had been in the last week, had not quite healed from when Wanda had elbowed her in the face. Natasha sighed, "I guess I could be there for her." Natasha looked at Steve's face and asked, "Are you okay Steve?"

"Me? Yeah, just tired," Steve answered. "We had another talk about the baby thing."

"She really does want a baby, doesn't she?" Bruce asked.
"And I do, but when we agreed to try it was for the right reasons. She had been well for the last year and a half. We were stable. We were able to come home. Bucky would have been in our lives. It was almost perfect. But I think since Wakanda, Wanda's been seeing that having a baby as something for her to make up for her mistakes."

"You sure she is seeing it that way?"

"I don't know for certain. I think that she believes that she failed in Wakanda, and she believes that the one thing she can do right is be a mother. So, when that test turned out to be negative, she must have thought that she had failed again. I hope we reached a compromise by focusing on the wedding instead. It'll give her time to recover and it is something she can focus on."

"You really think that would work?" Bruce asked.

"If we divert her attention towards the wedding, it could work," Natasha added. "I'll bring a bridal magazine."

Steve nodded. Wanda needed to refocus her attention, but he knew that she would need help in doing so. More to the point, they needed their own space. The Compound was not home. It was a base. Steve bid Bruce and Natasha goodnight and went to his room and logged onto the computer. He typed 'real estate' into Google and began to search for houses.

Chapter End Notes

In case you may have missed it, I did publish an International Women's Day fic on Friday called 'Don't Tell Me What to Do, and Don't Tell Me What to Say' so check that out. It's literally Wanda and Natasha friendship and talking about women's issue.
Chapter Three

Happy St Patrick's Day, you know since Steve is Irish.

Chapter Three

It was 05:30 when someone knocked on the door. It did snap Wanda out of her sleep, but she was still drowsy from her sleeping medication to physically get out of bed. The door opened and someone walked over to Wanda's bed and gently shook her.

"Wanda. It's weigh day," Leticia, one of the night nurses, said softly. Wanda groaned as she sat up and tried to wake herself up. "Come on sweetheart, you can go back to sleep after you're done."

Wanda managed to swing her legs over the side of the bed and stand up. She grabbed her dressing gown and followed Leticia down to the medical room. She yawned as she entered the room where the morning nurse, Zoe, was waiting with Wanda's chart.

"Hi Wanda, how are you feeling?" Zoe asked.

"Tired," Wanda grumbled.

"Okay, so I am going to take your blood pressure and then weigh you." Wanda sat on the bed as a blood pressure monitor was strapped around her right arm. It beeped and Zoe announced, "80 over 50. Still quite low. Have you been feeling faint at all?"

Wanda shook her head. She jumped off the bed and removed her dressing gown. She looked at the scale and took a deep breath. "Am I good to go on the scale?"

"Whenever you're ready." Wanda stepped on and waited for the number to stabilize and lead to a conclusive result. "Forty-one kilos. That's really good."

"That's seven pounds in a week, right?"

"Yes. Be proud of yourself. You've been working hard." Wanda got off the scale and grabbed her dressing gown. "Be happy. Go back to sleep."

Wanda trudged back up to her room and dived back under the covers. Seven pounds sounded a lot in her head, but it was seven pounds in the right direction. Wanda sighed and tried to go back to sleep. She tossed and turned as but as soon as her brain finally shut down, she felt someone shake her awake again.

"Come on Sleeping Beauty," Calliope said. "Breakfast."

Wanda grumbled as she sat up. "I feel as though they should give people who have to get weighed an extra hour."

"Well, got to be consistent. Come on or else they will be checking you are avoiding going to the dining room."
Wanda took a deep breath and swung her legs over the bed. She grabbed her leggings and sweater, put them on and made her way down to the dining room. Kate was there already, though rather than the smile she usually greeted Wanda with, her face seemed rather serious.

"Morning Wanda," Kate said as Wanda sat down. "How are you feeling about this morning?"

"Okay, I think. Pleased, I guess."

"It is a great achievement and you should be pleased. So, given that you've had a good start, do you think that you can keep it up?" Wanda nodded. "Is there anything you feel may set you back?"

"I don't know."

"Well, we'll see how we go. I know that you have your first family therapy session this morning. How are you feeling about it?"

"I'm not sure. I don't really know what to expect."

"The first one be the hardest. However, just take a deep breath and listen to everything."

Wanda nodded. The session was at 10:00. After breakfast, Wanda sat by the window in the recreation room, waiting for Steve and Natasha to arrive. Calliope noticed her and went over to sit with her. "You know that watching a pot means it will not boil right?"

"You sound like my mother," Wanda commented. "What was your first family therapy session like?"

"Me? Well, I can't say that it was all sunshine and rainbows. I put my family through a lot. Why are you scared of what you may hear?"

"I don't know. Maybe. I did put Steve through a lot of shit, and I put Natasha through a lot." Wanda sighed. "It's not that I don't want to hear it, but I don't want to hear how much I hurt them." It was then Calliope noticed that Wanda had two letters in her hand. "These are what I have been writing for the last week. Apology letters."

"They look pretty bulky."

"I have a lot to apologise for, especially to Steve." Wanda turned her head and that was when she noticed the car pull up. "They're here."

Wanda got out of the window seat and began to walk towards the door. "Wanda, it won't be as bad as you think it will be."

Wanda nodded and walked down the stairs. She opened the door and smiled brightly when she saw Steve. He smiled back as he engulfed her in a hug and kissed the side of her head. "How are you today?"

"Tired," Wanda replied as she pulled out of the hug. "They woke me up at half five this morning to weigh me. I gained seven pounds."

"That's great, and you are looking so much better and brighter."

"You think?"

"Yeah, you have some colour in your cheeks." Steve cupped her face and smiled.

"You do seem brighter Wanda," Natasha stated. "How have you been this last week?"
"The first few days were weird, but I have a good roommate and good doctors," Wanda replied. "So, Doctor Uzair is waiting for us."

The setup of the room was a little different from what it usually was. There was usually only one sofa but there was a second. It made sense. There had to be a space for Steve and Natasha to face Wanda directly if they were to confront her about what happened.

"So, I should lay a few ground rules. Number one: whoever has the tennis ball gets to speak and the others must listen. Number two: keep the conversation respectful. I know these conversations can become emotionally charged but remember that this is about Wanda's recovery. Is that clear?" Doctor Uzair asked. Steve and Natasha nodded. Wanda also nodded and tried not to look incredibly sheepish as she looked between her fiancé and her best friend. "Okay, so who wants to start?"

Wanda offered her hand to take the tennis ball. "This might be unusual, but I have some letters for you two. I don't know what you two are going to say during these sessions, but you need to know that I am genuinely sorry for everything I put you two through." Wanda handed the letters over to Steve and Natasha and instructed, "Don't open them now. Wait until later." Steve smiled and tucked it behind his back. "Fundamentally, I just wanted to apologise to you both for everything that happened when I was sick. I was selfish and mean and neither of you deserved it."

She handed the ball over to Steve. He seemed to have a small reassuring smile on his face that gave Wanda some comfort that he was not going to yell at her. "The thing is Wanda, I took my eye off the ball. I got wrapped up in my own head that I forgot to see if you were okay. And the worst thing is that I knew you were not well, but I didn't think to do anything about it until it was too late."

Wanda presented her hand and Steve threw it back to her. "It wasn't your fault Steve. I should have been more careful. I should have told you what was going on sooner. I don't know what it was but the day I started feeling strange was the day of Sam's memorial. It was on the plane and I could feel my anxiety building up."

Natasha asked the ball and Wanda tossed it to Natasha. "What exactly happened when you were in Sam's room before you had the panic attack?"

Wanda had to take a deep breath. Once the ball was back in her hand, she explained what happened in Sam's room.

Wanda ran her fingers over the CDs and smiled softly as she remembered the singing in the kitchen in Scotland, but then her eyes started to weep at the thought of never having that happy memory again. She sniffed and turned away to look at the wardrobe. She opened the door and she took a sniff of one of Sam's old college sweatshirts. It smelt familiar and safe.

She took a deep breath and closed the door and froze. She blinked and turned around. She looked confused at what she had thought she had just seen. She was not sure what she had seen. She closed her eyes for just a moment, and when she opened them, she realised who she was seeing: Sam.

"I just felt my heart pounding, my lungs blocked up, and I felt nauseous and sweaty. The next thing I remember was falling to the ground and you and Bruce trying to keep me calm." Wanda's hands shook. "Between the plane, the memorial and the hallucination, it just came to ahead."

Wanda sighed and gave Natasha the ball. "I should have noticed that you were not coping."

Wanda asked for the ball. "You weren't coping yourself. That's the thing: we all missed Sam, but I
made it all about myself."

Steve asked for the ball and he stated, "It was your idea to give Bucky a memorial. You did that so I could process my emotions better than I had been doing. I should have been doing that for you." Wanda seemed confused as she attempted to process that Steve may have some part to blame in her breakdown. He could not be blamed. Mostly because she did not want to say Steve was selfish for daring to mourn his friends. "I should have been more attentive, and I'm sorry if I wasn't Doll."

Wanda blinked and looked to Doctor Uzair. The psychologist smiled and took the ball from Steve. "Okay, everyone. What I want you to do now is address how you all feel about Sam's death."

Doctor Uzair gave the ball to Wanda and Wanda sighed, "Well, the first question is why he had to die. Sam had not done anything wrong in his life. I mean, he did fight in Afghanistan and Iraq, but Sam used his experiences to do good in the world. I don't understand why he had to go. It's funny because my grandmother lost her faith in God when she was in Bergen-Belsen. I remember one night - Yom HaShoah - my mother asked about this. We had my other grandfather around. He'd survived Auschwitz, and a theological debate arose: why did God allow so many people to die in such an evil way. Easy topic right. My grandfather, who was more Haredi than my father was, suggested loads of theories. He even told the story of Job - a man whose faith God tested by doing shitty things to him. It was then that my Baka called him out and said, 'If the Holocaust was a test of faith, then I clearly failed'. I honestly do not think it was a test of faith. I just think humans are capable of being pure evil. And I think I answered my own question: Thanos is pure fucking evil. The first vision I had of Thanos was when he destroyed a place called Xandar. I just remember how rational Thanos was about his plan. That was what scared me the most. It wasn't the fact he wanted to eradicate half the universe; it was the fact he had no doubts about doing so."

Doctor Uzair grabbed the ball and said, "So you could sense Thanos' arrival, Wanda?"

Wanda nodded. When she got the ball back, she said, "We knew he was coming but we still failed, and Sam's now dead."

"Is that why you commonly see Sam in your hallucinations, because you feel guilty that you could not stop his death?"

"It's not just that. It's that fact that we managed to do it, only for it to be in vain anyway. So instead of Vision sacrificing his life to save the universe, he was brought back to life, his head crushed, and they all died for nothing." Wanda began to physically shake, and Steve had to go over to wrap his arm around her. "The reason I hallucinated Sam was that he was the most recent person I cared about to die. I worked it out when I was in the Avengers Tower and I spoke to Vision."

"Okay, so what was that conversation about?"

"He was telling me that if I died then everyone would miss me. Actually, that was exactly what everyone else was saying."

"Can you pass the ball to Steve, Wanda?" Wanda passed the ball to Steve. "From your description of that night, you and Wanda had a conversation over the phone. Could you tell me what Wanda said to you?"

Steve's breath hitched and Wanda knew what he was going to say without even reading his mind. "She said that I deserved someone better than her."

"And how did that make you feel Steve?"
"Terrified because I thought she was going to hurt herself." Wanda's eyes brimmed with tears and she buried her head in her lap. "I thought she was going to kill herself."

"Wanda," Doctor Uzair said softly as she sat on the coffee table in front of Wanda, "Did you try to commit suicide that night?"

"Yeah," Wanda whispered.

"Could you talk me through your thought process?"

"That's the thing: I was so out of it that I don't know what I was thinking. I think I was just so tired of everything and feeling like I was a burden that I just thought everyone's life would be better if I was dead. I just remember feeling so hot… that was why I stood outside in just a t-shirt and leggings."

"And the alcohol?"

"I just wanted to forget everything. I just wanted it all to stop. I couldn't see a way out. My head was telling me that there was, but I didn't believe it." Steve had his arms wrapped around Wanda and he pressed his lip to the top of her head. His heart broke for Wanda and all he wanted to do was whisk her away to a place where she would be able to forget about the world. "Do you hate me, Steve?"

"Of course not," he replied. "I was just so scared."

"I'm sorry."

"I know. We can get through this though."

Steve looked at Natasha. She got out of her seat and sat beside Wanda. She looked to Steve who handed her the ball.

"The thing is Wanda, we know that wasn't the first time," Natasha said taking Wanda's hand. "We know that you tried to do it after Pietro died."

"Wanda, could you talk me through that?" Doctor Uzair asked.

Wanda barely lifted her head and she had to swallow the hard bile in her throat. "When… When Pietro died, I felt half my body disappear. My left arm and leg went numb. And then I felt so much rage that I went out to find Ultron. I found him on a derailed train, I pulled out his heart and crushed it. He told me that I would die once the button had been pressed. I didn't care because I already died that day anyway. My soul was gone. It was just a case of getting rid of the body. The city started falling and I was so close…"

"But you were saved at the last second?"

"Vision came to save me. I don't think he realised that I wanted to die. When we landed, I pushed him away and screamed that he should have left me there. I think if I did hurt his feelings, he hid it well. He looked more confused. After that, I found a bottle of whiskey and sat in the morgue hoping that the booze would do it. But then Steve found me." Steve sighed and rubbed his face. If he had not been insistent, Wanda could have died that night. "I thought back to that night when I was on the balcony. I didn't want to be a burden anymore."

"You were never a burden Wanda," Natasha said softly. "You were frustrating at times, but never a burden."

"I just caused so much pain. I felt worthless, and that the world would be better if I was dead."
"You have been through so much and I don't blame you for going as low as you did. We can get past this. You are stronger than you seem. That night will be a distant memory."

Wanda lifted her head. Her eyes were brimmed with tears, but she nodded. Natasha was right. Steve was right. She could get past this.

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Steve had to go straight to his room when he and Natasha arrived back at the Compound. He needed a moment just to process everything that had happened that day, but it relieved him to know Wanda was improving. He sat at his desk and opened his e-mails. Nothing much. Just some e-mails from places where he had bought things.

He dug into his jacket pocket and pulled out the letter Wanda had given him before their session. Steve opened the envelope and read every word carefully. He had to admire Wanda's handwriting. It was always quite big – rather like a child. He knew English was not her native language so she probably was not as fluent when handwriting compared to her typing skills, hence why it had taken her five whole pages to write this note.

Steve.

I am writing this letter to tell you how sorry I am for everything I did. I hurt you in ways that no person should. I knew the risks of not taking my medication, but I did not, and... well, you know the rest. I sought comfort in a bottle when I could have taken support in you. You have always been there for me in my darkest moments.

You were the first person I met after Pietro and I ran from HYDRA. You did not treat us like criminals. You treated us with more human dignity than we deserved. You tried to make us see that Ultron did not have our best interests, and I was stubborn because I was blinded by my hate.

And then Pietro died, and you took care of me. You made sure that I slept in a bed. You made sure I was not alone. And even after, you were always there for me, even in times where I felt as though I did not deserve it.

When we arrived in Wakanda, I was a shell. I could not process anything and I can't remember when I felt my mind slipping, but I think it was the day I cut my hair. When I showed you what I had done, you remained so calm and you instantly knew what to do. I needed someone like you to help me. You always knew what to do to help me.

It makes me so glad that I did not lose you because I would have broken entirely. Or a lot sooner than I did. I love you so much that you mean so much more to me than gold, silver or any other precious metal. I wish there were more men – no people like you.

There is a phrase in The Zohar that I love and I think it applies to us: .

It means: a husband and wife are one soul, separated only through their descent to this world. When they are married, they are reunited again. I know we may have been born over seventy years apart, but we have too much-shared life experience and too much love for one another for it not to be true.

And it is the reason why I hate myself for reaching as low as I did. I just could not see a way out of it. The hallucinations. The guilt. I just wanted it all to stop. I feel so selfish for not considering how you would have felt if I had gone. While you mean a lot to me, I forget how much I mean to you. Peggy meant a lot to you and I remember how broken you were when she died. Losing another
woman you loved, especially to suicide… I hate myself for daring to inflict that on you.

I am going to get better Steven Grant Rogers. I am going to beat this and get better.

I love you.

Yours always,
Wanda. Xxx

Steve sniffed and wiped the tears forming in his eyes and the remnants of snot forming on the end of his nostrils. This was such a deeply personal letter that Wanda had written to him. She had out her heart on her sleeve and explained how he had been her rock. He was right though. He should have been there for her. That said, she was also right: he had lost two of his best friends, and he had not made an effort to process his own grief to be able to make sure Wanda was okay.

If Wanda was getting help, he should get help as well. He was about to type in grief support groups when an email appeared in his inbox. It was a real estate agent who was letting him know about a house that had just been put on the market.

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It was later that day when Wanda braved going down to the recreation room. She had spent the rest of the day in her room, aside from lunch when Steve encouraged her down to the kitchen. She did well with her lunch all things considered but it was hard. After Steve and Natasha left, Wanda took a nap. It was not easy, and she found that she needed the radio on to help distract her mind.

When she entered the recreation room, Wanda saw the other patients rubbing hair dye into each other's hair.

"What's going on?" Wanda asked.

"Oh, we do this every few weeks," one of the girls answered. "Do you want to join us?"

"I'm okay. I might just read." Wanda then looked at the selection of box dyes and pondered for a moment. She lifted the dirty blonde end of her hair and then asked, "Actually, do you have a dark brown?"
Chapter Four

A month after she arrived at Acres, Wanda felt a cramp in her lower stomach. It was a dull ache, but it felt familiar. She sat up and pulled her duvet off. There it was: a small red patch on the sheets. Wanda knew she had to report this to the nurse, so she got out of bed. The procedure for women whose periods had come back was quite intense. They would have to go under observation for three days and receive sanitary pads that would be marked. Three days later, Wanda's period was verified to be genuine and Doctor Mathieu called Wanda into her office.

"Well, the fact your periods have returned is great news. It means you are responding to your treatment and you can be moved to the blue kitchen where your supervision will be lifted," Doctor Mathieu commented. "So, what we will do is get you in with a gynaecologist."

"Okay?" Wanda said unsure where this was going.

"Since you have had only two periods since you were seventeen, I thought it might be best to see if you may encounter fertility problems, and if you do, we can help you through it."

Wanda had not even contemplated that she could have any issues with her ability to have children, but she knew that what Doctor Mathieu was saying made sense. Just because she had a period, it did not mean she could automatically have a baby. She had not really thought about having a baby since her conversation with Steve. Focusing on the wedding had been a useful distraction.

"Are you okay with this Wanda?" Doctor Mathieu asked.

"I think so."

"Well, your appointment is tomorrow. Lucy will accompany you and you can bring Steve for support. Doctor Uzair will be free the rest of the afternoon if you want to speak with her." The doctor could see some nerves in the younger woman's face, and she gave a soft smile. "Don't panic. It will all work out."

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Wanda felt awkward with her legs hiked up and spread apart by the stirrups with only a paper towel covering her dignity. Lucy was standing in the corner of the room observing Wanda as they waited for the gynaecologist to enter. Steve had not arrived, and Wanda was getting increasingly nervous.

"You'd think they would be quicker once the woman was in the stirrups," Wanda commented.

"Probably a baby being delivered. Babies don't tend to rigid schedules," Lucy replied.

At that point, Steve came bursting through the door, "Sorry Doll. The traffic was awful." He pressed a kiss to her lips. "Have we started?"

"No. They just put me in these things, but I am convinced they have forgotten me," Wanda replied. "So, how is everything in the Compound?"

"Nothing much to say. Though I am convinced Rocket is eating all the food."

"You do know Thor has a bottomless stomach, right?"
"Okay, they are both eating us out of house and home." Steve gave an amused smile. "How are you feeling?"

"Nervous. Mostly about the result."

"Hey, we will get through whatever they tell us."

Wanda nodded. Just then, the gynaecologist came in with a warm smile on her face. "Hi, Wanda. I'm Doctor Fry. You feeling comfortable?"

"Within reason," Wanda replied. Wanda sighed and relaxed as Doctor Fry inserted a vaginal ultrasound into her. Steve gripped her hand as the doctor examined Wanda's reproductive organs. "Is everything okay?"

"Your uterus is fine. It's not hostile which is good. It means you could maintain a pregnancy."

"But?"

"You're twenty-nine this year, right?" Wanda nodded. "You have fewer ovarian follicles than I would expect for a woman your age."

"What does that mean?" Steve asked.

"Let's get Wanda out of the stirrups so we could sit and talk." Once Wanda had put her knickers and jeans back on, she sat next to Steve in the chair by the desk. Doctor Fry poured out some wrapped candies onto the desk and explained, "So each of these sweets represents the follicles a woman should have in their ovaries. When puberty begins, a woman should have about four hundred thousand eggs. The amount of these decrease as a woman gets older and you're at the age when the loss of eggs increases quite rapidly. You can't get those eggs back. So, if these candies represent one thousand follicles each, the older you get," Doctor Fry moved half the sweets aside, "the rate of eggs decreases rapidly."

"So, does that mean I won't be able to get pregnant?" Wanda asked.

"Not necessarily. You probably could get pregnant on your own, but it might be the case where you need extra help such as IVF."

"But if I want to become pregnant in the next year, it would mean I would have to come off my lithium and that would increase the risk of another relapse."

"It is something that you really have to work out with the right advice and support. I think you both have to consider the pros and cons of either trying to become pregnant while in the first year of recovery or waiting a year."

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Later, both Wanda and Steve were sat on Doctor Uzair's sofa. Doctor Mathieu had joined them given the results of the appointment. Neither Steve nor Wanda knew what to say. They had made an agreement not to try for a baby given the amount of stress that it had put Wanda through, but given that they had just been told that Wanda had fewer follicles than she should do, they needed to talk it out with people who could give the right advice.

"How are you feeling about the results Wanda?" Doctor Uzair asked.

"Conflicted," Wanda replied. "Part of me wants a baby knowing I might not have a lot of time left,
but on the other hand, I know that coming off the lithium will be a massive risk, especially given that pregnancy is not the most ideal thing for a woman with bipolar disorder."

"It does appear that you have a complicated decision to make. What is your heart telling you?"

"Take the chance while you still can, but Steve is right. We're not in the mindset to be able to raise a child."

"You have come a long way since you arrived Wanda," Doctor Mathieu stated. "And you are right to say that coming off your lithium is a huge risk after a severe episode of mania where you attempted suicide. However, with the lithium, there are times that are less risky than others, and that is after the twelve-week appointment. If you take it during the first three months, the main risk is heart defects and that affects only one in two thousand births. I am going, to be honest, given Steve's DNA, you might be among the lucky ones."

Wanda looked at Steve and tried to gauge what he was thinking. It seemed he was pondering all the information that had been given and it seemed a lot to take in. On the one hand, Wanda was right in saying that their window was small, but there were risks and Steve wanted to put his fiancée's welfare above everything.

"Steve," Wanda said softly.

"I don't know. I think I need to really think about it. I mean there are other options we can consider. Adoption is one." Wanda saw Steve's point and agreed it was a viable option. "I can't lose you, Wanda. I nearly lost you and I don't want you slipping back to where you were a month ago."

Wanda took a deep breath and ran her fingers through her dark roots. "I know. Maybe we should sleep on it."

"I think it might be a good idea," Steve said.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Natasha asked when she knocked on Steve's door. "How did the appointment go?"

"Well, Wanda has fewer ovarian follicles than a twenty-eight-year-old woman should have. It means that we might not have much time until we won't be able to have children," Steve answered.

"Huh… So not great. And I guess that led to some conversations about her medication."

"Yeah. The thing is that she can't take it in the first three months of pregnancy, but she should be fine afterwards, and with my DNA, the baby should not suffer any defects."

"So, what's the problem?" Steve sat back and sighed. "It isn't just about Wanda is it?"

"It just feels weird to be talking about this when Sam and Bucky have not been dead for three months. I'm just scared that I will forget them if I move on too quickly."

"Well, maybe consider that they would not want you to harp on the past. They would want you to be happy. No one is saying have a baby now. You could suggest harvesting eggs and freezing them until you are both ready. Nothing is off the record if there is a chance, she can maintain a pregnancy."

Natasha was just about to leave when Steve asked, "Do you wish you could have children?"
Natasha tensed and turned towards him. "I was medically assaulted. Someone strapped me down to a chair and removed my uterus without my consent. It was not a medical necessity; it was so it would make me a better killer. And I have convinced myself for so long that I would have been a terrible mother anyway. However, I don't even have the option to find out for myself."

Once Natasha left, Steve looked back at his computer and thought carefully about what Natasha had just told him. It seemed she was telling him that he and Wanda had an option that they should not take for granted. Eventually, he lifted his fingers and started typing.

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In the meantime, Wanda was reading a book, but her eyes had kept flickering over the same line, and she was not taking anything in. The results of her ultrasound were playing on her mind. She was too conflicted over it to even think of what she wanted to do.

"You know if you hit the book against your head, it should all go in," Calliope commented. Wanda put the book on her stomach and gave a sad smile. "So how did it all go?"

"I may have a narrower window than I thought but I can't risk coming off my medication. Well, I could and go back on it after twelve weeks, but I think the first three months are the riskiest. What if I lost the baby and I go on a downward spiral again?"

"There is that, or you could stop worrying about everything because that is what is going to stress you out."

"I guess that is a point."

"A friend of mine has bipolar disorder and she had her first child within the first year of her diagnosis. She got support through counselling and she tried to eat healthily and do pregnancy yoga. Medication is not the be all and end all."

"But they have kept me stable."

"I think you need to remember that one size does not always fit. Think about it. You're not alone in this."

Wanda tapped her fingers against her hand and nodded. "I'll think about it."

-o-

"I actually slept okay last night all things considered," Wanda said to Steve as they walked through the gardens.

"That's good," Steve replied lacing his fingers with hers.

"Admittedly, the sleeping meds help." Steve snorted. Eventually, they came to a bench and the sat down. "So, I have given some thought to what we talked about yesterday. If I come off the meds, it will only be a brief period and I looked into some medication that I can take, and I can take an antipsychotic so that should stop the hallucinations. I can also see a counsellor. You know, just so that I have a way of dealing with my emotions."

"Natasha and I had a talk yesterday, and what she told me to make sense. You know when I said that I was not over Bucky and Sam… I am just scared that if I dared tried to move on then I would forget them."
"I know the feeling, and I am not trying to forget them. However, when I was deep in my psychosis, Sam and I had a conversation. I said that I wasn't sure I could move on and he said I would be able to, just as long as I remembered the good times."

"Well, we did manage to clear out his room. That was not easy, but it was the right thing to do. I did find something interesting. In his duffle, he had a USB stick, and on that, he had a playlist of music called 'Wanda and Steve Wedding'."

"Anything good on there?"

"Yeah, they were all good. It shows that he would have wanted us to be happy. So, with all that considered, if you want to try for a baby then I think we should go for it. I have been doing some digging myself. There is a lot of testimony from women who went on to have children without problems. However, I did look into IVF so if you did want to wait, that could be a viable option for us"

"Maybe… Maybe we could do that. We could harvest some eggs and freeze them, and maybe use them as a backup if we don't conceive within a year."

Steve smiled and pressed a kiss to her lips. "That sounds a fair deal."

"However, I think we need to set a wedding date before we can even think about a baby."

"How soon will it be until you can be checked out?"

"I need to gain five more kilos, and that could take another month. However, the last year or so has taught me that life is too short. So, if I can aim to get out by the start of May, how does 31st May sound?"

"You sure you be discharged by then?"

"I think now that I have gotten to the root of my problems, I think it is possible."

"Okay, 31st May."
Chapter Five

For the first time since she arrived at Acres, Wanda had been granted a day release. It meant she could leave the hospital for a few hours without the supervision of the staff to see how she would cope outside of the restrictions of the facility. Steve had opted to take her out for some lunch and wedding dress shopping. He usually was a stickler for tradition but Wanda wanted him to be involved.

Steve leaned against the car as he watched Wanda walk out the entrance. His heart melted. She looked like her old self. While she was still thinner than she was before they arrived home, the sparkle was back in her eyes and her movements had the grace and joy of when they were in the UK.

Wanda smiled brightly as she leaned up to kiss him. "I have been looking forward to this for days."

"Me too," he replied as he pulled her in for a hug. "What time do you have to be back here?"

"16:00. Plenty of time."

They drove to Poughkeepsie and they found a little organic food shop and café. They did homemade pasta with a variety of meats, vegetables and sauces. They had adapted her meal plan so she was able to include more vegetables. Wanda looked up at the menu and decided she was going to order pappardelle with chorizo and kale.

"How are you finding your bereavement group?" she asked as she took a bite of her lunch.

"Well, they give out free doughnuts," he replied with a small laugh. "The first session was hard. Just hearing all these stories of people who had lost their families – some of them were the only survivors. But I managed to say my piece yesterday. I honestly feel a lot better for it. I'm still going to go because I think it helps to have that space to open up."

"You know the first time I went to group therapy, I thought I would hate it. Just the idea of sitting in a circle and hearing people spewing everything into open and sometimes it feels so mundane. But then I sat in the circle and realised that people have damaged backgrounds that lead to major problems. Much like myself."

"Well, the good thing about damaged people is that they heal." Steve leaned in pressed a kiss on her forehead. "I mean look at you. You are a different person to the person you were last month."

"So are you. Not that you were completely different but I know when you have a more optimistic outlook and a pessimistic one."

"Which one am I?"

"Definitely the former. Has something changed?"

"Well, you're better. I have a wedding to plan. We're going to try for a baby. Life is good."
"We just need a house."

Wanda turned back to her lunch. Steve had to smile to himself. Before he had arrived at Wanda's gynaecological appointment, he had signed a deal for a house in Brooklyn. For the last few weeks, he had been painting, decorating and putting furniture into their new house. He had not told Wanda as he wanted to leave it as a surprise for her for when she was allowed home.

Once Wanda had finished eating her meal, they went over to a clothes store to try on some dresses. Since they were not planning on having a traditional wedding, Wanda was looking for something simple. They raided the sales rack for dresses that would be her size in a month. She found a white dress, she found a pale pink and finally a cream dress.

Steve waited while Wanda tried the dresses on to show him. She emerged in the white dress. It was nice. It came down to the top of her calves and had a black lace strip down the middle. She did look beautiful in it, but for some reason, Steve did not like the dress. Wanda did not seem too convinced either.

"I just don't suit white," she said.

"You do, but whenever I see you in white I think of your nightdresses," he replied.

"How do you know? You never saw me in them for long enough." She gave a coy smile and returned to the dressing room. Steve chuckled. This was what they were like when they were in the UK: playful, loved up, happy. Wanda emerged from the dressing room with the pink dress on and Steve smiled. "What do you think?"

Steve took a glance at the soft pink dress. It was mostly lace and it came just above her knee. There was something so pretty about its simplicity, and all Steve could say was, "It's perfect."

"You really think so?" Wanda asked.

"It looks more you. Nothing artificial. No frills." Steve stood up and put his hands on her waist. "That's why I fell for you in the first place."

Wanda leaned up and pressed a kiss to his lips. "It is the best dress. I really love this one. It's perfect. Today has been..."

"Perfect."

"More than anything."

-0-

Wanda had worked through a lot of things with Doctor Uzair in the month and a half since she arrived at Acres. The deaths of her family, Vision and Sam. The events that lead to her breakdown and her feelings for the future. What she had not really addressed was her alcohol addiction. At first, Wanda had linked the alcohol with her bipolar disorder, but the more she had thought about it, the more she realised that her issues with alcohol had been long-standing.

"When was your first drink, Wanda?" Doctor Uzair asked.

"When I was fifteen," Wanda replied. "Pietro and I were with our last foster placement. They had a son, Novak. He was a little older, but I developed a crush on him. One night... I woke up and could not get back to sleep. I found Novak sitting in the living room, drinking whiskey and I just joined him. I remember it tasting horrible, but it did take the edge off. The next thing I remember is my
pyjamas were on the floor and Novak over me and trusting inside me. It felt weird because it didn't feel like I was in my own body."

"You lost your virginity when you were fifteen?"

"Yeah. It sounds bad but the only other person I have had sex with was Steve and that was not until over ten years later."

"How old was Novak?"

"Eighteen... The age of consent is fourteen in Sokovia so we hadn't done anything illegal."

"Well, that's good to know, however you were a vulnerable young girl who had been drinking."

Wanda vaguely remembered her interaction with Steve when she had drunkenly suggested he should have sex with her following Pietro's death. "He may have taken advantage even if you gave consent."

"You know some things are beginning to make sense. After Pietro's death... Steve found me drinking in the morgue and I asked him if he wanted to fuck me. He said that I was extremely vulnerable, and he did not want to take advantage."

"The first time a person has sex, it can be a very formative experience. You, being quite young, probably perceived sex with Novak as quite normal. If this is going a step too far, tell me, but how does your sex life with Steve compare?"

Wanda snorted, "Well sex while sober is great. I think the difference was that I am genuinely in love with Steve and he is with me. Novak was nothing more than a crush that resulted in losing my virginity."

"So, after that night, were there any other instances where you drank alcohol?"

"Um… whenever I went into some hostels, someone would offer a drink and I would always take it. It took a lot of the edge off you see. I struggled to sleep and often the alcohol would help. I never actually dependent on it…"

"Until your brother's death?"

"Well, you know what happened the day he died. What I neglected to say was that drinking did not stop after that night. It went on for months. Just any opportunity. If it was a group dinner and there was rosé wine, I would be the only one who would drink it, and it was a whole bottle. Then there was whiskey."

"Whiskey seems to be your go to."

"Not sure why. I guess it is nostalgia. The point is that if there was an opportunity to drink, I took it because it meant that I could forget everything. That lasted until about Thanksgiving. I think that was the point where I had an epiphany that if I socialised, then I might be happier. And it did work. I only drank occasionally after that."

"And after the Raft?"

"See that is the weird thing. I didn't drink. I think my depression was that bad that physically getting out of bed was torture and I was diagnosed just as my manic episode began so I never got a chance to drink alcohol. Literally, the first time I drank any alcohol in eighteen months was in Sam's bedroom."
"So, we gave you diazepam for the withdrawal symptoms when you arrived, and we weaned you off after a few weeks. How are you feeling now?"

"I think that I will be okay. I think now that my moods have stabilized, I won't have any trouble with alcohol. I'll have a support network who want me to recover."

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May arrived and Wanda was used to being woken up in the early hours of the morning and having her vitals taken. It seemed that the better she was getting, the less she struggled to get out. She had been weaned off the sleeping tablets, aripiprazole and diazepam and her dose of lithium had been slightly lowered. She felt like herself again and that was a huge relief.

"Okay, hopefully, today will be the day," Zoe said as she took Wanda's blood pressure. She smiled when the numbers flashed. "One-ten over seventy. Perfect." Wanda jumped off the bed and onto the scales. Fifty kilos on the dot. She had hit her target. Zoe grinned and told Wanda, "Well done. You've done so well."

Wanda felt so proud of herself for hitting her target weight. When she arrived at Acres, she felt as though she never would get to this point. Given how low she had fallen, she never thought she could get back on her feet, but she had.

Later she was called for a meeting with Doctor Mathieu. The doctor had a bunch of notes from what looked to be from Doctor Uzair and Kate. Wanda felt some nerves about what was going to be said and she tapped her fingers against the back of her hand.

The doctor looked up and smiled softly. "So, Wanda, how are you feeling?"

"Well," Wanda answered. "Happy that I have hit my target. I feel so much calmer. I feel as though I have some hope for the future."

"Well, Doctor Uzair has been impressed with your progress. You've responded well to the sessions and I can see in the way you present yourself that you are better in yourself. When you arrived, you appeared withdrawn, had little hope and scared of your own shadow. You were extremely thin, and you looked unwell. Now you look healthy, you are more confident, and you can talk about what you want with doubting it could happen."

"So, what does all this mean?"

"I think since you have a support network at home, we can consider arranging for you to be discharged. We can move you to a transition room for the next week, which will give you some more independence. This is just to see how you go outside the clinic's rules. You do have a support network at home, and we can arrange outpatient treatment so that you don't jump without a net."

Wanda nodded. Inside she felt all giddy and she wanted to jump up and down being able to be at home with Steve. She could not wait to tell him. She ran up to her room with the biggest smile on her face.

"Okay, what are you on and can I have some?" Calliope asked.

"They are making arrangements for me to leave," Wanda replied. "They are moving me to a transition room tomorrow."

"Congratulations." While the tone did seem pleased for Wanda, Wanda sensed that Calliope was not too happy. "It's a good thing. You've done really well."
"But?"

"Well, you are my second roommate to be discharged. I'm not exactly getting pushed despite being here longer than you have."

"You'll get there. If I can do it given the state I was in when I arrived, you can do it."

"The thing is Wanda, you have a supporting family."

Wanda sat at the foot of her bed and asked, "Do you want to go home?"

"Of course I do."

"I'm just wondering if you are scared to leave this place because of the friendships you have formed, and they are closer than your actual family."

Calliope sighed, "I failed a home visit. All it took was some snide comment from my mother and I did this. Calliope lifted the sleeve of her left arm and showed the scabbed over cuts. "So, I am a little worried that as soon as I am discharged, I'll instantly slip back into my old ways."

"Maybe you should think about cutting her out. If someone is being abusive and damaging to your mental health, cut them out."

"Problem is that I am financially dependent on her. Can't move out until I get a job and I can't get a job until I leave here. I guess I could move to my father's. He lives in San Francisco so it could be a fresh start."

"I would take it."

"What happened to the shell of a person who came in two months ago?" Calliope asked.

"I think she's going to be all right." Wanda smiled and the two women hugged. "My friend Sam always used to play 'Alright' by Kendrick Lamar during tough times. However, I think I may have found a new song to mark the future."

Wanda went over to her phone and turned on Spotify. After a few seconds, the sound of Macklemore rapping blared out and then the chorus began, 'I feel glorious, glorious. Got a chance to start again. I was born for this, born for this. It's who I am, how could I forget? I made it through the darkest part of the night, And now I see the sunrise. Now I feel glorious, glorious, I feel glorious, glorious. '

The two women sang along at the top of their lungs and danced around the room. A few of the other patients looked in wondering if there was a party going on, but they saw the joy in the room and could not resist joining in on the fun.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, less than a month until Avengers: Endgame, or watch as Sophie dies inside. Just waiting on those damn midnight release tickets.

Oh, and we're doing Saturday updates because it's easier for everyone.
Chapter Six

After a week in the transition ward, Wanda was declared well enough to be discharged from Acres Recovery Hospital. It was clear that she was no longer a danger to herself and her moods were stable enough that she could live a normal life. As she brushed her hair, Wanda looked in the mirror. Her cheeks were fuller, her eyes were sparkling, and she looked like she was before they had gone on the run. Her optimism for the future was so much stronger than it had been in years. She had Steve. She had a chance to make a great life for herself. No pressure of saving the world. No pressure of being on the run. No pressure of guilt or loneliness. Just a path of hope, dreams and love.

Steve was due to collect her at 11:00. It was enough time to ensure she had everything packed and to say goodbye. She had her outpatient plan. She would continue to have therapy once a week, she had her prescription for lithium carbonate and a food diary for the next few weeks, so she kept a track of what she was eating. She felt ready. All she wanted was to be home with Steve, and with her friends.

There was a knock on the door and Wanda immediately ran to grab it. As soon as she opened the door, she launched into Steve's arms. Steve chuckled and kissed the side of her head.

"I take it you want to leave," he said putting her down on the ground.

"I just want to be with you," Wanda replied. "Home."

Steve smiled and pressed a kiss to her lips. He took her hand and then her suitcase as they went to the reception to check Wanda out. Susan was there and gave Wanda a great big smile as Wanda signed the forms.

"I bet you'll be glad once you are home," Susan commented. "You're going to do well, I can tell."

"Thank you, Susan," Wanda replied.

She took one last look at the hallway and followed Steve out. Once outside, she took another look up to her old bedroom window. Calliope was sitting at the window and Wanda waved goodbye with a smile on her face. She had promised to write once she had settled back in the Compound. However, ten minutes into the journey, Steve turned right rather than left towards the Compound.

"Hold on," Wanda said looking confused. "Isn't the Compound the other way?"

"We're not going to the Compound," Steve replied.

"Then where are we going?"

Wanda frowned as they entered what looked to be The Bronx. Then they drove through Manhattan. They then arrived at the Brooklyn Bridge, and Wanda was starting to wonder why Steve was bringing her to his birthplace. Steve pulled up outside a house about ten minutes after they had left the bridge. Wanda looked at the front of it. It was a terraced red brick house with a stone staircase that led to a white door. She turned back to Steve, who smiled at the look of confusion on her face.

"Welcome home," he said.
"You bought us a house?" Wanda asked.

"Well, I thought we could do with our own space and it could be a fresh start. You want to see it?"

Wanda smiled and nodded. Steve gave her the key and she got out of the car and walked up the stairs as Steve grabbed her suitcase from the trunk. Wanda put the key into the hole and opened the front door. Her eyes went wide. The living room was a soft apple green with a grey stone fireplace and two yellow couches facing a widescreen television. She moved further into the house to an enchanted Eden green coloured kitchen.

"I thought I would use calming colours. Make it seem more like a relaxing environment," Steve explained.

"I thought you couldn't afford a house in Brooklyn," Wanda commented.

"Well, I had to get a loan. It was cheaper than renting an apartment in the long run. Do you like it?"

"You've done a spectacular job with it." Her hand wandered over the granite-look countertop. "Is there anything else?"

Steve nodded and took Wanda's hand. He led her up the stairs, firstly to the bathroom painted ocean ripple blue with a bath big enough for the two of them. He then took them to their bedroom. It was a mixture of red and white with a white duvet cover that was decorated in red and black flowers. After two months of sleeping in a single bed, she was grateful to be able to share the same bed with Steve again and feel the security and warmth of his arms. Then a room at the end of the hallway. White-coated wall, a white crib rested in the corner of the room and a white wardrobe on the other end.

"It's not done, but it's a start at least," Steve said. "It'll be ready for when we have a baby."

Wanda looked over the crib. It was the same one she had bought when she thought she was pregnant in the midst of her mania. It seemed like a long time ago and she wondered whether she was okay with the crib being there given that it was linked to the straw that led to her breakdown. However, it looked beautiful now it had been set up. The room was not done, but they had more than enough time. She had ideas for this room, whether their baby turned out to be a boy or a girl.

She smiled and walked over to kiss Steve. "One day," she whispered. "But we need to be married first."

"I know. Fifteen days." Steve brushed the hair out her eyes and kissed her forehead. "Where do you want to start?"

"Well, I think we're going to need a little bit of help. I know we have the dress but there are some major details we need to organise. How about we invite everyone for dinner but order pizza?"

"You sure you want loads of people?"

"I haven't seen anyone aside from you and Nat in two months. I think I am ready."

Steve smiled and kissed her head. "Okay, I'll call Nat and hopefully everyone should come over. 17:00?"

"17:00."
Later that afternoon, Wanda had laid out some nibbles on the oak coffee table and just as she had fluffed up a pillow for the fifth time, the doorbell rang. She took a deep breath and opened the front door.

"Sorry, I was looking for the Maximoff-Rogers house," Natasha commented. Wanda smiled and the two women hugged. Natasha had dyed her hair red again and it seemed everything was back to normal. "God, you look so well."

"You look great Wanda," Bruce added. "Glad to be home?"

"Yeah, and this was a great surprise," Wanda replied.

She let Natasha and Bruce in. Thor came into view and gave her the biggest bear hug in the world. "It seems as though the hospital has done wonders on you," he commented.

"Well, I wouldn't worry about me running away again anytime soon," she replied. Once Thor was into the living room, she saw Rhodes walk from the car. "Hey, Rhodey."

"Hey Wanda," he replied.

"Listen, I said a lot of horrible things when I was unwell. Tony is your friend and I shouldn't have spewed all that."

"Listen, it's cool. I could see it from your point of view, even if you were extremely depressed and drunk."

"Well, I am no longer depressed and am now completely sober, so you don't have to worry about it anymore." She offered a reassuring smile as she allowed Rhodes in. Finally, there was Pepper. "Hey Pepper."

"How are you feeling?"

"Better. I feel as though I actually have some hope."

"Well, maybe you could give me some of that hope."

"I take it there has been no luck finding Tony."

"No. My guess is that Thanos killed him, either before he came to Wakanda or he went with the rest of the universe." Wanda furrowed her brow. "You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm just thinking. When I saw Thanos take the Time Stone, Tony was there, and he was alive. Badly injured but alive. I know what you may say about this, but I kept hearing the voices of people who died that day. I heard Sam, Bucky, T'Challa, Groot. I heard that young boy Peter because I recognised his voice from Germany. I kept thinking that if Tony disintegrated with them, I would hear him. I'm not convinced that was part of my psychosis because I am connected to the Infinity Stones."

"You think Tony is alive?"

"It's been over four months. My guess is that it is fifty-fifty, and from experience, fifty percent is better than nothing."

"Twelve percent is better than nothing." Pepper gave a small smile of thanks before she passed Wanda to enter. Wanda looked out to the street. She took a deep breath. New York air. Not as clear
as the air in Acres but it felt familiar. It felt like home.

With all the pizzas delivered, the team caught Wanda up with things that happened in the Avengers Compound, which was not much.

"Mostly it's been quiet," Natasha commented. "Nothing really, we can do. That's the problem with losing half the population of the world: the scum and villainy are not so plentiful."

"Basically, we're bored as hell," Bruce added. He watched as Wanda devoured a large slice of pizza without issue. "So, was all this just to celebrate bringing Wanda home?"

"Well, you know that Steve and I are engaged?" Wanda asked rhetorically. "Well, we've set a date."

"I know this is going to be a surprise, but we are aiming for 31st May," Steve added.

Everyone looked at each other as they tried to piece together what Steve and Wanda had just told them. Pepper was the first to vocalise her concern, "You mean 31st May 2018?"

"As in nearly two weeks from now?" Bruce added.

"I know it sounds quite short notice, but we thought that we don't want to waste any more time," Wanda explained. "We're not having a big wedding anyway, only our close friends."

"It's doable," Natasha commented. "Have you made a list?"

"Um… Well, no."

Natasha grabbed the pad of paper from by the phone and started making notes. "Firstly, we need to get a location. Where were you thinking?"

"Will a church have a slot free now that summer is coming up?" Rhodes asked.

"It won't be a church," Steve answered. "Wanda's Jewish so we thought maybe a registry office would be better."

"Well, you need to get a marriage licence but you could get it the day before," Pepper inputted. "If you're going to do it simple, I think we should go all out on the after party."

"I see Tony has been rubbing off on you," Rhodes commented.

"Maybe not all out," Wanda said. "I don't mind having the party here."

"Fine, but at least let me bring in some party planners." Wanda nodded as a deal. "So I know you are not going super traditional but have you got an idea of what you want in the wedding."

"I made a list," Wanda replied. "I was thinking that I could walk down the aisle to an Annette Hanshaw song - undecided because Steve has to choose it. Maybe one of you could read a poem. Then Steve and I will read our own vows and do the declarations."

"Sounds as though you have it figured out," Thor commented.

"The issue is that I wanted Clint to give me away but...," Wanda added. "But… Maybe I want Natasha to do it."

Natasha dropped her pen and paper in shock and asked, "Wanda, are you sure?"
"Well, you've been there for me after everything, and you have always supported Steve and me. We could not have picked anyone better."

Natasha nodded and moved to hug Wanda. "It would be my honour."

Pepper, who had already grabbed a writing utensil, tapped her pencil. "So that will just leave the rings, suits, music and the dress," Pepper reported.

"I have a dress. Steve and I bought one in Poughkeepsie."

"And Sam gave us a playlist," Steve said grabbing a USB from the draw. He opened the laptop and inserted the USB into the port. "Well, I think he was waiting for us to get engaged and wanted to surprise us."

He clicked on the USB, opened the file called 'Wanda and Steve Wedding', and clicked on the first song in the playlist. 'When the rain is blowing in your face, And the whole world is on your case. I could offer you a warm embrace, To make you feel my love.'

Steve looked to Wanda who softly smiled as the song continued. He had not believed that they would be able to reach this point considering everything that had happened in the previous five months. He wished - ached - for Sam and Bucky to be with them to celebrate but given that they would not want him to harp on the past, Steve was grateful for what he had.

He had Wanda home, safe, healthy and determined. They had a whole life to look forward to, and he was ready to see what that future would bring.

End of Part Seven

Chapter End Notes

So... when I first started drafting the wedding, Clint was meant to be there - and giving Wanda away. They were going to do it on the farm. Then the trailer came out. So I now have to wait to see where I can bring him back. Only three weeks to go people.

I did manage to get a ticket. The movie better be spectacular for the amount of stress it put me under just trying to get the tickets. What happened was that my friend said on Monday that there was a possibility the tickets would be released on Tuesday - and it was true. So, I asked him to get me one as I would likely be at work. He did. So, yay, I had my ticket. However, the Odeon website crashed, so many of my friends could not get tickets. So I ended up having to battle the website crashing to get six tickets. Then my card was blocked and had to sort it out. Then I managed to buy the tickets.

That said, it wasn't the great 75p Infinity War ticket caper of 2018.

Anyway, return next week for the wedding of the year that will be better than Harry and Meghan's wedding. Watch Meghan have her baby the same day.
Part Eight: Dreams

Chapter Notes

Happy 50th chapter. It feels so weird to be saying this because I did not think it would last this long. It's hard to think it's been a year since this story was first published and since Avengers: Infinity War was released. I would say we're in the endgame now... but you have ten weeks of fluff before I inflict you again with whatever the Russos decide to inflict on us.

Also that Star Wars Episode IX teaser... my brain went boom.

Anyway, do I hear the sound of wedding bells?

Part Eight: Dreams

Oh, my life is changing every day,
In every possible way.

Chapter One

Wanda did wonder whether separating her and Steve the night before their wedding was entirely essential given that they were getting married in a courthouse, but Pepper and Natasha insisted that they were going to treat this as an actual wedding. The plan was simple: Wanda was to stay at Pepper's apartment while Steve was to spend the night in a hotel. Wanda had brought the dress with her so that they could spend the morning preparing for her to get to the courthouse by twelve. The reception was to be held at the house. Pepper had arranged for a wedding planner to decorate the house the next morning with Wanda and Steve's consent. Wanda had never been more grateful to have a hyper-organized person like Pepper to help arrange everything in just under a fortnight.

Pepper had decided that Wanda's bachelorette party was going to be a girls' night with facemasks, a few movies, and nail-painting so that Wanda felt completely relaxed. There was no need for alcohol either so Wanda was thankful for that.

"And some lemon, cucumber and orange detox water so that you will be slender tomorrow," Pepper commented as she handed Wanda a glass.

"Are you trying to say I am fat?" Wanda asked with a raised eyebrow.

"To be honest, this just tastes better than regular water. So tonight, I thought we would start off with Pitch Perfect, The Greatest Showman, and Mamma Mia."

"There is going to be so much singing tonight then," Natasha responded as she put out the nibbles. The doorbell rang and she went to see who it was: Sharon.

Wanda smiled and went over to hug the blonde woman. She had been happy to hear that Sharon had survived and given all the help that Sharon had given her and Steve while they were on the run,
Wanda could not think of anyone better to be at their wedding.

"Well, I am glad that you have dyed your hair back to brunette," Sharon commented.

"I didn't mind the red hair but it was a pain to maintain," Wanda replied.

"You nervous about tomorrow?"

"I won't lie and say I am not but it's more excitement than anything."

"Well, I can tell that Steve will not know what hit him."

Meanwhile, across Manhattan, Steve, Bruce, Thor, and Rhodes were gathered in an Irish bar near Times Square. There seemed to be a basketball playoff game on the televisions so no one noticed that they were there as they were preoccupied with who was going to win between the Cleveland Cavaliers and the Golden State Warriors. Rhodes and Bruce seemed keen to know, which gave Steve the impression they had a bet going.

"How are you feeling Steve?" Bruce asked as he sipped a beer.

"Good. A little bit nervous but I guess that is normal," Steve replied.

"I uh… Thanks for allowing me to be your best man. I know I wasn't your first choice. Or your second choice. Or even your third." Bucky would have been his first choice for best man; Sam was a very close second. His third option was not here either. He really had to choose between Bruce and Thor but a lot of it had to do with Bruce's help over the last few months. "But I am going to be the best, best man for you."

"Have you done a speech?"

"Well… It's not funny."

"It's not a problem. I think just a few meaningful words will do."

"So, I take it that we are not going to any strip clubs then?" Rhodes asked.

"Why would you want to go to one of those places?" Bruce responded.

"I'm just imagining what Tony would say if he was here right now."

"Oh, yeah, he would say that."

"Do you reckon the women will be getting a stripper?" Thor asked. Steve wanted to give him a look but he was not self-conscious enough to feel threatened. "I never really got this Earth custom of stripping clothes for entertainment."

"Me neither, to be honest," Steve replied. "Anyway, I think we could move onto a club - a normal club - in a moment."

"Shots on the best man," Rhodes said patting Bruce's shoulder.

Just as Steve grabbed his coat, he looked at his phone and smiled at the text sent by Wanda. She said that she loved him and was aching to be with him again.
The sunlight broke through the window and hit Wanda square in the face. She scrunched her eyes and as she blinked her lids open she smiled brightly.

Today was going to be the day where she would marry Steve.

She stared at the dress hanging on the wardrobe and counted all her blessings that she had reached this point. Nearly three months ago, she was in such a dark place that she thought she would never escape. She could put all that behind her now. She could now make plans for the future. She had managed to get a decent amount of eggs harvested in case she needed to have IVF in the future, but they agreed that they would use the frozen embryos if they did not manage to conceive on their own in the next year or so. It was nice to have that option though.

Wanda sat up and before she could dare get out of bed, the door opened and Natasha barged in holding a bowl of porridge. "Okay, first things first: breakfast." Wanda smiled and took the bowl. It seemed whoever made it had created a heart out of the strawberries and blueberries. "How are you feeling?"


"Any nerves?"

"A little. Stomach feels like it's in knots."

"Well, the second you see Steve, it'll go away. Right, eat up. Get in the shower and then we will sort out your face and hair. We are going to make you the most gorgeous bride in the world."

Wanda nodded and dug into breakfast without question. As soon as she was done eating and had showered, Pepper and Sharon came in armed with a hairdryer, a curler, and a makeup bag. Wanda wondered what they had planned, but turned out to be something rather simple. A few loose curls at the front but Wanda's hair was to be pinned since it had grown so much since she went on the run.

"How is Steve?" Wanda asked as Natasha dabbled foundation onto Wanda's face.

"He's okay. The boys seem to be keeping him occupied," Pepper answered.

"Don't worry. He's not going to jilt you," Natasha said.

"I wasn't doubting him," Wanda responded.

"So have you got your vows prepared?" Sharon asked.

"Yeah, all done. All two pages back to front. We've been through a lot together so I couldn't just leave it brief."

The knot in her stomach felt even tighter, and then there was a hole in her heart. Her mother should be there doing her hair and calming her nerves. She had been doing well trying not to harp on the past but she felt unable to not think of her family. She leaned over to a leather-bound photo album and opened it. One of the only surviving items from when the shell hit her home was a photo album that had been returned to her and Pietro a couple of weeks after they were placed in their first foster home. They had carried it around with them until HYDRA had duped them into the experiment, at which point they had lost it. It turned out that Steve and Tony had retrieved it and Steve had returned it when Wanda arrived in the Avengers Tower. The first picture when she opened it was of her parents' wedding. They both looked so happy.

"You don't half look like your mother," Pepper commented. "I can see where you got the inspiration
Wanda looked at the dress. It was reminiscent of the dress in the photo. Her mother's wedding dress was long-sleeved and lace covered, but it was full length and there was a lace veil. Wanda had elected not to wear a veil since she wanted to keep the wedding simple.

"You miss her," Natasha said.

"I could just imagine her now fussing over every last detail, and I want that. When I was little, I had an image in my head that on my wedding day my mother would help me get ready and my father would walk me down the aisle. Pietro would be there to give the 'big brother talk' even though he was only twelve minutes older-" There was a catch in her throat on the last word. She had to bite back the tears because she did not want to ruin her makeup. Just then, she felt something heavy behind the picture of her and Pietro when they were home from the hospital. Her hand slipped inside the sleeve and she pulled out two letters. One for Pietro and one for her. She put Pietro's letter aside and she opened hers. The handwriting was familiar but she had not seen it for nearly twenty years. "It's from my father."

"Do you want us to leave you alone?" Pepper asked.

"No. I think I am going to need you all." Wanda sniffed and handed it to Natasha. "I can't read it."

"It okay," Natasha soothed. Natasha looked at the letter and read out, "Dear Wanda. If you are reading this then it must be your wedding day. However, if it isn't and your brother has left this lying around, tell him he is a bupkes and he can't be trusted to do anything properly." Wanda managed to let out a snort. "The day you and your brother were born was one of the best but also the most difficult days of my life. I cried loads. I was the happiest man in the world. I was scared too because the second you came out you were taken away in an incubator. It was not easy because your mum became unwell and I had to look after your brother. Luckily your grandmother was there to help. We managed to take care of all three of you until you were all well enough to come home. I never thought I would not be there on your wedding day. I knew the second I saw your face that I would be the proudest man in the world to walk you down the aisle and give you away to the luckiest man in the world." Wanda's eyes welled with tears and she had to grab a tissue to stop it ruining her foundation. Natasha was finding it tricky to hold it together herself. "I'm sorry I'm not with you today, but I will be there in spirit. I love you baby girl. Yours always, Dad."

Wanda's breath hitched as Natasha put down the letter. Natasha wrapped around Wanda in a bid to comfort the bride. Pepper rubbed Wanda's shoulders until Wanda composed herself. "Come on, we still have a lot of work before I am completely ready."

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Steve fiddled with his tie for what felt like the tenth time as he observed himself in the mirror. He was wearing a black suit but nothing too fancy since it was a courthouse wedding.

He felt a slight emptiness from the absence of Bucky and Sam. He felt as though they should be standing there telling him to calm down. He had no doubts over his love for Wanda but given how quickly everything had been thrown together, the nerves were bound to come. It had all been leading up to this moment but he had never been happier than he was at that moment.

Bruce was due to collect him around 11:30 to walk the two blocks to the courthouse. It felt such a long way away, almost as though it was Christmas. Rather like a child though, he could not wait to see Wanda.
The door knocked. It was Mrs Wilson, Gideon, Lisa, and little Jimmy. Steve had invited them because they had been good to him when he first met them and at Sam's memorial. Steve smiled brightly as he went to hug the family.

"Hey man, how are you doing?" Steve asked.

"A lot better now. The memorial did us some good," Gideon answered. "It was good of you to invite us."

"Well, you would have been invited even if Sam was here. I can just imagine him now wandering around trying to get everything in place."

"He would have given a killer best man speech."

Steve laughed, "God, the character assassination would have been brutal.

"Ah, you look so handsome Steve. It's like looking at Marlon Brando," Mrs Wilson commented.

"Mum," Gideon grimaced. "Oh. I did find something among Sam's things when I got them home," Gideon pulled out a yellow sheet of paper. "It seemed to be some good ideas for a best man speech."

"Ah, I will give that to Bruce."

"Well, I can tell that this will be the wedding of the year," Lisa commented.

"She also said that about Harry and Meghan," Jimmy pointed out. Lisa laughed as he rubbed her son's head.

"Well, I mean it this time."

Bruce knocked on the door, and asked, "You ready Steve?"

"As I'll ever be."

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"Wanda, come on, we need to get moving," Natasha yelled through the door. She, Pepper and Sharon had changed into their pink-hued dresses to keep with the theme but since their Uber was waiting outside, they needed Wanda to make a move.

Just then the bathroom door opened and Wanda emerged. The lace dress fitted with each curve, the top layer of her curled hair was pinned back so her face was visible and she had put on a pair of nude heels that Pepper had lent her. The necklace Steve had bought her for her birthday was around her neck and gold studs adorned her ears.

"How do I look?" Wanda asked.

"Perfect," Natasha replied. "Steve is not going to know what has hit him."

"So you have something old and borrowed," Pepper began, "what about new and blue?"

"Well, I worked out the blue bit," Natasha said presenting a box to Wanda. "I mean it could count as new as well." Wanda took the box and opened it to reveal a blue garter. She managed to burst out laughing imagining Steve having to take it off her leg in front of everyone. She tugged it onto her leg far enough that it would not be exposed to everyone before the toss. "We all good?"
"Yeah, we're all good," Wanda replied.

"Okay, well the Uber is waiting and we need to get moving," Sharon ordered. She and Pepper left, leaving just Wanda and Natasha alone.

"You feeling okay?" Natasha asked.

"Well, I tried not to think about everyone who could not be here but they are still there, in my heart."

"I think Pietro would be proud of you today."

"I can't believe it's been only three years. It feels like a million years."

"A lot has happened, but you've come out stronger than ever."

"Thanks, Nat." She took a deep breath and said, "This is it."

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Steve paced up and down as he waited for his and Wanda's name to be called. Pepper had the idea to allow Wanda to wait out the way so that Steve would not see her before the actual ceremony. It looked a little ridiculous the way they were keeping themselves separate, Steve did not mind the suspense.

"Steven Rogers and Wanda Maximoff?" a woman announced.

Steve raised his hand as he and the rest of the wedding party entered a room to the left. Wanda and Natasha were left outside to wait for Thor's cue to enter. Wanda took a deep breath. Her hand was gripped around the bouquet of pink roses.

Natasha took Wanda's hand and squeezed it. Just then the door opened and Thor gave a thumbs up. Wanda smiled at the sight of him in a suit.

"You ready?" Natasha asked hooking his arm through Wanda's.

"Yeah," Wanda answered.

Natasha gave a thumbs up to Thor to start playing the music, which was 'Cherie, I Love You' by Annette Hanshaw.

'The language of love is the same, In any clime, at any time.'

Steve turned around when he heard the first lyrics play out. Natasha gave a small smile to Steve as she and Wanda emerged from the door. Everyone stood and turned towards the bride.

However, Wanda's focus was solely on Steve and she could not have smiled brighter if she tried. She was holding onto Natasha for dear life but as they passed the guests, Wanda's feet felt so light it was like she was walking on a cloud.

Steve's breath was taken away the second Wanda appeared. She had always been beautiful to him, but her pure joy made her heart-stoppingly divine. All he wanted was for Natasha to walk faster so he could have Wanda in his arms.

When Wanda arrived at the front, Steve nodded to Natasha as he took Wanda's hand and whispered, "Hey Doll."
"Hi," Wanda whispered back.

The music drowned out and everyone sat down. The officiator began, "We are gathered here today to witness the marriage between Steven Grant Rogers and Wanda Tzipporah Maximoff. Before we begin, if there are any objections as to why this union should not take place, speak now or forever hold your peace." There was a five-second silence before the officiator continued, "The union of two people is something to be celebrated, especially when people have had little to celebrate in the past. To all the guests here, Steve and Wanda extend their thanks to you for supporting them and caring for them for the last few years. The late Maya Angelou said, 'Love recognises no barriers, it jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination, full of hope'. And now, for another notable poet. Colonel Rhodes, if you may."

Rhodes stood at the front, holding onto the poem that Wanda had chosen for the readings. "My love, we will go, we will go, I and you. And away in the woods we will scatter the dew; And the salmon behold, and the ouzel too, My love, we will hear, I and you, we will hear, The calling afar of the doe and the deer. And the bird in the branches will cry for us clear, And the cuckoo unseen in his festival mood; And death, oh my fair one, will never come near In the bosom afar of the fragrant wood."

When Rhodes sat down, the officiator started again, "Okay, now for the vows. Wanda, if you could declare your vows."

Natasha handed Wanda the two sheets of paper and Wanda began to recite, "When we first encountered each other, I threw you down the stairs - and I don't think I ever apologised for that Steve so sorry." There was an audible laugh and Steve could not help but smile. "I threw you down the stairs because I perceived you to be my enemy. However, you were the first one to really reach out and listen to Pietro and me, and it did mean a lot to me. No one had really listened to us before.

"When I first arrived in the United States after Pietro died, I was so angry that I shut out the world. However, you were always there trying to ensure that I knew that I was not alone in the world. You were there for me when I had a severe panic attack in response to Mufasa's death in The Lion King. You told me that you understood where my head was at because you had been there yourself. You said that being an Avenger had given you some purpose and for a year or so, I thought it had.

"With the benefit of hindsight, I think I first fell in love with you when it was at the Avenger's Christmas party and we spoke on the balcony. I thought I was going to be okay that Christmas but there was still that pang in my chest that missed Pietro. You said that it never really goes away and I think that was when it dawned on me how much-shared life experience we had, and I sat on it for months without realising.

"There were moments where I could have acted on my feelings. Most notably, when you comforted me after what happened in Lagos. I was just about to kiss you when Vision came bursting through, and we never got the opportunity. We had to go on the run and I became unwell. However, once I was better, I managed to realise that I was in love with you. And when you felt the same it was the happiest moment of my life.

"The last few months or so has not been easy for the both of us, but I honestly don't know if I would have gotten through it without you. You have given me so much to live for that even at my lowest moment, I knew you were my guiding light.

"So, Captain Rogers, I promise that I will never doubt your love and affection. I promise that I will be forever indebted for all the warmth and kindness you have shown me. I promise that I will sing again and fill the house with music. And finally, I promise my joy, for you have brought me so much."
Steve smiled as Wanda brushed away a tear and he wanted so much to kiss her right there and then. She had put all her heart into those vows and he felt every word. Then he was instructed to deliver his vows and he chuckled, "I don't think I will be able to top that." Wanda smiled in response. "It's funny that you mentioned our shared life experience. About four years ago, Natasha kept trying to set me up on dates with women we worked with and I told her that it was hard to find a person with shared life experience. When Maria showed me yours and Pietro's file, I instantly got where you had come from, and I empathised with your fight. And after Pietro died, I empathised with you even more.

"Even though there were moments over the year we worked together where I felt an incredible closeness to you, I didn't really piece together my feelings until Japan. Everything about you had a joyous air about it. I just wanted to be a part of that joy and I think I was. Seeing your smile was more than I could ever ask for.

"And while we have had some really hard times that I was not sure I could get past, you have grown so much as a person, especially in your courage, kindness and heart. I told Peggy a very long time ago that I was looking for the right partner, and after I woke up I wondered whether I would find that right partner. Maybe there was a higher power drawing us together, and it only took me until now to realise that you and I are bound not only in our hearts but in our souls.

"I value your friendship and love more than anything in the world. You have been a guiding light for me in a time when I did not know if there was a way out of a hole. You are kind, loving, clever, inspiring and beautiful. We know each other like the back of our hands and it's more than I have ever had with another person.

"Wanda, I promise to love you and take care of you. I promise to wake you up every morning with a kiss. I promise to listen to you in times of need. I promise that I will always be strong for you. I promise to fill a wall in our house of all the drawings. I promise that we will have pizza night every Saturday and I will submit to whatever movie you choose."

He gave Wanda's hand a tight squeeze and she mimed, "I love you."

The officiator began, "Wanda, do you take Steven to be your lawful wedded husband, to have and to hold, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, for better or for worse until death do you part?"

Wanda smiled and replied, "I do."

"Steven, do you take Wanda to be your lawful wedded wife, to have and to hold, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, for better or for worse until death do you part?"

Steve cupped Wanda's face and answered, "I do."

"And now for the rings," the officiator said turning to Natasha and Bruce. Natasha handed Steve's wedding band to Wanda and Bruce handed Wanda's wedding ring to Steve. The wedding band was a simple white gold, but Wanda's was a twisted rose and white gold ring to match the engagement ring but give a more modern twist. "Okay, Wanda, repeat after me: with this ring, I will be wed."

Wanda took Steve's left hand and slid the band along his ring finger, "With this ring, I will be wed."

"Steven, repeat after me: with this ring, I will be wed."

Steve took Wanda's left hand and slid the ring onto her ring finger, "With this ring, I will be wed."

"By the state of New York, I am able to pronounce you husband and wife. You may now kiss the bride."
The guests made a round of applause but Steve and Wanda could not hear them as they took their first kiss as husband and wife. Wanda had her arms wrapped his neck while Steve had pulled her close at the waist. They drank each other in and when they broke apart, they felt like they were floating on a cloud.

Wanda was getting a little antsy as the photographer kept choosing different people to take photos with herself and Steve. She and Steve had enough wedding photographs to fill a wall in their house. There were loads of just her and Steve. There were some with Natasha and Bruce in addition to the bride and groom. There were a couple that included Rhodes and Thor. Some with just Wanda and Natasha. Some with just Steve, Bruce, Thor and Rhodes. Once the photographs were finished, Steve and Wanda walked to their cab to go back to their house.

"You know what Wanda, you are the most beautiful bride in the world," he said. "You look like a real princess."

"Does that mean I look better than Meghan?" she commented.

Wanda and Pepper had gotten up early to watch the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle nearly two weeks previously, mostly so she could get some ideas for the wedding. She thought Meghan looked beautiful but Steve had said that Wanda would knock her out of the water.

"You are simply angelic Wanda."

"Well, you won't be saying that later," she whispered in his ear.

Steve snorted and placed a kiss on her lips. They arrived back at their house and they saw the streams of lace adorning the fence. They wondered for a moment what the wedding planner had done but they were in absolute shock when they saw the white and pink balloons, roses, and a table set out with buffet nibbles, alcohol-free sparkling rosé and a pink ombré wedding cake.

"Pepper, this looks amazing," Wanda commented as everyone came through the door. Someone grabbed a needle and tossed it at a giant white balloon. A flutter of pink and white confetti filled the air. Wanda smiled brightly as Steve twirled her around.

"It's nothing, honestly," Pepper insisted as she laughed at the glee on Wanda's face. Bruce went over to pop open a bottle of the sparkling alcohol-free wine and he handed the glasses to everyone. Steve pulled Wanda close and kissed her on the lips.

Someone announced the buffet was open, and Wanda and Steve went first to take what they wanted. Wanda's plate was filled to the brim. She had gained more weight since leaving the hospital and was now steady at fifty-three kilograms. While it was ten kilograms below her heaviest and healthiest weight before she went on the run, she was making good progress. She had another period the week before. It seemed her body was now working like clockwork.

"These duck straws are delicious," Wanda commented.

"I personally cannot wait to get into the cake," Steve replied as he dug into his chicken tenders.

"How are you feeling?"

"Well, I still feel as though Bucky and Sam should be here. I appreciate Bruce being there today but there is that weird ghost beside me."
"I found a letter from my father earlier, so that brought those feelings of my family not being here."

Steve put his plate down and cupped her face and said, "They are all looking down on us and smiling I can tell. My parents, your parents, your grandmother, Pietro, Bucky, Sam and Peggy. They'd all be proud of the both of us." Wanda pressed a tiny kiss to his lips and took his hand.

Once outside, they seated themselves on a long table that had been decorated with a white tablecloth and pink roses. They sat in the middle while everyone gathered around them with their selections from the buffet. When everyone was seated, chatting and eating, Bruce tapped his glass and stood up.

"Hi everyone," he said. "So, as you know I was chosen by Steve to be his best man. When Steve asked me to do it, I was honoured. Steve and I met when were assigned a mission, which then led to the Battle of New York so clearly we were successful on that first mission." There were a few chuckles. Bruce, Natasha, Thor and Steve exchanged a look. It had been the event that had led to their lasting friendship. "I thought that Steve would only really care about the Hulk but he didn't care about that, and he saw my own value. It meant a lot for someone who was used to people expecting me to lash out." There was a slight raise of the eyebrow towards Natasha, who shrugged in response. "As for Wanda... I can see that the woman I encountered in South Africa is not the same person sitting at this table. Steve seems to have been a good influence on you and you appear to have made him happier than I thought possible. So I must thank you for that. Anyway, enough of the mushy talk, I know you want me to talk shit about Steve."

"Language," Wanda warned nodding to Jimmy.

"Actually, that is a good one to start with. When we were in the process of getting Loki's sceptre from HYDRA, Tony hit a forcefield and exclaimed some mild profanity, as I had just done. Steve, for some reason, decided to reprimand him by saying, 'Language'."

"It just slipped out," Steve whispered. Wanda snorted and rested her chin on his shoulder.

"And this is amusing to me considering that Natasha has informed me about Steve's repertoire of 'bad words' she had heard through the bedroom wall." Steve tried his hardest not to turn a deep shade of purple. "And speaking through bedroom walls, Steve and Wanda's dear friend Sam Wilson, who is represented today by his family, wrote down some interesting memories. Firstly, when they met, Steve decided to constantly tease Sam by outrunning him and saying 'On your left'. This proves that Steve is a giant troll." Steve could not help but smile at the memory. "Another memory Sam noted was when he discovered Steve and Wanda were together. Needless to say, he had to bleach his eyes." This earned a laugh from Wanda. It seemed so much funnier with hindsight. "There others I could mention, but these memories would be better coming from Sam's mouth. I know he's not here, among so many others that should be here. So as we raise a toast, we should toast to all those we loved and cherished. To Wanda and Steve, and absent friends."

Everyone raised their glasses and said, "To Wanda and Steve and absent friends."

Wanda and Steve pressed their foreheads together and the rest of the meal went on with chatter, smiles and laughs. Once the buffet was clear, Wanda found Mrs Wilson stacking plates.

"Mrs Wilson, you don't have to do that. Let me," she said walking over.

"Don't be silly dear. You are the bride and you should not have to lift a finger," Mrs Wilson responded. "I will just stack them and return to the party. How have you been since the memorial?"

"I had a severe mental breakdown. I had forgotten to take my lithium for weeks and it delved into a
sea of alcohol and hallucinations. I spent two months in a psychiatric hospital. I'm a lot better now as you can see."

"When Sam came back from Afghanistan, we wondered whether we should have put him in a unit. He would jump at everything and lash out. He wouldn't get out of bed. We got the diagnosis of PTSD quickly and he recovered very well."

"I spoke to Sam when I was deep in my psychosis. He said that he loved you all. I know it is only a figment of my own head…"

"Figment of your own head or not, it's nice to know he is still about. You have to remember, death is not always the end." Wanda smiled. Just then, the rest of the wedding party came in. Steve instantly found his wife and wrapped his arms around her waist.

"Okay, ladies and gentleman," Rhodes announced as he and Thor finished setting up the speaker and computer. "I think it may be time for Wanda and Steve to take their first dance."

Steve took Wanda's hand and led her to the middle of the room. Rhodes pressed play and the strums of the guitar filled the room. 'Today is gonna be the day that they're gonna throw it back to you.' Wanda grinned brightly. It was hardly something they could ballroom dance to, but they did manage a sway and a few turns. 'Wonderwall' was their song. It was there on their first date. It was there when Wanda was incredibly ill. It was their song. 'I said maybe (I said maybe), you're gonna be the one that saves me. And after all, you're my wonderwall.'

The song ended and the two shared a small kiss as everyone clapped. The song changed to 'God Only Knows' by the Beach Boys. At that point, it was more about mingling than dancing since no one was really up for dancing.

"Okay, everyone, it's time for the bouquet toss," Rhodes announced. "Ladies prepare yourself."

Natasha forced herself beside Pepper and Sharon. Lisa excused herself on the basis of she was already being married. Wanda took a stand in front of them, turned around and threw the flowers. She turned, Natasha had clearly made no effort to catch them but they landed in her arms despite Sharon and Pepper's struggle to catch them.

"Okay, gentlemen, you know it is time for the garter toss," Rhodes added. Steve's eyebrows furrowed. "And I have had confirmation that Wanda is wearing a garter."

Wanda lifted the hem of her dress up and Steve saw the bright blue garter. Since the dress was short, the idea of removing the garter with his teeth seemed quite inappropriate with a young child around. Wanda could sense this so she peeled the garter off herself and handed it to Steve. She pressed a kiss to the corner of his mouth and he smirked.

Rhodes, Thor, and Bruce (not of his own volition) gathered in a huddle. Steve threw the material, landing just on Bruce's shoulder. He seemed bemused at the appearance of the garter and Wanda gave a raised eyebrow Natasha. Natasha shook her head to suggest that she had no intention of getting married to Bruce. Though when Wanda looked back, she saw Natasha smile softly at the bouquet.

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With all the bottles of alcohol-free wine devoured, Wanda and Steve were standing in the middle of the room with Wanda's arms wrapped around Steve's neck while his hands were on her waist. Natasha and Pepper had disappeared for a bit but had returned with a wink towards Steve. He
wondered what they had been up to, but he did not care.

'So give me a run for my money. Sipping bubbly, feeling lovely, living lovely. Just love me.'

"You know, I have pictured this day for ages, and it was more perfect than I could ever imagine," Wanda said.

Steve pressed a kiss to her forehead and whispered, "Should we head up?"

Wanda giggled and kissed Steve on the lips. She took his hand, but before they could reach the stairs, Pepper stopped them. There was an envelope in her hand and a small smile on her face. "So, I know you hadn't thought of anything for your honeymoon, so I arranged for you to go to a villa near Saint-Tropez. Everything is paid for and you fly out tomorrow."

Wanda took the envelope and opened it to reveal two first class tickets. There were a few planes to catch, but Wanda seemed calm about it. She smiled and said, "Thanks, Pepper. For everything." The two women hugged and Wanda led Steve up the stairs. Rhodes proceeded to put on Marvin Gaye's 'Let's Get it On'. Wanda rolled her eyes and commented, "He thinks they're so clever."

Steve chuckled. He stopped however when he saw pink rose petals across the floor. Steve opened the door and Wanda could not help but burst out laughing. On the bed were an array of massage oils, a blindfold, a riding crop, and a sheer piece of lingerie.

"I think this is what Natasha and Pepper were up to," Steve commented.

"Well, we could put them in the bag and save them for Saint-Tropez," Wanda suggested putting the items on a chair in the corner. Wanda sat on the bed and bit her lip. She and Steve had not had sex since their encounter in the bathroom upon arriving back from Wakanda.

"You okay?" Steve asked pulling off his jacket.

"A little nervous."

Steve smiled and sat next to her. He cupped her face and kissed her ever so softly. Wanda shifted closer and rested her hand on Steve's chest. Steve pulled away and said, "We don't have to do this if you don't want to."

"I'm ready. And what better night than our wedding night."

Wanda undid his tie and pushed his waistcoat off. It felt like it was her first time but this time she was completely sober and with a man who valued her worth. Steve kissed her again and his hand went to the zipper at the back of her dress. Steve pulled the dress off her shoulders, exposing her white lace bra. Wanda worked the buttons of his white shirt and she pushed it off as Steve helped her step out of her dress. Steve looked at the pallor of Wanda's skin. Her body seemed so much fuller than it had been, and the pink on her cheeks made her look so much brighter than she had been.

Wanda ran her hand up Steve's bicep and Steve leaned down to kiss her again. Wanda moaned softly into his mouth as Steve worked the button of his trousers. His shoes kicked to the floor and the trousers followed not long after. Steve rolled over so Wanda was straddling his hips and Wanda glanced down with a bright smile. She started to grind herself on Steve's growing member as she kissed him again and she unhooked her bra. Steve moaned and flipped her over again. His lips captured one of her nipples in her mouth and he rolled the rosy peak with his tongue. She could feel how aroused she was as the lace grew damper by the second.

Steve detached his lips and his face hovered Wanda's. Their eyes met. It had felt so long since they
had been this intimate with one another, and Wanda had not felt this nervous since their first time together back in Yekaterinburg. Steve's hand found Wanda's and he laced his fingers with hers.

"You okay?" he asked. Wanda nodded and leaned up to kiss him.

Steve removed her white panties and his boxers. Wanda parted her thighs and Steve aligned himself with Wanda's entrance. With a kiss, Steve slid inside her and Wanda gasped. It felt so familiar and so right, and she was reminded of why she loved sex with Steve. He was safe. He was strong. He was secure.

Her arms and legs wrapped around him as Steve began to thrust slowly. He took like their first night together. Gentle. Loving. Heavenly. This was not about achieving orgasm; this was reconnecting, and proving a rightness they could only create. They had built a bridge over the river of life. It was the strongest bridge they had built, and with each other side-by-side, there was no point where they could not cross it.
Chapter Two

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter Two

It was a rainy afternoon in New York when Natasha looked out towards the sea of people who had arrived from London Gatwick Airport. Most seemed to be business people coming back from long meetings in London, some were family members, and some were couples coming back from holidays or honeymoons. One of the couples was Steve and Wanda, and she instantly spotted the newlyweds.

After a wonderful week in the bright sun, white sand and blue sea of Saint-Tropez, Wanda had a beautiful caramel glow to her skin, and Steve's skin had only gone bronzer. It had been a wonderful week of sunbathing, lovemaking, swimming in the ocean, lovemaking, excellent food and even more lovemaking. It was not called a honeymoon for nothing, and the extras that Natasha and Pepper had laid on their wedding bed were put to good use.

"Well, you two look well rested," Natasha commented as the couple reached her. She hugged them both and hooked her arm through Wanda's as Steve pushed the luggage trolley. "So how was Saint-Tropez?"

"Absolutely gorgeous," Wanda replied. "The sun was out every day, it was so warm and the ocean views from the villa were stunning."

"So you actually made it out of the villa?"

"We did see the town," Steve protested. "We ate out every night, we went to the beach, the shops - which means we have bought you that wine you wanted - and we even ventured to Cannes and Nice on two of the days."

"Well, the tans gave it away. If you had spent the time only in the villa, I think you would be paler than when you left. So I take it you had a good time."

"The best," Wanda replied. She was glowing, a combination of the tan, love and joy. Steve leaned in to kiss her and Natasha rolled her eyes.

"You two are sickeningly adorable." Steve packed the bags into Natasha's car and joined Wanda in the backseat. "I'm not a taxi service you know. You seriously cannot keep your hands off one another for an hour?"

Natasha muttered something about them joining the mile high club before she drove away. Half an hour later, they pulled up in front of the house. Steve smiled as he helped Wanda out of the car and he lifted her up bridal style. Wanda laughed as Steve carried her up the steps and through the threshold of their house.

"You've been waiting to do this for a week," she said as Steve put her down.

"Well, Wanda, I am a bit of a traditionalist," he responded with a kiss. "I should get the bags."

"Yeah, because Nat is looking a bit annoyed."
As Steve went to get the bags, Wanda went to look at the menu for the local Indian. They had not been shopping but she was too jet-lagged to go out to the store and do a full shop.

"So, I got all the bags in," Steve announced as he walked into the kitchen. "Should we unpack or should we leave it?"

"Well, I am not without clothes but I guess we should throw our underwear into the machine," Wanda suggested with one eyebrow raised. Steve chuckled and moved over to hug her. "It finally feels like home."

"I swear you were less disgusting when we lived together," Natasha commented. "Right, I've done my duty for today. I will let you get on with what you need to do. Your wedding presents and photos are in the living room."

"Thanks Nat," Wanda said. "You sure that you don't want to stay for dinner?"

"No, I actually do have plans and you two look as though you'll fall asleep in a minute."

"I'm okay," Steve protested.

"Okay, just your wife. See you guys tomorrow. Pepper is having a dinner party."

Wanda frowned as Natasha left. "She's doing it alone?"

"I think it's the company. Tony's still missing."

"Okay, underwear, wedding gifts and food. What do you want from Lahore Karhai?"

With the food ordered and underwear in the washing machine, Wanda and Steve got to work on their wedding gifts. They received a beautiful photo frame from Thor (and Rocket though Wanda was convinced Rocket had nothing to do with the gift), Rhodes had bought them a nice set of green bowls and plates, Natasha had given them a luxury set of bath towels and bathrobes, Bruce had gotten a set of dip bowls, Sharon had bought wooden candle holders and the Wilsons had given them a CD set with all the songs Sam chose for the wedding. Wanda appreciated the last gift the most.

The food arrived and Steve plated up his lamb tikka balti and Wanda's sagwalla. They shared a giant naan between them and sat close as they watched another episode of Grey's Anatomy. They had binged the first two seasons and had just started on the third.

"How has Izzie not been officially fired for what she did?" Wanda asked.

"I don't know. I don't know if half these medical conditions exist," Steve replied.

"Well, maybe Meredith and Derek will knock some sense into each other."

"We have eleven seasons to get through. They must marry at some point."

"Well, they did fuck in an exam room." Wanda took a piece of the naan and scooped up the curry. "I think I could have been a good doctor. When I was little, Dad got me this little doctor's kit and I loved it. I had a little white coat and everything."

"Why did you drop out of school when you were seventeen?"

"Well, we fell out of the care system and ended up on the streets. We never had a shower so it was easier not to turn up and be bullied. Why did you drop out of art school?"
"Pearl Harbour happened. I thought I would be able to enlist. Bit stupid but if I hadn't then I would never have met you."

Wanda smiled and pressed a kiss to Steve's lips. "I think I should get back to school, or at least restart that English class I was taking."

"You sure?"

"Well, I won't have any missions that will induce panic attacks so I think it's worth a shot. I also have you."

"Well, you know I am going to support you no matter what."

-o-

Wanda and Steve walked up to Pepper's apartment hand-in-hand with Steve holding a bottle of white wine. While Pepper was keeping the dinner party alcohol free for Wanda's sake, it did not mean that she could not drink once Wanda left the apartment. Wanda knocks on the door and soon Pepper opened the door, greeting Wanda and Steve with a welcoming smile.

"Oh god, you look so well," Pepper exclaimed hugging the two. "How was the villa?"

"Perfect. It was more like a hotel," Wanda replied.

"Good. I told them to treat you well. Come in. Rhody and Thor are already here."

"This is for you," Steve said presenting the bottle of white wine.

"Oh thank you. Steve, can I just speak with you for a moment?" Steve frowned but followed Pepper into the kitchen.

Wanda was curious as to what was happening but she shrugged it off and went into the living area where she gave Thor and Rhodes a hug.

"How was France?" Rhodes asked.

"Amazing. It was the best time of my life," Wanda answered. "How's everything been here?"

"Eh, things could be more exciting."

"Still no sign of Tony then."

"It would be helpful if we had Heimdall," Thor commented. "He would be extremely helpful in this situation."

It had been six months since they had lost everyone they held dear and while the pain was not as strong as it had been, the deaths still played on their minds. Wanda had not thought about Sam, Vision or Bucky for a week, and there was a touch of guilt but she remembered Sam's words about not harping on the past.

"He'll turn up. Tony is known for turning up when it suits him," Rhodes said. "Anyway, how did you find the gifts?"

"Lovely thank you. The plates are too pretty for me even think about using them and that photo frame is the most perfect frame to use one of our wedding photos." Steve came into the room, his face a little whiter than it was when Wanda last saw him. "You okay Steve?"
She saw a magazine in Steve's hand. For a moment, she wondered what was going on and when she got her hands on the magazine, she froze. The image on the front was her and Steve in a compromising position by the pool of the villa with the headline, 'Cap gets Maxi-Off'.

Wanda remembered what happened that day but the images were more salacious than what had happened. She and Steve were kissing in the pool but nothing more than that. He was topless and Wanda was in a barely-there black bikini but nothing had happened (in the pool at least).

"What?" was all Wanda could say.

"Thankfully, Pepper has a person who can help with damage control. They basically said that the pictures were an invasion of privacy and they have issued an injunction so no one can print any more pictures," Steve commented. Wanda felt dread in her blood. When she was sick, a lot of her episodes were in public. They must have also hit the news. "You okay?"

"Guys, be honest. When I was ill, were there any news reports?"

The three men looked at each other and took a deep breath. Steve said, "Some magazine like this had some photos sent in from the bar in Poughkeepsie. I think the person who took it was more interested in Rocket but the magazine looked at you because you'd dyed your hair, was wearing a short dress and was drinking. They asked us for comments but I chewed them out."

"Yeah, never seen Cap so mad in his life," Rhodes added. "I think they got the message and no outlets published it."

"But the fact they wanted to publish photos of me when I was going through a serious mental breakdown..." Wanda began. Her fists were tight and Steve took her hand.

"The paps never learn. They did the same with Tony after his parents' death. He went on a bender for a month until I dragged his ass to rehab but every time he fell out of a club or was seen hooking up with a woman there was always a camera waiting," Rhodes stated.

"They tried to get statements off Banner and me," Thor added. "I basically told them it was a private matter, as did Banner. Well, he told them that they were jerks for exploiting what was clearly an ill woman for money."

"Thank you," Wanda said. "I don't think I can thank you guys enough for everything in the last six months."

Natasha and Bruce arrived and the guests all gathered for the starter. Wanda dug into her scallops and smiled as she listened to Thor and Bruce explain how they were reunited.

"So, I'm about to face off with the Grandmaster's prized champion. I had my weapons ready. I expected him to be a big beast but you could not imagine the glee I felt when I saw him burst through the door," Thor explained with all the animated gestures.

"So, you guys fought?" Pepper asked.

"Well, I didn't really have a choice. I was a celebrity. Like imagine if Hulk Hogan went into the ring and decided he wasn't going to fight because his opponent was his friend," Bruce answered. "Needless to say I kicked his ass."

"Because you had help," Thor countered.

"I kicked his ass."
Natasha rolled her eyes. "Okay, before we get embroiled in a dick-wagging contest…” Thor had to shut his eyes as though he remembered something that has mentally scarred him. "What?"

"Let's just say Hulk did a bad job of what Stark referred to as 'hiding the zucchini,'" Thor answered.

Steve looked down at his plate. There were two grilled disks of zucchini and they did not look remotely appetising now. The main course was more successful. And so was the dessert. Wanda was actually rather stuffed so Thor finished her cheesecake. And Rhodes' cheesecake. And Natasha's.

"The amount of food that I ate in France should surely tip me up to sixty kilos by now," Wanda joked. "Most of it was bread and cheese."

"Yeah, and the rest," Steve added. Wanda snorted into her water. "Oh, before I forget, do we have any letters at the Compound?"

"Yes," Natasha replied digging into her bag. "I forgot to bring them yesterday."

Steve took his large pile but there was one for Wanda. In the top corner, there was a logo for Cosmopolitan magazine and Wanda ripped the envelope open. "They want to do an interview with me to put me on the September cover."

"That sounds… awesome?" Pepper said not sure how Wanda felt about it. "It's better than being papped and your photos being released without your consent."

"I guess," Wanda said. "I just worry because people don't have a good view of me."

"Well, maybe you could use it to rewrite the story. Besides, I wouldn't take what Christine Everhart says seriously. She was fired from Vanity Fair because they found out she used unethical means of getting information."

"Then how did she end up on WhiH World News?" Rhodes asked.

"My guess those unethical means are less unethical in that company."

"So this could be a good PR move?" Wanda asked.

"If you want to," Steve replied.

"Okay, I'll do it."

-0-

They arrived home quite late but Wanda was not exactly tired. Despite feeling full, she went to the kitchen and grabbed a cookie from the cupboard.

"Tonight was really nice," she said.

"I know. It's quite nice to know that now we're married we won't be isolated," Steve replied as he got the kettle ready to boil a tea for Wanda.

"You sure you are okay with me doing that Cosmopolitan interview?"

"Hey, I am not going to be that husband who will stop you from doing anything. I know I should feel a great deal of protection over you given everything that has happened recently, and I do worry, but you are clearly well."
"Well, I wouldn't expect you to do anything less," Wanda said as she finished her cookie. "I don't understand how you can trust me after everything?"

"I think it is knowing you too well."

Steve walked over to her and pressed a kiss on her lips. Wanda's hands gripped his jacket and she pushed it off his shoulders. Steve moaned into her mouth and lifted her onto the table. Wanda chuckled as Steve's hand's began to unzip her dress and she gasped when his hand came out to cup her covered breast.

Wanda leaned back as Steve pulled her dress down, leaving slender body exposed to the warm June air. Steve kissed her jawline and Wanda hummed. He had a stubble that reminded her of the way his beard. While she missed the beard, she had gotten used to his bare cheeks for it to no longer be an issue. Wanda unhooked her bra and Steve pulled down her panties, which did annoy Wanda because she was completely naked and Steve was still fully clothed. She managed to unbutton his shirt, but Steve teased her by kneeling down and kissing the inside of her thigh.

Wanda bit her lip when she felt his hot breath on her centre and let out a noise that she was not sure was human when his tongue darted out and licked her. Her fingers threaded through his hair and pushed him closer to her entrance as Steve's nose brushed just under her clit.

"Fuck," she breathed. He had done down on her so many times during the last week that she was convinced that she would not be able to feel anything, but Steve had a talent of drawing pleasure out of her. She could feel his laugh against her and the vibrations caused her to gasp.

Steve slid one finger inside of her and he had to grip her hip to stop her from slipping off the table. He looked up and saw her beautiful face twisted in so much pleasure. He felt immense pride in being the cause. Suddenly he felt her nails dig into his skull and a slight slickness on his finger and he frowned.

"Did you just…"

"Well, I think you have a hidden secret power," Wanda whispered between breaths. He laughed and stood up. There was a noticeable bulge in his trousers and Wanda got to work to relieve the pressure in his groin. She undid the button and zip and helped him push his trousers and boxers down his leg.

Steve groaned as his erection was released and the two scrambled until Wanda's legs were wrapped around his hips. One of her hands was wrapped around his erection and she pumped him before lined up with his erection and allowed Steve to push himself inside her. Wanda put her hand on his shoulder and leaned back as he began to thrust his hips.

He leaned in to kiss Wanda and she reciprocated gladly. She was just so soft and supple in his arms that his heart could only explode in pure love for her. Wanda felt her senses float out of her body. She was in heaven. They were fucking on a kitchen table, but this moment, regardless of how numb her backside felt, was too perfect.

They were married. They finally had their own home. They could start a family.

She heard Steve's surrender in her ear and both their bodies gripped tightly around one another. He panted on her shoulder and it was when he felt his shirt peel away from his damp skin that he realised he was still in his shirt. Wanda was not complaining. She was brushing her fingers over his torso.

Steve laughed and kissed her on the lips. "You going to be able to make it to bed?"
"I think you may have to carry me."

Chapter End Notes

Welp, only five days to go - well four for me as I am watching the midnight release. I am hyped and scared at the same time. I will be recording my day through Instagram stories (sophiembh94) so if you want to follow that you can. I will not reveal any spoilers as there will be people who live in parts of the world where the movie will not have been released yet.

Wish me luck people. I'll see you on the other side, hopefully.

Also, Happy Passover to any Jewish readers and to anyone who celebrates Easter: don't eat too much chocolate. You may need it in case Avengers: Endgame breaks you.
Um... yeah so I saw Avengers: Endgame. What I will say is that it won't affect this story too much. I'm already on the fourth chapter of the Endgame plot (granted not a lot has happened...). There'll be some tweeks here and there. Anyway, please do not post spoilers in the reviews as it is unfair to people who have yet to see it. If you have any questions, please message me on Tumblr (wandaheartsteve).

Chapter Three

Four weeks

"Any idea what you are planning for Steve's birthday?" Natasha asked Wanda when they were eating lunch in a cafe in Brooklyn.

"I don't know. Steve says he doesn't want it to be a big deal - but it's his hundredth birthday; I can't just ignore it," Wanda replied.

"Yeah, that's always been the issue with Steve: he hates being the centre of attention. I think you should throw a small party, but keep it a surprise."

"You reckon that would work?"

"True, you are the least subtle person I know. If I can get Bruce and Thor to take him out, it should give us some time to set up."

"That sounds like a good idea. Should we keep it 4th July themed - because obviously my husband could only have been born on Independence Day when everyone will be hosting parties?"

"Can do. Saves on decorations. Steve Rogers is Captain America; no other person can be him."

"Okay, I have a spicy bean burger and a tuna sandwich," the waitress announced. Wanda raised her hand to the garden burger, but the second the sandwich was placed in front of Natasha, Wanda's stomach turned slightly and she had to put her hand over her mouth.

"You okay?" Natasha asked.

Wanda wanted to say no and that the smell of the sandwich was making her feel sick, but she replied, "Fine. Just acid reflux."

"Since when did you get acid reflux?"

"I guess since I downed a bottle of whiskey," Wanda replied taking a bite of her fries. The salt settled her stomach slightly and she managed to get through the meal. The plan was set for them to throw a surprise party for Steve. Now it was just a case of keeping it a secret for two weeks.

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Five weeks

Wanda frowned as she looked in the mirror. She was in the process of trying to put her bra on but she had winced when the fabric hit her flesh. She pushed her breasts up and hissed. They felt really sore and Wanda could not understand why.

"You okay Doll?" Steve asked putting his hand on Wanda's waist.

"Yeah... Do my breasts look bigger?" Steve tilted his head to see. He gently cupped one but recoiled quickly when Wanda winced and flinched. "Sorry. You okay?"

"I think it may be a loose t-shirt day. It'll pass. Do they feel as though they have gotten bigger?"

"Maybe a little. I wouldn't worry about it Doll; it may just be a blip."

"Maybe it is a menstrual thing. My head has been pounding and that usually was a sign that my periods were coming."

"I'm not going to lie Doll, you have been very lethargic these last couple days. You sure you are not coming down with anything?"

"Well, I did nearly..." She paused for a moment and shook her head. "I'm okay. I just need a day on the couch."

"Well, we can make a day of it. You and me and a Grey's marathon."

"I could so do with that."

-o-

Six weeks

Her period was late.

Initially, Wanda had not noticed given that she had spent the previous week head deep in planning Steve's surprise birthday party, but she did have a feeling that something was missing. On the morning of 4th July, she looked over the lists and checked her planner. It was when she saw a red dot on the 21st June, she frowned. She was nearly two weeks late and she was worried. She checked her weight on the scales. Much to her surprise, she had gained more weight rather than lost it.

Then it hit her: she could be pregnant. The more she thought about it her symptoms she had been experiencing in the last two weeks (tender breasts, fatigue, some headaches and nausea) all linked to her being pregnant. Yet Wanda did not want to believe it. She had gotten her hopes up the last time she thought she was pregnant and it led to her having a severe mental breakdown. Combined with the fact she thought it would take longer for her to get pregnant, Wanda had a nagging doubt in her head.

"You okay Doll?" Steve asked as he padded into the bathroom to find his wife standing on the scales.

"Yeah, I just thought I had lost some weight," she answered. "I've actually put some on."

"That's good though."

"I know. It just felt weird." She shook her head and walked over to Steve, wrapped her arms around his neck and said, "Happy birthday Steve."
Steve smiled and pressed a kiss to her lips. "One hundred."

"Should put you in a retirement home." Steve chuckled. "So, Bruce and Thor are taking you out?"

"Yeah. They want to take me for lunch in Manhattan. I guess it's because we're part of the original team. Though why Nat isn't coming…"

"Doctor's appointment I think. Well, I might reconsider what we are going to do later."

"Honestly Wanda, I am happy just to sit in and watch a movie with you." Steve kissed her and said, "I should brush my teeth."

"Good, because that garlic bread had a ton of garlic in there."

Wanda smiled as Steve passed her. She took a deep breath and went to get changed. As soon as Steve was taken by Bruce and Thor, Wanda text Natasha telling her to get extra plastic cups and a pregnancy test.

In the meantime, Wanda started putting some food onto cook. She kept trying to put the potential pregnancy out of her mind, and then when she opened a tin of tuna for the sandwiches, her stomach turned and she had to run to the bathroom and throw up. When she was sure the contents of her stomach was empty, Wanda rested her forehead against the ceramic toilet. Yet the doubt was still in the back of her mind. The moment she left the downstairs bathroom, she heard the front door open.

"I'm here," Natasha announced with a soft smile. "How are you feeling?"

"I just threw up at the smell of tuna so not great," Wanda replied.

"Any other signs other than throwing up?"

"I'm two weeks late. My boobs have been quite sore and I have been getting some headaches."

"I thought it might be worth getting some ginger ale and saltine crackers. The ginger and salt should settle your stomach. Have you had any liquids?"

"I have been drinking water all morning but I don't know if I threw that all up."

"Do you need to pee?"

"Maybe…" Wanda sat down and ran her hand through her hair. "I'm actually terrified."

"Of having a baby? I thought-"

"Not that. The last time I took a pregnancy test, I did some really bad things."

Natasha sat next to Wanda and said, "You were not well back then. You are so much better now and you have a support network who can help."

"I guess you are right."

"I am right." Natasha went into the grocery bag and took out the blue box. "You won't know until you've tried."

Wanda's lips went thin as she looked at the box. While the fears of her having another breakdown were there, Natasha was right. She had Natasha, Steve and her doctors at Acres. She knew there would be a reason it was negative, and the fact they had a backup at a fertility clinic did reassure her.
She took a deep breath, took the box from Natasha and went to the downstairs toilet.

Natasha, in the meantime, got to work on finishing the tuna sandwiches. When the final sandwiches were wrapped in clingfilm, Wanda emerged tapping the blue-capped white stick in her hand.

"Well?" Natasha asked.

"Still have another minute. I can't read it," Wanda answered as she thrust the pregnancy test into Natasha's hand.

"Okay calm down. It's going to be okay either way. You're okay." Wanda tapped her foot and bit her nails. "I think it might be time." Wanda nodded and watched as Natasha flipped the test over. After what felt like a long three seconds, Wanda noticed Natasha's lips turned into a smile. "It's positive."

Wanda had to grip the table. "Positive?"

Natasha handed the test back to Wanda and there it was: two blue lines.

"I'm pregnant," Wanda stated. Her voice sounded so shocked that Natasha had to sit Wanda down in case the younger woman fainted. "I'm actually pregnant."

"Do you need some water?" Wanda shook her head and put her hand on her flat stomach. "This is a good thing right?"

"Yeah, I just can't believe that I am genuinely pregnant after everything." She suddenly burst out laughing. "A baby." Natasha could not help but smile with Wanda but then Wanda grew serious. "I need to find an OB who specialises in bipolar disorder."

"Okay, well Pepper is going to be here in a minute to help finish off. You get yourself an appointment."

Wanda got out of her seat and went to the laptop. After a moment, she allowed herself to smile. She was having a baby, and it was the perfect day for her to tell Steve.

-0-

"You can't just sit in your house on your hundredth birthday," Bruce commented as they entered the diner.

"Well, I have missed sixty-seven birthdays so it is not really a hundredth birthday," Steve replied.

"Well, for my one-hundredth birthday, Loki decided to pretend he was a Persian rug. I love Persian rugs. So I went to stand on it, and it was Loki, and he turned back into Loki and there was a hole and I fell through the hole," Thor recounted.

"How many of those pranks did you fall for?" Bruce asked. The three men took a seat and looked at the menu. "So I take it that you don't feel old?"

"Not as much as I used to do," Steve replied. "I think now that I have settled down, I actually feel like a whole new man."

"So I take it that everything is good between you and Wanda," Thor commented.

"Well, she was little off this morning. Not in a bad mood but seemed a little away with the fairies."
Bruce and Thor looked to one another. It seemed as though the surprise party may have been playing on Wanda's mind that morning. "Might just be nerves over the interview with Cosmopolitan," Thor suggested.

"You know what journalists can be like. She may say one thing but they could rewrite it," Bruce pointed out.

"I guess, but she seemed more concerned she had lost weight."

"Had she?"

"She's put on if anything." Thor and Bruce frowned in confusion. "She's fine. I have seen her eat every meal. I am just curious as to why she thought she had lost weight. Maybe she thought she'd lost weight from the honeymoon." Steve shrugged it off and turned to the waitress waiting to take their order.

In the meantime, Wanda was in the process of getting ready for the party. Pepper and Rhodes had arrived to help finish setting up. Wanda had elected to wear a red summer dress and was just putting on her lipstick when she took a moment to rub her flat belly.

She was still in disbelief that she was pregnant. It felt like it was a dream that could be taken away so easily. She had booked a doctor's appointment for three days' time which would confirm the pregnancy and see what her options were for her bipolar treatment. Part of it knew it was too soon after her suicide attempt but she was not looking back, especially now.

She looked down at her belly and said, "Hi there baby. You might not be able to hear me. You might not even have ears yet. But I'm your mum. I can't wait to meet you, and Daddy and I will love you and spoil you until the stars go out."

She looked towards the bed where Wanda had placed the wrapped pregnancy test box on Steve's pillow. She just hoped the result stayed on the test long enough for Steve to see it. She took a deep breath and walked downstairs where Rhodes had finished decorating and the food was out on the dining room table.

"How are you feeling?" Natasha asked.

"Good," Wanda replied with a soft smile. It was taking a load of effort not to touch her belly. "The nausea seems to have passed."

"You worked out when you are telling Steve?"

"I'll wait until we're alone. That way we won't have to tell everyone until we're ready." Natasha nodded. "How long until they get back?"

"Bruce says they are on their way. Problem is that Sharon is running late," Wanda smiled sadly and then she suddenly started weeping. "I take it the hormones have kicked in."

"I'm getting everything today," Wanda chuckled wiping her tears. "Sorry. I just started going on a track of thinking who should be here. I thought Sharon, then I thought Peggy and then Bucky…"

"You okay Wanda?" Rhodes asked.

"Yeah, just hayfever," Wanda lied. She took a moment to compose herself and walked into the kitchen. The spread looked amazing, topped off with Steve's birthday cake. Three tiers of white fondant with red stripes, with the top tier a blue fondant background with fifty white stars. He was
Captain America after all. "At least they put Happy Birthday Steve."

"I know," Pepper replied. "I made it so clear to the baker that it was a birthday cake and not an Independence Day cake that she thinks I am incredibly high strung."

"You are high strung." Wanda laughed and Pepper tossed a cheese puff at her. "Steve is on the way so hopefully everyone will be here by now."

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Steve was incredibly confused as to why Bruce and Thor wanted to return to Brooklyn with him. However, he shrugged it off. Other than Natasha, they were the original Avengers, and it was nice that they were seeing him as a brother in a way. The two were bickering about something, so it did feel as though he was the older brother trying to stop his younger siblings from fighting.

As soon as they arrived, Steve pulled up outside his house and noted the cars. "There's a lot of cars about."

"Your neighbours must be having 4th July parties," Bruce suggested.

"Maybe we should go around to the neighbours later."

"Maybe…"

The three men walked out of the car and up the steps to the house. Steve opened the door and was greeted by a barrage of people shouting, "SURPRISE!"

Steve blinked as he saw everyone in the front room with bright smiles. He actually could not help but laugh as he walked in and found his wife, "Is this why you were acting so weird this morning?"

"Not quite," Wanda replied as she pressed a kiss to his lips. "I may have another surprise for you later."

"Okay you two, let's keep it PG," Rhodes joked. Steve laughed and looked around. There was a blue banner that proclaimed, 'Happy Birthday Steve' and the room was filled with red balloons. "Right, let's get some music on."

'You're picture perfect blue, Sunbathing on the moon. Stars shining as your bones illuminate."

Steve pressed a kiss to Wanda's head. "I love you so much."

Wanda smiled and hugged him close. They took the party outside and mingled among the guests. Natasha and Pepper revealed the buffet and the guests immediately scrambled to get to the food. Wanda had to take a deep breath at the smell of tuna but she managed to keep herself together. She almost forgot about the pregnancy and she did have to take a step back to avoid it bursting from her lips before she had the chance to tell Steve. She let herself wonder for a moment whether it would be a boy or a girl. She had no preference but she could not get the image of a little girl out of her head.

"I'm not going to lie, married life suits you both," Sharon commented to Wanda. "You're just glowing."

Wanda smiled as she took a cheese sandwich. "Thanks. I think we're still in that honeymoon period."

"Well, given everything you two have been through you deserve this."

Wanda had doubted whether she really deserved to have this life: marriage, a house and a baby. She
wondered what her parents, Pietro and her grandmother would make of this. She hoped they would be proud.

Later in the afternoon, Wanda quickly went into the kitchen and grabbed the cake. It was a little heavy but she managed to get it into the garden where everyone started singing, "For he's a jolly good fellow. For he's a jolly good fellow. For he's a jolly good fellow, which nobody can deny."

Steve blew out the candles and pressed a kiss onto Wanda's lips. "Was that your big wish?"

"Hey, I don't have a lot to ask for now." Wanda smiled as she put the cake down for it to be cut. It wasn't anything overly fancy but it tasted delicious. Steve was more than pleased with it.

After a few hours, the party started to look towards the sky where the fireworks would start. Wanda and Steve were sitting on the swing as the colours illuminated the air. Steve wrapped his arm around her and Wanda leaned in. It was almost perfect.

Once everyone had left and the house was clean, Wanda and Steve walked up to the bedroom. He commented, "Okay, I'm not going to lie, this has been the best birthday ever."

"Even better than last year?" Wanda asked as they walked through the door.

"Well, maybe there could be something that would make it perfect."

He kissed her lips and then saw a gift on his pillow. He frowned and grabbed it. "Is this from you?"

"Maybe," Wanda replied coyly.

"I think you've spoilt me enough." Steve ripped the paper and he dropped the box on the floor in shock. He looked between the box and a smiling Wanda and back again. He picked the box up and opened it. Inside, he found the positive pregnancy test. "You're…"

He could not quite get the words out and Wanda laughed. "I am."

"Oh my god, Doll." He laughed and scooped her into his arms. Wanda laughed with him as he kissed over her face.

"I found out this morning and I wanted to wait until we were alone."

"How are you feeling?"

"Top of the world." Steve put her down and kissed her on the lips. His hand slipped down to her stomach and rubbed it gently. "I called the doctor and we've got an appointment on Saturday."

Steve nodded and hugged her close. He kissed her forehead. "I love you so much Wanda Maximoff. You are amazing."

"I love you too Steve Rogers."

Chapter End Notes

Again, please do not post spoilers.
Chapter Four

Steve had gone to the water cooler for the third time as they waited to be called to see their new OB/GYN. Doctor Kwon was a specialist in bipolar disorder and pregnancy and had a positive reputation that reassured Wanda that she would be in good hands. However, they were both nervous. They would not only be seeing their baby for the first time but also talking through Wanda's treatment.

"All that water is going to go straight through you," she commented.

"Sorry. I just can't sit still," Steve replied taking her hand. "You okay?"

"I think I will be once we've got a plan together."

"Wanda Maximoff?" the nurse asked holding a tablet. Wanda and Steve stood and followed the nurse to an examination room. "If you could change into a hospital gown and Doctor Kwon will be with you in a moment."

Wanda slipped off her dress and pulled on the pink paper gown. She guessed it would be worth removing her knickers since she would need an internal exam. She sat on the gynaecological chair and smiled at Steve. He gave a nervous smile back as a doctor came in.

"Hi, Wanda, I'm Doctor Kwon. You are here to confirm a pregnancy?" the doctor asked.

"Yeah," Wanda replied.

"Okay, you are twenty-eight and this is your first pregnancy?" Wanda nodded. "When was your last period?"

"21st May."

"Okay, you also were diagnosed with bipolar disorder but we can talk through that in a moment. I want to do a vaginal ultrasound since you are about six weeks and we can get a better visual of your baby." Wanda parted her legs into the stirrups as Doctor Kwon produced the ultrasound machine. Steve took Wanda's hand as the probe was inserted into her. After a moment, there was an image of Wanda's uterus and they saw a little speck in the middle. Doctor Kwon pointed to the speck and smiled. "That is your baby."

"It's so tiny," Wanda breathed. She turned to Steve who looked dumbstruck at the slight. Their baby was barely the size of a lentil, but it blew his mind.

"So tiny," he echoed.

"Well, everything looks as it should. If you come back in two weeks, we should be able to hear the heartbeat clearly. However, the baby is the right size for six weeks and six days and I can see its heart flickering."

Wanda nodded as she stayed entranced by the image in front of her. "Is it possible to find out the sex?"

"Not this early. The baby's genitals don't start forming until the ninth week and even then it will be
"Oh," Wanda said, realising it was a dumb question.

"Okay, now we have that in order, I think we need to sit down and talk about bipolar treatment."

Wanda got changed and they followed Doctor Kwon to her office. Wanda had her notes from Acres prepared. The doctor read over the notes and made some notes on her computer. "So you are currently on lithium carbonate but had recently been weaned off aripiprazole, diazepam and sleeping medication?"

"Yes," Wanda replied. "I went through a severe manic episode before I was admitted including psychosis. I also had an alcohol addiction. I was on lithium for eighteen months until this January when I stupidly forgot to take it."

"And was this pregnancy planned?"

"I have fewer ovarian follicles than I should for my age. We decided it was better to try than to wait until it was too late."

"We did the research and know the risks, but Wanda does have a support network to help her," Steve added.

"That's good. So, you know the risks of your medication?" Wanda nodded. "Okay, given that you are still within the first year of treatment, I am not going to recommend that you come off the lithium. Given your history and the risks associated with coming off the medication, it is the safest option for you and your child. There are things you can do to reduce lithium toxicity. Drink plenty of water and maintain a normal salt intake. We will be taking blood samples from you to check your lithium levels at each appointment. Obviously, we will be having more checkups than what is usually expected to check on your baby's organs. We will offer you an amniocentesis at around fifteen weeks."

Wanda looked at her as she processed all this information at once. "Okay…"

"As long as you continue your therapy and have a strong support network, your chances of a relapse are very low."

Wanda nodded as she was handed pamphlets as well as a copy of her maternity notes. On the way out, she read through them and Steve squeezed her hand. "That's good news at least."

"Yeah. It was just a lot to take in." Wanda looked up and smiled at him. She pulled out the ultrasound picture and her eyes started to well. "I can't believe that I could love something so small."

"I know. It already looks beautiful."

"For a prawn." Steve laughed and kissed her head. "Come on, let's get some lunch."

Thankfully, Wanda was taking the doctor's advice seriously. She even asked for the sodium content of her salad. "I can't believe that I asked the doctor what the sex was," she said.

"To be honest, I was curious myself," Steve replied. "Do you have a preference?"

"No. I mean, I always saw us having a girl first but if it is a boy I am not going to protest."

"I thought we would have a girl. Your hair and my eyes."

"Well, when I picture a boy, I picture just you." Wanda laced her fingers with Steve. "Thirty-five
more weeks until we see who they look like."

"We still want to call it Milena or James?"

Wanda nodded. "They're the perfect names."

"Well, the nursery is mostly done and we have decided on names…"

"Just a waiting game really."

-0-

Seven weeks

Steve felt a loss for how to help Wanda. The morning sickness had hit her with full force and all he could do was rub her back as she hurled. Wanda was mentally cursing him but it was only a reaction to how she felt at that moment. The July heat was not helping either. Once she thought the nausea had passed, Steve wiped her sweaty face with a cloth and gave a sympathetic smile.

"I bet you hate me right now," he said.

Wanda snorted. "I wanted this baby so I am willing to suffer. Though it really would have been nice if I had been one of those lucky women who have no issues."

"Do you want some water?"

"Ginger tea. I'll clean myself up."

Steve nodded and kissed her forehead. He left her to it and went down the stairs and to the kitchen to prepare the tea. He saw the maternity notes on the table and he flicked through them. Everything seemed in order from her weight to her bipolar medication. However, it felt too official. It was not personal to them.

The kettle whistled and Steve poured the water over the tea leaves. Wanda came down the stairs looking a lot fresher and she welcomed the smell of ginger. She leaned against the counter and Steve took his phone out.

"What are you doing?" Wanda asked as she sipped her tea.

"I am taking a picture of you so we can document your stomach growing," he replied.

"I've not started showing yet," she countered.

"I know, but we have to start somewhere." Wanda gave a soft smile. She actually could not wait to start showing and for it to feel real. She wanted to feel the baby moving around more than anything. "How about we get a pregnancy diary. That way we could keep a personal track rather than medical information such as your notes."

"It sounds quite nice." She rubbed her stomach and said, "I take it that was what those pictures are for."

"Maybe. It will be fun to see you both grow." Wanda smiled and leaned in to kiss him, only for his phone to ring. Steve groaned and saw Natasha's number. "Nat?" Wanda watched as Steve's face run the gambit of frustration to horror in moments. "Okay, I'll get there as fast as I can."

"What's going on?" Wanda asked when he hung up.
"There's been reports of a HYDRA agent in Tunis. Jack Rollins."

"So…"

Nat, Rhodes and I are going after him."

Wanda felt dread in her blood. "You're going to come back right?"

"Of course I will." He smiled and pulled her into a hug. "Doll, it will only be a few days. And Rollins is not very clever."

"It's just the last time we went after a HYDRA agent…"

"Was in Lagos. I know. However, Rumlow was smart. Rollins will screw up somehow." He pressed his lips to her head and touched her stomach softly. "I love you."

"I love you too."

-o-

"I thought he was in prison," Steve said as he and Natasha entered the quinjet.

"There was a mass breakout while we were on the run and Rollins was among them. He's been on the CIA's most wanted list for the last eighteen months. Even higher than we were," Natasha explained. "You going to be okay to go on this mission?"

"Why wouldn't I be?"

"I know about the baby. I was there when Wanda took the test."

Steve looked around in case anyone else was there and said, "I think Wanda's worried because of what happened in Lagos."

"Not to mention everything that happened since then. Maybe you should sit this one out. Rhodes and I could take it and we should bring Thor and Bruce. Rollins won't stand a chance."

"You're benching me?"

"My main concern is that your baby has a father and that Wanda is healthy." Steve felt annoyed since he was supposed to be the leader. However, Natasha had a point. He could not throw himself into missions like he used to before HYDRA was exposed. He had a wife and baby to consider. Unlike his father, he was not drafted. He had a choice. "You can keep watch on the trackers."

"You serious?"

"Hey, we need our leader, but Wanda needs you more."

Steve sighed and walked away from Natasha. He hated not being involved in missions and he felt a duty to bring down HYDRA once and for all. He grumbled as he sat at his desk and switched on the computer. He picked his phone up and rang Wanda.

"Steve?" she asked when she answered.

"Hey Doll. Well, turns out that I am not going to Tunisia."

"Why?"
"Nat's benched me."

"Again, why?"

Steve sighed, "I think she's worried that if something happens to me then... She's worried that I am going to leave you a widow with a baby to look after."

"Like your father?"

It was that point that the realisation dawned on Steve: he had grown up never knowing his father. His father had died in a mustard gas attack before he was born. Steve wondered whether his father knew that his mother was pregnant. Steve leaned back and said, "I guess she may have a point about it."

"I can't say that it didn't occur to me when you said you were going to Tunisia. Does that mean I am selfish?"

"Not at all Wanda. I guess it's something that I have to consider now I have a family to think about. My dad didn't have a choice, but I do. I don't want our baby to grow up without a father. All I have is a picture of my father. No memories."

"So what are you saying?"

"I think that Captain America is going into retirement. I'll still lead the team from the base, but no more field missions."

-o-

It was later that night when Steve found himself staring at the ceiling of the bedroom. Wanda was curled up and asleep. The fatigue started hitting her around 20:00 and she was dead to the world now. Steve wished he could get to sleep but the thought of earlier kept spinning in his head like the fan he was watching.

He wondered if he had made the right choice by stepping down from field missions. He felt a little selfish, but he had faith Natasha could lead the team on her own. He would not have thought about it had Natasha not put the idea in his head.

Wanda rolled onto her back and Steve looked at her. The vest top had ridden up, exposing her flat belly. He still could not believe that there was a baby in there. His fingers danced over Wanda's belly and he whispered, "Hey baby. I'm your dad. I saw you yesterday and you are honestly the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. Your mommy is the best thing to ever happen to me, and so will you. I promise that I am going to be there for you. You will always have a dad. I love you."

Steve pressed a kiss to her belly and wrapped his arm around her. Wanda stirred but settled into his embrace. He saw the smile on her face and kissed her on the cheek.

"Were you just speaking to the baby?"

"Yes. I would like him to know my voice."

"She will. You okay?"

"Yeah, I just wondered if I made the right choice." Wanda turned around and kissed him on the lips. "I think I have. I know how it feels to not have a father and while I respect my mother and love everything she did, I don't want you to be in the same position as her."
"Your mother would be so proud of you. And your dad. He would be so happy you made the choice he couldn’t."

Steve smiled and pulled her close. While his father was not at fault for his death, Steve felt as though this would be the chance for him to not make the same mistakes.

"Our baby is going to have the best we can give him," Steve whispered into her hair.
Chapter Five

Chapter Notes

Well Avengers: Endgame has been released for two weeks now and I have managed to complete most of it. Should be coming to you around July so make sure you have seen it. Who am I kidding, you've already seen it about five times by now.

Chapter Five

Eight weeks

For the second time in two weeks, Wanda found herself on the gynaecological chair with an ultrasound wand inserted into her vagina and herself staring at the little kidney bean on the screen in front of her. Only this time she was entranced by the sound of rhythmic hooves echoing through the room. Steve could barely look away from the screen as he heard the heartbeat.

"Everything looks perfect," Doctor Kwon told them. "So, other than the usual symptoms, how have you been feeling?"

"Just rolling with it, to be honest," Wanda replied. "My moods seem fairly stable, though I did sob at a WWF appeal."

"So no signs of feeling depressed?"

"None that I can think of. I took up writing a mood journal to keep a track of how I feel and I haven't fallen low."

"What about mania?"

Wanda bit her lip. "To be honest, I think I may be on the more manic end, even with the lithium. It's not in a sense that I am irritable or having hallucinations again but just feeling a bit more energetic and planning, but not mad plans. Sensible plans."

Doctor Kwon looked to Steve, who nodded in confirmation that Wanda's plans had been sensible. The plans included meal plans, looking for pregnancy yoga classes, birthing classes and scheduling appointments with Doctor Uzair. It seemed this version of Wanda's mania was more productive than when she was off her lithium.

"Okay good. Keep using that journal and that way we can go through any patterns. We took a blood test at the start but from what I can see, your vitals are great and your baby looks healthy. Though I do wonder…"

The pause caused a hitch on Wanda's heart monitor. "What?" Steve asked.

"You are both enhanced individuals. You both have different abilities so I am wondering whether or not your baby will inherit those abilities. We can work it out with the amniocentesis if you want." It had been something that Wanda had not considered. It had been a complete afterthought since she was more worried about the effect the lithium would have on her baby's development. However, she was very enhanced, and so was Steve. There was a very high chance that their baby could inherit
their abilities - or worse suffer serious defects as a result. "Wanda, you okay?"

"I am. I just hadn't thought…"

"We don't know what to expect because this is probably the first instance of a baby being born to two enhanced parents that we know of. I think it would be worth having the amnio for that reason alone."

Wanda took a deep breath and looked at the screen. She smiled softly at her little bean. If she had any hope, she would wish her baby would be free of superhuman abilities. It would make for an easier life. A life without the burden of hiding their abilities or potentially being used as a weapon by either Ross or HYDRA. Wanda nodded at Doctor Kwon to give consent to the amniocentesis.

"Okay, so when you are fifteen weeks, we'll take a sample of the amniotic fluid and the results should be back within a few days. Right now, I suggest that you take it easy and enjoy the pregnancy while you can."

-o-

It was three days later when Natasha and Pepper dragged Wanda to the cinema to see Mamma Mia: Here We Go Again. Wanda was not sure what to expect given that she thought the first movie ended on a final note. Still, she doubted that she would get the time to socialise once the baby arrived so she was not going to protest.

Lunch was first. While Wanda was eating healthily, for the most part, her cravings had kicked in, and it was mainly sweet foods. However, she had found ways of managing these cravings by buying smaller portions of ice cream and chocolate and only restricting herself to one or the other. Her main concern was due to Steve being tall and stocky, and with the risk of the baby inheriting his enhanced genes, the baby could grow so big that it could lead to an emergency caesarean section. Wanda wanted to avoid that as much as possible.

"I'll have the leek and potato soup please," Wanda ordered. The waitress nodded and went to take their order to the kitchen.

"It doesn't sound a lot of food," Pepper commented. Wanda knew this was a place of concern given how low her weight had dropped only a few short months ago. Wanda was fifty-eight kilograms now. Part of that was the pregnancy, though most of that was her eating healthily.

"It's reasonable for a lunch," Natasha countered. Natasha was still the only person who knew about the baby and she knew why Wanda was not gorging on the fries as a normal pregnant woman would. "And you have a bread roll with it."

"And I am going to get some candy when we get to the cinema," Wanda pointed out. That would be her portion of sweet food for the day. "I bet you must have thought I had an eating disorder considering how much weight I lost."

"Well, it was a shock to see you going from looking healthy to stick thin within a few short weeks."

"I think I lost ten kilos through lack of appetite. The rest was pneumonia. I remember when I was in the hospital they wanted to put me on a feeding tube."

"Why didn't you?" Pepper asked.

"The last time I had a tube stuck inside me, it was when HYDRA was experimenting on Pietro and me."
The three women were silent for a moment before Natasha said, "You never really speak about your time in HYDRA."

"I did when I was in therapy."

"Being HYDRA's prisoner was the worst year of my life," Wanda said bluntly.

"Because of what they did to you?" Doctor Uzair asked.

"Well, it is the only time where I have understood how my grandparents felt in the concentration camps. Especially my dad's side because I never felt close to them."

"How so?"

"My grandfather was also a twin. I bet you know what Josef Mengele did to twins. While Steve always said that HYDRA was even more extreme than the Nazis, I still had that association with my grandparents. This was the grandfather that took the line of God sends suffering to test people's faith."

"Did your grandparents ever tell you what happened?"

"No. I read about it in school. That was strange for me. Pietro and I were the only Jewish kids in school so whenever the Holocaust was mentioned… It was made even weirder because we were also half Romani on my mother's side."

"I thought your father was Romani."

"No. I know his name was Django, but that was due to my grandmother moving to France after the Second World War. She heard the music of Django Reinhardt and she loved it so much she named her son Elyakim Django Maximoff, but my father hated Elyakim so he always told people to call him Django."

"That makes sense. I find it interesting that you embrace both sides of your heritage but you appear to not have the same closeness to your father's parents as you did your mother's mother."

"Well, they lived in Germany. By the time my parents died, my grandmother had died and my grandfather was sick so he would not have been able to take care of us. I think it was the argument between him and my Baka over why the Holocaust happened that strained our relationship. I was closer to my Baka and seeing her upset made me upset and defensive. That said, when the HYDRA doctors stuck a needle into me, the first person I thought about was my grandfather."

Wanda shook her head as she snapped out the memory. "Anyway, can we speak about something that is actually fun?"

"Sure," Pepper replied.

An hour and a half later, the three women took their seats at the back of the cinema with Wanda snacking on her Milk Duds. Pepper needed the bathroom before the film began so it left Natasha and Wanda alone.

"So, how is it all going?" Natasha asked.

"The baby is doing well. We heard the heartbeat the other day and she sounds strong," Wanda replied.
"And you?"

"I'm okay. Other than the morning sickness, fatigue, swollen boobs and a weird metallic taste in my mouth. I'm okay with my head."

"Well, that is good at least. So they have not taken you off the lithium?"

"They haven't but they are monitoring the baby. They thought it was better than for me to have another relapse. It's just a case of continuing to eat healthily and continue counselling."

At that point, they saw Pepper return from the bathroom, so they stopped the conversation. Steve and Wanda wanted to keep the baby a secret as long as possible - at least from the media. Wanda just wanted to certain the baby would be okay. Given she still had to have an amniocentesis, she wanted to wait until the results were confirmed before she told anyone.

"So, what are we expecting with this movie?" Pepper asked.

"Hopefully just a fun romp like the first one," Wanda replied.

For the most part, *Mamma Mia: Here We Go Again* was a fun romp. Wanda could not help but bop her head along with the music. However, when 'I've Been Waiting For You' started to play, the tears started to prick in her eyes and she had the compulsion to rub her stomach. *I'll be a good mum, I swear, You'll see how much I care when you meet me.' It then hit her that this could be the closest she could be to her mother. She was the same age as her mother when she had Wanda and Pietro. The floodgates finally opened at 'My Love, My Life'. She tried her hardest to hide it, but since she was perched in the middle of Natasha and Pepper, it was mission impossible.

Pepper seemed bemused by Wanda's outburst while Natasha's lips went thin in a bid not to laugh at her best friend in the midst of a hormonal moment. Once they were out of the cinema, and Wanda had a moment to compose herself, they found a table in The Loeb Boathouse Restaurant in Central Park. Pepper had ordered a cheese board for them to share. Wanda seemed to have calmed down at least.

"So, I take it that the ending hit you in a personal place?" Pepper asked.

"A little," Wanda replied shyly. She felt embarrassed about it.

"To be fair, Meryl nearly got me going," Natasha added. "I guess she wasn't nominated for all those Oscars for nothing."

"Pepper, I need to be honest about what happened: I'm pregnant."

Pepper took a moment to process the information before moving to give Wanda a huge hug. "Oh, sweetie. I'm so happy for you."

"Thanks. So yeah, you can tell that the movie hit it right in the chest."

"How far along are you?"

"Eight weeks. I found out on Steve's birthday."

"And is everything okay?"

"Yeah."

"So, you crying in the cinema?" Natasha asked.
"Well, I guess it hit me that my mother isn't here. She's been dead eighteen years but she should be here to see her own grandchild. My grandmother was there to see me and Pietro being born. And I'm a little scared."

"Why?"

"Mum must have had bipolar disorder. I remember after my grandmother died, Mum was rather manic and until I was diagnosed, I never really put the pieces together. Dad mentioned in his letter that Mum became unwell after Pietro and I were born. I don't know whether it was just postnatal depression or postpartum psychosis but I'm scared that when the baby is born I will end up with the same illnesses, and I don't want Steve to end up on his own looking after the baby on his own until I'm better again."

"Wanda," Pepper began, "you don't have to worry about that."

"You're not going to become ill again," Natasha added. "As you've said, you're still on your lithium and you're taking therapy sessions so the likelihood of you suffering a relapse is minimal."

"I guess you're right. I guess I am just sad because my parents would have been amazing grandparents."

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Steve looked over at Wanda as she twirled her pasta. She seemed to be away with her thoughts so he put his hand over hers.

"Doll?" he asked.

"Hm?" Wanda responded looking up from her plate.

"Just wondered if you wanted a penny for your thoughts."

Wanda snorted. "I'm just thinking about my mother. The movie brought up some very intense emotions. I just feel as though she should be here to help with the baby."

"I know the feeling. However, Ma would drive us nuts."

"I don't think it helps that they were both nurses. I can just imagine my mother fussing and telling me that I should rest."

"Well, I can take her place."

Wanda smirked and leaned over to kiss him. When she pulled back, she signed and said, "I think she would also know what to say if something happened to the baby."

"You think something will happen?" Steve asked curiously.

Wanda took a deep breath and went over to the bookcase where the photo album rested. She opened onto the third page. It was one of her parents and a baby, but it was neither Wanda or Pietro.

"I never told you about Ana, did I?" Wanda said softly as she walked over to the table with the album. "She was my older sister. She had a condition called Ohtahara Syndrome and she died at six weeks old. It's not genetic. However, Mum also had a stillbirth. Mateo stopped moving at twenty-two weeks." Out of instinct, Steve's hand came out and gripped Wanda's. "I never met them, but it doesn't mean they did not affect my life. My parents were always protective of Pietro and me,"
especially me since I ended up in an incubator when I was born."

"Wanda," Steve said as he allowed her to sit on his lap. "I can't say I'm not worried either. However, as Doctor Kwon has said, every pregnancy is different. It's likely that you won't have the same problems as your mother."

"I guess you are right."

"I know I am right. I am also right in thinking that we should enjoy this pregnancy."

"That you are." Wanda pressed a kiss to his lips and whispered, "I love you so much. I genuinely don't know what I would do without you."

-o-

Ten weeks

As Wanda entered the tenth week of pregnancy, the fatigue started to hit. She usually could manage with caffeine, but since she could only drink a limited amount of caffeine, she felt like a walking zombie. Steve had tried to pick her up with some high energy meals, including smoothies, porridge, scrambled eggs and plenty of wholemeal carbohydrates. Yet she still found herself lagging by 10:00. It was frustrated as she felt as though she could be doing something productive but instead was lying on the couch waiting to drift off.

"Listen to this Doll," Steve said. He had a pregnancy book propped up on a pillow as Wanda brushed her teeth. "The baby's heart should be fully developed."

"I guess that is a good thing," Wanda replied tiredly. She did not mean to be grouchy, especially when Steve was really excited by little things like this, but she was so exhausted that she could not really take anything in.

She spat out the foamy liquid into the sink and sighed as she padded to the bed. She ran her hands through her hair as she tried to get into a comfortable position. Steve pushed some hair from her eyes and asked, "What's up Doll?"

"I just feel so tired all the time. I'm napping twice a day but I just can't keep awake. The baby is a vampire."

"It won't be for too long Wanda."

"Hmm. I guess."

Steve pressed a kiss to Wanda's head and watched as she drifted off. He really wanted to make it better for Wanda and he hated seeing her this drained of energy. It was really affecting her mood as well. He could deal with a little manic to a point. Manic meant she could get out of bed. Manic meant she could be productive. Depressed Wanda… He could not work out how to help her.

He guessed he could make her life easier. It was only 19:30. There was also a huge pile of laundry to do. He pulled the covers over her gently and got off the bed to walk to the bathroom. Steve could do laundry. When he was living on his own in Washington DC, he worked out that he needed to separate the lights from the darks, the whites from the blacks and the delicates from the other fabrics. He was still not sure why he needed to do so but he did not argue with what he was told. At least when it came to housework.

As he got to work separating the delicates from the other clothes and then the white delicates from
the coloured delicates, Steve frowned a little. He was holding a pair of Wanda's white cotton knickers but it looked to be dried blood, and from the look of it, it seemed recent. As in just today.

"Wanda!" he shouted as he ran to her. He shook her until she woke and Wanda grumbled as she sat up. He showed her the knickers in alarm and said, "You've been bleeding."

"I know," she groaned. "It's just spotting. I got checked out by Doctor Kwon and she said there is nothing to worry about. She thinks it must have been a cervical polyp that is bleeding."

"And you did not think to tell me?"

"I didn't want to worry you."

"You were worried enough to go see Doctor Kwon."

"That was because I was advised to do so if there was any form of bleeding. Steve, it is just spotting. The baby is fine. I'm fine. All she said was to keep an eye on it."

"You should have told me. I could have been there for you."

"I knew you would freak out like you are doing now."

"What do you expect Wanda?"

"For you to be the rational one of the two of us."

"I can't be the rational one when you neglected to tell me that you were bleeding."

"Steve… I promise that everything is okay. I'm exhausted. We can talk about it in the morning when my head can think straight. Okay?" Steve sighed but he nodded. While he was worried about her, it was not fair that he discussed this when she was extremely tired. She leaned up and pressed a kiss to his lips. "I love you, Steve."

"I love you too Wanda." He watched as she went back to sleep, and he flopped on the other side of the bed. He wrapped his arm around Wanda, palm flat on her belly, and tried to shut his eyes.

-o-

The next morning Steve went for a run. He had not slept well at all. The spotting had made him anxious and he had spent most of the night reading the baby book and researching 'spotting' online. It was excessive, but he just did not want to not in the know. Wanda was still sleeping when he slipped on his gym shirt, shorts and trainers. She looked so peaceful that his heart spilt out for her. However, he knew that if he did not go for a run he would be pacing around waiting for his wife to wake up.

He managed to do five rounds of the park, run as far as the Brooklyn Bridge and he was on his way back when he heard something rustling in the tree above him. There was a very little breeze so the rustling seemed to be coming from something else. He just about saw something ginger and hairy, at which point Steve realised that was a cat that had gotten stuck.

"Breaking news on New York 1, Captain America saves a cat. I can see Pat Kiernan saying it right now," Steve muttered to himself as he jumped to the largest bough and pulled himself up so he was level with the cat. "Hey, you need a hand?" The cat hissed a little until Steve stretched his hand out to pet it. It seemed to respond more positively. It crept onto his shoulder and Steve lowered himself to the ground. "Well, you don't have a collar, so I guess it may be best to see if you have a chip."
Meanwhile, Wanda woke to an empty side of the bed, but she assumed Steve had gone for a run. She did feel a pang of guilt for not telling him about the spotting. She had freaked out, and the only thing she could think of doing was getting herself to Doctor Kwon's office and getting it checked out. She had felt relief when she heard the baby's heartbeat, but she really needed Steve to be there. It had just slipped her mind.

She sighed and got out of bed. She went to the bathroom and checked her underwear. No blood and when she wiped, there was no blood on the tissue.

"At least you have stopped freaking me out baby," she whispered to her stomach. She still felt tired but her stomach began rumbling. The baby needed food. "Okay, I'll feed you, you little bloodsucker."

-o-

"Looks like you just found a stray," Doctor Fuller commented. "She's cute though and she has clearly taken to you." The cat was rubbing her head against Steve's hand in a bid to get Steve to pet her. Steve did so with a small smile on his face. "Have you ever thought of adopting a pet?"

"Not really. It's a bit chaotic in my house at the minute without bringing something else to look after." As soon as Steve finished his sentence, the cat started to purr and his eyes appeared to expand in a bid to make herself seem cuter. "I'll have to consult my wife about this."

Steve picked the cat up and carried him all the way home. Wanda was up and cooking breakfast when she turned towards him and frowned. "Why do you have a cat?"

"Oh, I found her in a tree. The vet can't find a microchip and she seems to have taken a shine to me," Steve explained putting the cat down.

"You sure that getting a cat is a good idea when we have a baby on the way?"

"Well, the good thing about cats is that they are generally low maintenance animals. All we need to do is feed her tuna, let her wander around the neighbourhood and curl by us when she's asleep."

Wanda looked down at the cat. She was sitting down, making a purring noise and her eyes as wide as saucers. Wanda looked back up at Steve and he shrugged. "I guess she is cute. What are we going to call her?"

"I thought you could choose since you are good at choosing names."

Wanda took a good look at the cat: she was ginger. Ginger was usually orange. Tigers were orange. She did not look much like a tiger. She looked completely harmless. More like a Tigger.

"Tigger," Wanda replied. "She looks like a Tigger."

"It's a great name. So, I guess that means we should get her a bed, some toys and some tuna." Wanda had to put her hand over her mouth. "You okay Doll?"

"Sorry, just the thought of tuna made me a bit queasy."

"How are you… you know?"

"It's stopped. I'm okay."

"Listen, I had some time to think while I was running. The reason I got upset had to do with what we
went through earlier this year. I wasn't there for you when I should have been, and I nearly lost you as a result. So, I freaked out when I saw the blood. I sometimes feel at a loss on how to help you so I just need you to tell me when you are struggling."

Wanda smiled and nodded. "That sounds one hundred percent fair. I can't say I haven't struggled in recent days. I just feel so exhausted that I can't function and I feel unable to be productive. I feel a bit useless, to be honest."

Steve smiled and walked over to hug her. "You aren't useless Wanda, just tell me what I can do to help."

"Well, you did help by bringing Tigger home. It gives me something to focus on." Wanda leaned down to pick Tigger up and she stroked her back softly. "It's quite nice the baby will have a companion to grow up with."

"I can see all the pictures together. Birthday parties. Playing outside. Sleeping together."

"We're not going to let her sleep in the nursery are we?"

"Maybe not."
Chapter Six

Eleven weeks

As the end of her first trimester approached, Wanda started to feel the physical changes in her body more. While there had been some signs such as her pelvis shifting, her breast size increasing and her face looking fuller, they never quite stood out to her as much as when she first spotted that her stomach had turned from flat to a squishy muffin top almost overnight.

Her fingers danced over the little swell of her belly and she called, "Steve."

"Hm?" he asked coming into the bathroom. It seemed he was in the middle of getting dress since he was wearing just his grey sweatpants. It was then he noticed Wanda's belly and he stopped stock still. "Is that?"

Wanda nodded with a smile and answered, "She's popped."

"It's hard to believe something so small could cause this," Steve replied as he walked over and placed his hand on top of Wanda's. "Can you feel anything?"

"Not yet. It might not happen until I'm six months along."

"So not for another three months." Steve pressed a kiss to the top of Wanda's head and said, "It feels almost too real."

Steve leaned in again and he pressed a kiss to Wanda's lips. Wanda hummed into Steve's mouth and Steve lifted her onto the vanity. Steve's hands roam under her silk robe, gripping her milky flesh in his hands. Wanda sucked on Steve's bottom lip as her legs wrapped around his waist. She could feel him twitch in his sweatpants and her hand snuck into the waistband to wrap her hand around his member.

"Doll," Steve grunted. His untied the knot of her robe and pulled the thin material off her body. His head dipped to capture her nipple - which had become darker in colour since Wanda found out she was pregnant - in his mouth and Wanda's head tilted back. Her body had become far more responsive since discovering she was expecting and while she welcomed the new sensations, sometimes it was driving her so crazy, she was having up to three orgasms in one session, which was draining her energy levels.

But overall, she just felt sensual. Even the simple touch of his fingers set Wanda alight.

Steve pushed his sweatpants down, removed her hand and pushed inside her gently. Steve knew his own strength so he had to restrain himself from slamming into her too hard in case it hurt both her and the baby. Wanda wriggled a little as she adjusted to the feel of him. Their lips met again, and then Wanda got a gleam in her eye.

She lifted herself off the vanity - Steve slipping out of her in the process - turned and braced herself against the counter. Steve kissed the side of her neck as he stroked her oversensitive bundle of nerves. She was so wet, soft and pliant in his hands, and he could not help but feel an overwhelming
rush of love for her.

He parted her legs again and swiftly rejoined them, his one hand grasping hers and the other still stroking her clit.

"Oh God," he groaned into her shoulder.

As always, they rocked together, their hips grinding against each other in unison. Wanda bit her lip as her back arched. She could feel the beginnings of her first orgasm approaching in her belly and the more pressure Steve applied to her clit, the faster it approached.

Steve pressed a kiss in a spot just under her ear and a jolt went down her spine, and her body shook as a tiny orgasm burned her body. Steve grinned as he felt her shake in his arms and whispered, "Good girl."

She turned her head to kiss him on the lips and Steve began to pound into her. The tension in his groin felt unbearable and he needed to release, but not without her surrender again. He sucked on her earlobe and his nail scraped against her clit, and he felt her body become rigid, and he emptied himself inside her.

Once they regained their breaths, they kissed again and Wanda said, "I need to shower."

Once Wanda was showered and dressed, Steve and Wanda made their way down to the kitchen for breakfast. It was wholemeal toast, poached eggs and extra spinach for Wanda. Tigger had come to rub herself on Wanda's leg and purred as she was waiting for her tuna. Wanda pointed to Steve for him to open the tin because the thought of the smell was making her stomach queasy.

"So what are we doing today?" Steve asked as he put the food bowl down for Tigger. The cat immediately dug into her breakfast.

"Not sure. Granted, I have my yoga class later. I guess we should start a birthing class soon."

"I'll start having a look soon to see whether we can get booked in as soon as possible." Steve leaned in and kissed her on the lips, only for his phone to cut the kiss short. Steve groaned as he answered, "Hello?"

"Hi Captain Rogers?" a man's voice asked.

"Yes?" Steve's eyebrows furrowed his brow in confusion because he had no idea who this person was.

"My name is Franklin Nelson. I am named partner at Nelson, Murdock and Page. I'm calling because I have the Last Will and Testament of James Buchanan Barnes."

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Steve felt his head spin as he was sat down in front of the desk with Franklin Nelson sorting through the papers relating to Bucky. Steve had not known Bucky had a will. He was not even sure if this was from the 1940s or recently, though given that the lawyer in front of him was rather young, he guessed that it had to have been recent.

Steve looked around. The only other person in the room was a man wearing sunglasses - which probably meant the man was blind. He was pressing his fingers against some papers, possibly written in braille. There was also a heavy bruise mark around his eye, as though he had been punched directly in the face. Steve wondered who would punch a blind man.
"Okay, Captain," Franklin said as he found the papers he was looking for. "So, I should explain how I have this. I used to work at a law firm called Landman and Zack. Around about 2014, I had a man come in claiming to be James Barnes. He wanted to take out a new will since the old one had been settled between his three sisters. However, it seemed they had not been able to close his bank account, so whatever money was left in the account collected interest. It's not a lot, but essentially what has been accumulated over the years has been left to you and his final remaining sister. However, since we believe Jodie… passed along with half the world…"

"All Bucky's assets have been left to me," Steve concluded. He hated knowing that Bucky had no more relatives that would be more deserving to receive the money Bucky had accumulated. "How much?"

"About $5000. As I said, it isn't much but it's probably put to better use with you than sitting in an account. We would have gotten it to you quicker but the number of clients we lost that day…" Steve notice the drop in Franklin's voice. He turned to the other man and notice his hands tense. "We lost our friend Karen that day. We keep the Page in our name to honour her. Anyway, we just need you to sign the forms and we will release the money to you in the next two weeks."

Franklin went to get the forms and Steve turned to the other man. Steve said, "I'm sorry about your friend."

"You're a Catholic right? Irish?" Steve nodded. "I've been doing a lot of soul searching in the last few years. I just wondered why it had to be Karen. I lost other friends: Danny Rand, Misty Knight and Trish Walker. All good people. They didn't deserve to go."

"No one did." Franklin returned with the forms and Steve signed on the dotted line. "So is that everything?"

"That's everything." Franklin answered.

Steve stood up and shook the lawyer's hand. Just before he walked out the door, a thought came across him. "Have you got any will writing kits?"

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It was later that afternoon that Wanda found Steve hunched over the kitchen table looking through some paperwork. He was so intensely focused that he did not notice her enter until she kissed his cheek.

"Afternoon sunshine," she whispered.

"Hey Doll. Good yoga class?" he asked.

"Not too bad. Some comments made about the bump but nothing major. Just comments that I'm showing. How was your meeting?"

"Bucky left $5000 to me in his will." Wanda blinked in surprise and she sat down as she tried to work out what this meant. Tigger jumped on her lap and Wanda smiled. "I wondered on the way back what to do with it. The best suggestion is that we open a savings account for a baby. Start a college fund perhaps."

"That sounds like a smart way to use the money," Wanda replied. She looked at the papers in front of Steve and asked, "So what is all this about?"

"Hearing Bucky's will got me thinking that I should make my own. Mostly as a precaution. It's
nothing much to say. I leave the house to you and all my assets. I'll leave a portion of the money for the baby to be accessed once he's eighteen but."

"Steve, why are you talking about this like you are going to die?"

"I'm not, but as I said, it means that you and the baby are looked after. I don't want to see you be in the same position as my mother where she struggled to make ends meet."

"And what if something happens to me?"

"I guess we could do it as a joint will. It will mean that we will have to choose a legal guardian if something happens to both of us."

"Natasha? She'd be my first choice. She's our best friend."

"Do you think she'd be up to being a fulltime guardian?"

"You've seen her with Clint's children; she's really good with kids."

"Okay, so in the unlikely event that both of us pass, the legal guardian of our child will be Natalia Alianovna Romanov."

"Sounds a great plan."

"This is just the basics, but it's good that we are considering this."

"Well, it is important to me. I don't want her to be passed through the care system. Never knowing what love is. I want her to have the stability that I never had."

Steve pressed his forehead against hers. "He will do. We'll give him that."

-o-

Twelve weeks

Wanda was relieved that the twelve-week scan would not involve something unpleasant being inserted into her vagina. However, she could not say she was keen on the feeling of the cold jelly being squirted onto her bare stomach. Steve had his hand gripped onto Wanda's hand as the black and grey image of their child - now looking more like an actual baby - came onto the screen.

"Perfect," Doctor Kwon commented. "Baby is the right size and heartbeat is strong." She moved the probe across Wanda's belly and said, "There are the feet."

"She already has your big feet," Wanda commented.

"So it looks to be a good size for twelve weeks and it looks as though there are no defects. Are you certain you still want the amniocentesis?"

"I think so. Did you tell me the risks?"

"I can tell you. There is a one percent risk of a miscarriage, and injury to the baby or yourself, infection, and preterm labour are other potential complications that can occur but are extremely rare. So with that in mind, do you still want to go forward with the procedure?"

Wanda and Steve looked to one another and then back at the screen. One percent did not sound a lot in theory. However, the doubt nagged in her mind that she could be in that unlucky one percent.
However, she conceived despite the circumstances of having a lower egg count. It may have been that luck was on her side.

"Is it worth the risk?" Wanda asked Steve.

"I think it is up to you."

Wanda leaned back and took a deep breath. "I still want to do it. Whatever the situation is with the baby, I want to know about it."

"Okay, I will schedule you in for an amnio in three weeks. That way I can send the information off to the geneticist who should be able to give you the results before you turn eighteen weeks."

"Three weeks?"

"For the whole picture. Is that okay?" Wanda nodded. "Okay, your blood pressure looks good. Are you still taking your lithium?" Wanda nodded. "Good. I'm going to take a blood test and see whether your levels are stable, but I can't see any problems on the scan to suggest it is affecting the baby."

On the way out of the clinic, Wanda took Steve's hand and asked, "Do you think I have made the right choice with the amnio?"

"It will prepare us for the worst case scenario," he replied. "It's your body at the end of the day."

At that point, Wanda's phone rang and she frowned when she saw it was Pepper. "Hey Pepper, what's up?"

"Okay, please do not freak out," Pepper ordered. "A tabloid magazine has published a picture of you and they have a headline that is announcing you're pregnant."

Wanda did not know how to process the fact that a magazine had published a photograph of her protruding belly without her consent. She just stared at the cover that Pepper had taken a picture of on her phone while Steve was on the phone to the editor.

"I'm not confirming it is true or not; that is not the point," he yelled. "It's incredibly irresponsible to do this."

Wanda was chewing on her nails and she turned to Pepper, whose lips were thin. "I took a glance. They are claiming that a source is close to you and Steve, but I haven't said anything."

"I believe you, and I know Nat would not have done it. Unless it was someone at my pregnancy yoga group," Wanda replied softly.

"Right," Steve announced as he came off the phone, "they said that this is nothing serious. They are just feeding a market."

"In other words, they don't really give a shit," Wanda said plainly. "What are they going to do when the baby is born? Shove a camera in her face so that people can kidnap her?"

"You know you can get an injunction for that. There is this thing called No Kids Policy where the parents of celebrities can request that no picture of their child should appear in any publication," Pepper suggested.

Wanda sighed, "I just wish it did not have to come down to this."
"Do you need to speak to a lawyer?" Pepper asked. "I have a really good one."


"I think I have heard of them; they tried to defend some crazy psycho who was shooting up Hell's Kitchen a few years ago. The case fell apart when he confessed to it all in court."

"Well, this is not a court case. It's an injunction against the press."

Steve went on the phone again and Wanda felt her head pounding. Pepper noticed Wanda rub her temples and asked, "Are you okay, sweetie?"


"Are you allowed to take any painkillers?"

Wanda nodded, "I'll be okay. I think I might have to tell the rest of the team though."

"You sure?"

"We've just had the twelve-week scan and everything's in order so I hopefully should be okay. I'll host a dinner party. It's about time I did one."

"So, I know this might not be the best time to bring it up, but I was picking up a copy of Cosmopolitan and…" Pepper produced the latest issue of Cosmopolitan which had Wanda's photograph slapped on the front cover.

Wanda took the magazine and had to smile to herself. The day she shot the photographs for Cosmopolitan was the day after she found out she was pregnant. While there was an element of photoshopping, she looked radiant. She remembered being so uncomfortable as she was not a natural model. The photographer had been helpful in telling her to do things such as play with her hair. Still, it stunned her that the photographs turned out reasonably fine.

She flicked through to the interview. Luckily, the interview seemed to match up to what happened and what she spoke about. The headline was actually rather positive: Wanda Maximoff: Setting the Record Straight. She really hoped she had done.

"It looks great," Wanda commented. "Let's just hope it gets a positive reception."

"Okay, I have managed to get us in a meeting with the lawyers. We need to head there now," Steve said coming off the phone.

Half an hour later, they were sitting in the office of Nelson, Murdock and Page. Wanda seemed surprised as Steve's choice of lawyer given it was not the upscale law firm like the one in Suits. It looked as though it had more than its fair share of pro bono cases.

"So you need to get a press injunction?" Franklin asked.

"It's for our child and any children we have in the future," Steve replied.

"We just want to ensure that they don't plaster her face on their covers," Wanda added.

"Okay," Franklin began, "so, I have a draft prepared. No child of Steven Grant Rogers and Wanda Tziporah Maximoff shall feature in a tabloid magazine. That includes their picture and name. The press must respect that request or they will be sued."
"Good, thanks Mr Nelson," Wanda responded.

"Call me Foggy. Is there anything else I could help you with?"

"Actually, how good are you with financial stuff?" Wanda asked.

Steve's brow furrowed and then Wanda pulled out what looked to be a bank statement. She put it on the desk and Steve looked at the number and he had to raise his eyebrows. Wanda had money. She also had three separate bank accounts. The first seemed to be her main account. That had the most money. There was also a separate account titled 'Baby'.

"So what do you want with this?" Foggy asked.

"I need to set up my own will and testament. The money in the main account goes to Steve. The baby's money goes to her to access when she is eighteen."

"Wanda-" Steve began.

"You don't know if I will survive the birth. The US does have the highest maternal mortality rate in the industrialised world. It's just doing what you are doing Steve: making sure that you and the baby are financially secure in case…"

Steve did not want to think about losing her. He had almost lost her when she attempted suicide only a few months ago. The idea of losing her was not something he wanted to think about. However, it made sense for Wanda to make this plan, because, unfortunately, she had a good point about the maternal mortality rate.

"We were going to do it as a joint will so that will be part of the that," Steve said softly taking his wife's hand. "I have the paperwork ready so it's just added that clause."

Foggy got to work writing up the terms of Steve and Wanda's will, and told the two he would call them to sign it when it was completed. As they left the building, Wanda sighed.

"At least that is over and done with," Wanda commented.

"You feeling better?" Steve asked as he wrapped his arm around her.

"The headache seems to have gone. Now, all we have to do is tell our friends."

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Wanda did not know what she was thinking about combining chicken alfredo with sweet potato fries. The chicken alfredo was fine on its own, but she really wanted sweet potato fries. However, she had done chicken alfredo and she was not going to let it waste.

"You okay Doll?" Steve asked as he lay the table with knives and forks.

"Aside from your child screwing with my cravings," she responded.

"Why is he my child when he doesn't something bad?" Steve chuckled.

"It's just the way it goes Steve." Wanda heard the bell ring and she ordered, "Can you get that?"

It seemed everyone had hitched lifts with one another as they all entered the house. Natasha and Pepper gave a subtle wink as the men decided to chat randomly. Wanda put the chicken alfredo in the middle of the table and the sweet potato fries by her plate. Wanda could hear Tigger purring for...
some food and she shook her head. The cat was spoilt enough as it was and she would get fat if they kept feeding her unnecessarily.

Everyone started to dig in until Steve laced his fingers with Wanda's. "Okay, I bet you have seen the front cover of the tabloid."

"Which one?" Rhodes asked. "There's loads with your face plastered on it."

"The one that is saying that I'm pregnant," Wanda imputed.

"To be honest, I think it's just the tabloids making stuff up to get people reading," Bruce suggested as he took a bite of pasta.

"Well…" Wanda began, "I am… pregnant."

The room went silent as they tried to process the news. Wanda smiled sheepishly. Thor was the first to break out into a huge smile and got out of his seat to give Wanda the biggest hug in the world.

"This is so wonderful," he commented.

"Thanks, Thor, but you are squishing the baby a little," Wanda groaned.

"Oh sorry." Wanda laughed as he let her go. "Congratulations."

"Thanks," Steve said with a small blush.

"So how are you?" Bruce asked.

"Not too bad. The last few days have been stressful but I'm okay for the most part," Wanda replied. "I have to have an amniocentesis in a few weeks but I am putting it out of my head. I'm twelve weeks and everything is looking good."

"Wait, why do you have to have the amnio?"

"Our genes basically," Steve replied. "Both of us are genetically advanced so it would be worth seeing if the baby has inherited our abilities."

"Trust me, this is something you should prepare yourself for," Natasha said. "This is the first instance where two enhanced individuals have had a child together."

"Well, I suggest we don't worry the happy couple and just congratulate them," Rhodes interrupted. He raised his glass of water in the air and said, "To Steve and Wanda."

"To Steve and Wanda," everyone echoed.

Wanda smiled as she sipped her water and she rested her head on Steve's shoulder. It felt a relief that their friends knew. It was just the amniocentesis and everything else to get through, but she was glad that there were more people around to give them a hand if they needed.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so next week we will have a gender reveal. Start placing your bets on whether Steve and Wanda will be having a boy or a girl.
Chapter Seven

Fifteen weeks

Wanda was supposed to be starting her adult English class the first week of September, but it was also the week of her amniocentesis. Since it was the same class she had taken before and the programme had not changed, the teacher had allowed her to take the first week off to refresh herself on the texts: *Wuthering Heights*, *Animal Farm* and *Othello*.

Wanda took a deep breath as Doctor Kwon performed an ultrasound to see how the baby was doing and so she could see where the needle was going to be pointed. Steve looked horrified at the sight of the needle. It was so long and thick that he was worried that the second they put it into Wanda’s stomach, amniotic fluid would start leaking. Wanda was also very nervous so she decided to avoid looking at the needle and the ultrasound.

However, Doctor Kwon was a specialist and the test happened with zero complications. All Wanda was instructed to do was rest for the next few days. Which meant that Steve was hovering over her like she was a china doll. Any groan of discomfort, he was there as a guard dog.

"Steve, I'm okay. It was just a little twinge," she said at least three times.

"You sure. I could get you a pillow Doll," he would respond.

She understood where this concern was coming from. She was secretly worried about the tiniest risk that they could lose the baby, but she could not help but feel annoyed.

"Steve, I know you are only trying to look after me and Peanut but I swear a twinge is just a twinge," Wanda said when he brought her a cup of green tea. She was lying on the couch with Tigger curled up beside her and holding up a copy of *Wuthering Heights*.

"I know Wanda, but it does worry me," he replied kneeling down beside her. "You sure you are feeling okay?"

"Nothing to be concerned about. I honestly am more worried about finishing *Wuthering Heights*."

"I thought you have already read it."

"I have but not since 2015. I remember the basics but it's just to refresh my head for next week."

"You sure that taking an English class while pregnant is a good idea?"

"What else do you expect me to do? Knit?"

"I'm just saying it was a lot on your mind back in 2015."

"But I was not very well back then. I was depressed and was essentially an alcoholic. I'm okay in my head for the first time in eighteen years."

Steve smiled softly and sat down so Wanda could rest her legs on him. "I just thought it would be a
lot to take on when you are meant to be relaxing."

"I'll just be reading books and writing essays. Nothing hard about it. I'm not exactly running around and kicking people's asses."

Steve leaned over and pressed a kiss to her lips. Wanda put her book on the coffee table and wrapped her arms around him. Tigger let out a disgruntled noise and went to lay on her bed by the fireplace. While they could not have sex, there was nothing stopping them having an impromptu make-out session.

Except Natasha walking through the front door.

"Hey, how did- Okay you two need to lock the door," Natasha announced as Steve jumped up and straightened himself. "I thought you could not do that for a few days."

"We were just making out," Wanda protested as she sat up. She gave the stomach a small rub and tugged the blanket up. "You could have called."

"Point. Anyway, did you say you were getting new neighbours?"

Steve walked over to the window and saw a truck with a man wearing jubbahs taking boxes out of the back alongside a young teenage boy in jeans. There was an older woman in a hijab and an eight-year-old girl leaning against the car.

"Should I say hello?" Steve asked.

"Hold on, I'll come with you," Wanda said standing up. "I need to stretch my legs."

"Fine but you're not going down the steps."

Wanda rolled her eyes and followed Steve and Natasha out the front door. It seemed the truck's lift was broken so the two men - presumably father and son - were trying to get the sofa out but we're making a Marx Brothers routine out of the job.

"Do you need a hand?" Steve asked walking down the steps.

"No we have it," the son replied groaning.

"Don't be ridiculous Aamir," the father protested. "Could you grab the back?"

Steve hopped onto the truck and lifted the back of the sofa so it was steady enough for them to lift it out of the truck. Once the sofa was down, Aamir said, "Thanks."

"No problem," Steve replied. "I'm Steve. That's my wife Wanda and our friend Natasha."

Wanda and Natasha waved and the father asked, "Are they not allowed to speak?"

"We can but I'm not allowed down the steps," Wanda replied pointing to her bump. "I just had an amnio so I can't do anything stressful."

"Oh, I had to have one with Kamala," the mother said, nodding her head in understanding. Wanda noticed the hint of an accent in the voices of the parents. It suggested they had been born elsewhere. "I am Muneeba, this is my husband Yusuf, our son Aamir and our daughter Kamala."

It was then the daughter looked up from her phone and her eyes widened at the sight of Steve, Wanda and Natasha. "Oh. My-"
"Be careful of that last word aibnatau," Muneeba warned.

"You never said we were moving next door to Captain America!" Kamala squealed.

"She's a big fan," Yusuf explained to Steve. "She has all your posters." Steve did not know what to think about the fact his neighbours possessed posters of him, but he did feel slightly flattered. "Listen, we do not want to inconvenience you further-"

"Actually, I was wondering is Muneeba and Kamala wanted to come in for a drink," Wanda interrupted. "You will be able to empty the van quicker with Steve's help." Secretly, Wanda hoped it would get Steve out of her hair for an hour and so she could have more company than the television.

"Can we Mom?" Kamala asked.

"We would be able to get it done quickly without Kamala getting in the way," Aamir added. Kamala stuck her tongue out.

"That would be nice," Muneeba answered.

Inside the house, Natasha instructed Wanda to sit down while she prepared the drinks. It was not so easy. Muneeba and Kamala did not drink coffee and Wanda could not because of the high level of caffeine. So she had to make coffee for herself, green tea for Wanda, and lemonade for Muneeba and Kamala. Kamala was immediately taken to Tigger, who welcomed the attention from someone different.

"So where did you come from?" Wanda asked.

"Karachi," Muneeba replied. "Yusuf and I moved here ten years ago."

"Oh, I meant before here."

"Oh. We lived in Ohio. It was a nice area but with a new job prospect, we could not pass it down. Brooklyn seems to be a nice area with a great school district."

"Yeah. I guess that I am lucky that the baby will have a decent education."

"Do you have an idea of what you are having?"

"No. I have an inkling it may be a girl but you can never be sure."

"It would be so cool if you had a girl. You could get her a mini Scarlet Witch suit," Kamala announced. Wanda's lips went thin. While the idea seemed cute, the reason that she had the amniocentesis was to see if the baby would inherit Steve or her abilities. However, she just nodded in a bid not to be rude. As well, Wanda was not used to having fans. She had received some fan mail expressing admiration of standing up to the twisted news about herself. There had been one eight-year-old girl, however, that Wanda knew had been her biggest fan.

"So there are these crazy assassins, and Captain America needs my help?" Scott asked.

"He heard of your skills and think you could be a great asset," Clint answered.

Wanda was leaning against the kitchen counter, her mouth thin and she turned her head to see a dark-haired girl - around eight - staring at her like she was in a trance.

"Sorry, Cassie loves you," Scott explained. "She has a costume in her bedroom that looks like the one you had in Sokovia."
Wanda gave a small smile at Cassie and Cassie came in holding a picture. "Could you sign this Miss Scarlet Witch?"

Wanda nodded and took the red marker from Cassie and signed the picture. It was one of her in a press conference for when they announced the new Avengers. Sam and Rhodes were beaming away. Wanda was hiding her head behind Steve's shoulder. It had not been a comfortable experience. She felt even more uncomfortable at that moment when she saw Vision's hand on her shoulder. She felt angry that he had betrayed her trust and tried to manipulate her into staying in the Compound.

"There you go Cassie," Wanda said giving the pen and picture back. She gave a small smile to Cassie who smiled back.

She wondered how Cassie was - if she had survived what was now known as the Decimation. There was still no news of Scott and they were not certain who Cassie's mother was to find out.

In the meantime, Steve was placing five boxes in the living room of the Khan's new house. The room looked similar to his but the walls were a bare magnolia shade ready to be painted.

"The neighbourhood is really nice," Steve commented. "Admittedly, Wanda and I have not gotten out much since we moved in. We were head first in wedding planning, then we were on our honeymoon and then the baby."

"Well, Aamir, now he has a job, is looking to marry." Yusef replied. "We thought that he should marry the daughter of our closest friend but Aamir said he saw her as a sister."

"Alala is a great girl but it's weird when you grow up with someone your whole life and you are expected to marry them," Aamir imputed.

"We took his choice into account and agreed he could find his own bride."

"Do you know any nice Muslim girls?"

Steve snorted. "Not personally, however when I pass the Masjid Al-Farooq on Atlantic Avenue, the women have always been very accommodating, though I am convinced it is because I am Captain America."

"Well, we were on your side anyway before Ross cosied up to the kadhabat birtiqalia," Yusef commented. Steve furrowed his brow. "Orange fool."

"Oh," Steve replied. "Never met the man but even Tony said that he was a piece of work. Which coming from Tony is interesting. I remember election night. Sam and I had stayed up to watch the results come in and when it was announced… Well, I never saw Sam chug so much alcohol back in his life."

"If I could drink, I would have done the same."

-0-

"They seem a nice family," Wanda commented as Steve handed her a bowl of pasta. "They remind me of the family we lived next to."

"Same. It's a good thing about Brooklyn: everyone comes from different places and have different stories to tell."

"I have a feeling I will be signing a lot of Kamala's stuff."
Steve snorted. "How are you feeling? Any twinges?"

"Some but nothing to be worried about. Natasha was mentioning something about a gender reveal party and I wanted to see what you thought."

"What is a gender reveal party?"

"It's where we have a party and we find out the sex of the baby. It's Pepper's idea."

"Sounds a fun idea. So what should we do? Let Doctor Kwon tell her so she can organise it?"

"I guess that is the idea. I think it is a good idea since we want to make the most out of this pregnancy. I'll speak to Pepper tomorrow and get some organisation done."

"You nervous about going back to school?"

"Nah. I think I'll be okay this time. Admittedly, I do not know how I will cope with the baby pushing on my bladder but I think now I have a better support system I'll be fine."

"You'd let me know if you were struggling to cope right?"

"Absolutely. You know, as much as your hovering can be annoying, I don't mind it when I know where I was about three years ago." She pressed her head against Steve's forehead and he pressed a kiss to her lips. "I know it was my own fault, but I was very lonely."

"Don't blame yourself. Never blame yourself," he whispered as he kissed her neck. "You will never be alone again."

-E-O-

Eighteen weeks

It was in the middle of breakfast when Doctor Kwon called to announce that the results of the amniocentesis had come through. Wanda quickly finished her fortified cereal and followed Steve out the house and into the car. Her heart was pounding in fear of what the results would say. If it was good news, it would have been said over the phone. She did not want the baby to have their abilities. She did not want their abilities to have an effect on the baby. Steve could only give her hand a reassuring squeeze. He was freaking out himself over what the results could mean.

"She'll be okay right?" Wanda asked as they walked into the waiting room.

"I hope so," Steve said as he wrapped his arm around her. They signed in and waited patiently until Doctor Kwon came out to greet them personally. "Is it serious?"

"Let's just sit down first before we discuss anything." The second they sat down, Wanda ran her hand over her belly. She had not felt any movements yet but she felt the need to have a protective hold over her baby. "Okay, I should start by saying the results found no sign of Down's Syndrome or any other trisomy disorders."

"That's good news. So what about our abilities? Have they affected the baby?" Steve asked.

"That... The results were inconclusive."

"Inconclusive?" Wanda questioned.

"There hasn't been any studies into how your enhancements affected your DNA for it to be clear if
there have been any changes. To be honest, the results look no different to a child born to non-enhanced parents. However, the geneticist said it could be possible the baby could develop abilities in the future."

"So all we can do is sit and wait."

"I'm afraid that is all that can be done, Wanda. How is this making you feel?"

"A little bit anxious to be honest."

"It's perfectly understandable. Do you need me to speak to Doctor Uzair?"

"No, I'll speak to her myself. Is there anything else you want us here for?"

"I want to do a quick scan to check the baby is okay. Before we do, would you like to know the sex?"

"Umm… Our friend is throwing us a gender reveal party so you can tell her so she can get the reveal part ready," Steve explained and he wrote down Pepper's number.

"Sounds exciting. When is it?"

"Friday," Wanda replied.

They walked over to the bed where Wanda lay down and pulled her top up. Doctor Kwon put a towel over her leggings and squirted the ultrasound gel on her stomach. The probe pressed against her belly and immediately a heartbeat echoed through the room. Wanda looked at her baby and smiled softly. It looked absolutely perfect. Ten fingers and ten toes and a perfectly beating heart. She should be thankful that she was having a healthy baby.

"Perfect as always," Doctor Kwon commented. "So, I just need to take a blood test and you'll be free to go."

Once the blood test was taken, Steve and Wanda returned to the car. Steve switched on the radio to kill the silence as they tried to process what they were told. Once Steve pulled up outside the house, Wanda went inside and sat on the couch. Tigger immediately went to sit on Wanda's lap and she stroked the cat. It did bring some comfort to her.

"Do you want me to get you a drink?" Steve asked.

"Tea, I guess," she replied. "What are you thinking?"

"I'm not sure Doll. I guess no news is good news."

"Maybe our powers are so complex they cancelled each other out. Like if you mixed acid and alkene." Wanda sighed, picked Tigger up, put her on the floor and went to the kitchen. "You know what I want: red velvet cheesecake."

"I guess I could go to that bakery in Grand Central. I quite liked their key lime cheesecake."

Wanda smiled and leaned up to kiss him. "You are amazing."

Steve grabbed his things and Wanda sighed. She grabbed her laptop, opened Skype and called Doctor Uzair. She wondered if her therapist would be free at that moment but luckily she was.

"Hi Wanda," Doctor Uzair said as she came on screen. "Have you had the results from your amnio
"Inconclusive," Wanda replied. "I think it's a good thing, but I wish we had an idea of what we could prepare for."

"Do you feel frustrated at all?"

"A little, but it's not making me feel down. To be honest, it's not the results I am worried about. It's how I am going to explain to the baby that her parents have powers. I think the reason this is making me anxious is the questions that my child will ask when she is old enough and when – well if the abilities start showing."

"Okay, so what type of questions do you think will be asked?" Doctor Uzair asked.

"Well, in my case it is how I got my powers. Being duped into joining a Nazi terrorist cult is not exactly an easy story to explain, especially when I am planning on teaching her about her Jewish and Romani heritage."

"So you are concerned that since you are Jewish-Romani yourself, explaining that you were tricked into being an experiment by people who were associated with the murder of millions of people, including some members of your own family, would be hard to explain."

"Essentially. I have had a hard time forgiving myself for it. I still picture my grandmother asking me why I did it?"

"Why did you do it?"

"Because I thought they were S.H.I.E.L.D. I thought they wanted to help those who wanted Sokovia to be free from Serbian forces."

"Wanda, you are just as much a victim as your grandmother was. You were told one thing but you were tortured. Remember the conversation we had about how you felt about being close to your paternal grandfather?"

"Vaguely," Wanda replied. "Do you think I am overthinking this?"

"It's understandable Wanda. You had a very close relationship with your grandmother. Your child doesn't have any grandparents so you and Steve are the nearest source to explain their ethnic culture."

"Yeah. Only I could have Jewish-Romani-Irish baby."

It did bring up an interesting question: what religion would their child be? Jewish law stated that the child should be Jewish, but Steve was Catholic. She had to consult his feelings on how their child should be raised.

Steve returned an hour and a half later with the red velvet cheesecake. Wanda smiled and took the cheesecake from him. "You are amazing."

"You've already told me this today," he replied as Wanda began to dig in. "You seem a little brighter."

"I had a conversation with Doctor Uzair. I think I was more worried about how I was going to explain how I got my abilities to the baby once she's old enough."
"Well, my explanation won't be much better, because who would let a German scientist perform experiments on them."

"I guess you and I were destined from the start."

"I think we'll work it out. We have time." Wanda nodded and smiled. She pressed her lips against his and Steve moaned softly at the taste of the red velvet cream cheese mixture on her lips. "I think that cheesecake is too rich but it tastes delicious on your lips."

Wanda chuckled and deepened the kiss further.

The conversation of what religion they would raise their child had slipped to the back of Wanda's mind. Mostly because she was not sure how to approach it. She assumed that since she was Jewish, then their child would be Jewish. However, Steve was Catholic, and he did have a say. Granted, she did find the concept of religion hard - especially in light of everything she had suffered as well as her family. However, sometimes people needed that belief that everything happens for a reason - that it was God's plan - so if her child wanted to follow a religion, then Wanda would have no protests.

On the way to the gender reveal party, Wanda turned to Steve and asked, "Would you care if the baby was not baptised?"

"Isn't it a custom in Judaism that the child must be raised Jewish?" Steve asked.

"Well, I am only half Jewish so we still celebrated Christmas…"

"I don't mind if we don't baptise the baby. I think we've established by now that I am a very bad Catholic."

"Even last night. Seriously, you can go to Hell for that tongue."

Steve snorted. "Honestly, I don't mind if you want to raise him Jewish."

"Well, if we do, we can't announce her name until eight days after the birth."

"Eight days?"

"Announcing the name was like tempting fate. Not that I believe in that but it keeps with tradition. Well, at least with Pietro. I didn't get a naming ceremony until I was fifty days old."

"Because you were in the hospital?"

Wanda nodded. "We also need to pick a Hebrew name. Well, James is Hebrew so that's okay. Milena isn't."

"Sarah is Hebrew right?"

"Yeah. It means 'Princess'."

"So if it is a girl her legal name will be Milena Sarah, but her Hebrew name would be Sarah."

"Essentially."

"Sounds reasonable."
"All that said if the baby was to say she wanted to worship one religion over the other or no religion at all, then we should be okay with it."

"Deal."

They pulled up outside the Compound and Wanda had to push herself out the car. Even though she was only eighteen weeks, her belly felt huge. She had definitely popped and the bump was firmer than the squishy muffin top it had been. "You okay Doll?"

"I think my centre of gravity is shifting. I'm only four months."

"Well, I guess it's possible he has my genes and absorbs everything you eat."

"That would explain the constipation."

Steve snorted. They could smell meat cooking from the garden. Even though it was late September, the weather still felt pleasant. They walked around the back and found everyone gathered. There were loads of blue and pink decorations and a banner starting 'Boy or Girl?'. On the table, there was an array of blue and pink themed food. There was a white cake with fondant daisies - which gave Wanda a hint of how they were going to find out the sex.

"Hey," Pepper stated coming over with a glass of pink lemonade and what looked to be blue lemonade. "How are you feeling?"

"Better," Wanda replied taking a glass of pink lemonade. "You really managed to string this all together in three days?"

"Yeah. It's actually easier than you think. The cake was delivered this morning. So I take it from the pink you believe you are having a girl?"

Wanda snorted. The dress code was that the guests turned up in pink or blue depending on what they thought the sex was. Natasha and Bruce were dressed in pink while Thor and Rhodes were wearing blue. Pepper was in white since she knew the sex. Steve had gone for blue in fairness. Wanda had noticed Rocket but he seemed preoccupied with scraps of metal.

While Wanda wanted to know the sex as soon as she arrived, there had to be some games first. First, it was an Old Wives' Tale guess where people had to make guesses based on some myths. First, Wanda's cravings for sweet food indicated it could be a girl. However, Wanda's pregnancy glow meant she could be having a boy. Steve's lack of weight gain meant it could be a boy (though, as Steve pointed out, he did have a high metabolism). Then finally the ring test: since it swung in a circular motion, it had to be a girl.

"I don't think any of those proved conclusive," Wanda commented to Steve.

"It's just a bit of fun," he whispered.

"I know but I just want to know now."

They had to wait for a game of gender juice pong where they had to throw ping pong balls into pink and blue juice. Finally, it was time for the big moment.

"Okay, are you ready to find out?" Natasha asked.

Wanda nodded as she and Steve stood by the cake. Natasha handed the knife as Pepper got her phone out to record the reveal.
"Okay, it's now or never," Steve whispered.

Wanda closed her eyes and counted, "Three, two, one."

Steve cut a slice and took a deep breath as a crumbly baby pink sponge emerged through the white fondant. Wanda opened her eyes and she gasped with delight at the sight of the sponge. Steve put the slice down and lifted Wanda up and swung her around. Both were laughing with as much joy as the day they found out they were having a baby.

"Oh my god, I can't believe it's actually a girl," Wanda exclaimed as Steve put her down. Steve did not say anything but kissed her instead.

"Okay you two, break it up," Natasha ordered with a laugh. "Thor, Rhodes, Rocket pay up-"

"You know technically blue used to be the colour for girls and-" Thor tried to argue.

"Just hand the money over Big Guy," Rhodes ordered.

"Right, let's eat the cake," Pepper said taking a slice. "I feel for your daughter's boyfriend in the future."

"What if she is a lesbian?" Wanda asked.

"Okay, whatever romantic partner she has."

"So have you thought of any names?" Bruce asked.

"We have a name but we were going to keep a Jewish custom of not revealing her name until she's eight days old," Steve replied.

"You honestly going to keep us waiting for eight days?" Natasha asked.

"Yep," Wanda replied through a mouthful of cake. "I know it sounds a long wait, but it's important to me that we pass on some customs to her."

"Sounds fair. You nervous about having a girl Steve?"

"I'll be fine," Steve replied as he rubbed Wanda's stomach. "I honestly did think it would be a girl. I just thought it would look better if we gave separate predictions."

"Sure you did Steve," Rhodes commented.

"You're wearing blue genius," Rocket commented as he swiped a slice of the cake.

"So are you. You see what I have to put up with."

Wanda laughed. It was almost too perfect but she could take perfection for once in her life.

Chapter End Notes

If you have not noticed by now, I am trying to incorporate some elements from the TV shows and the comics. Kamala Khan is one of my favourite comic characters so I really want her to be in the MCU, hence why I did include her. Initially, Kamala was meant to
be her age in the comics but the time jump in Avengers: Endgame meant I had to make her and Aamir a little younger so that when she does join the MCU, she'll be a teenager. If you have not been reading G. Willow Wilson's run of Ms Marvel then do so because it's awesome.
Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight

Twenty-two weeks

Steve always found it amusing that Wanda's birthday fell on the 30th October. The Scarlet Witch's birthday fell on the day before Halloween. However, Wanda did not want to have a party. She never liked Halloween. So Steve had to figure out a surprise for her.

"How about you two just get away for the weekend?" Natasha suggested one morning while helping Steve look for ideas. "You know like a babymoon."

"Is that a thing?" Steve asked.

"It's like the one last getaway you have before the baby arrives. Think of it this way, Wanda could do with a break from everyone and everything. She's not stopped since she found out about the baby, and I don't want to see her burnout."

"You think she's overdoing it?"

"I'm not sure she is sleeping all that well."

"That's because she can't really find a comfortable position now the bump has gotten bigger."

"Are you trying to say I am fat?" Wanda asked as she came in. Her belly was poking out of her grey dressing gown and her hair looked a bit dishevelled. Steve's heart did swell at the sight of her unkemptness but it dipped when he saw the bags and dark circles under her eyes. He loved his daughter more than he ever thought could be possible, even though it pained him to see Wanda struggle with the pregnancy. He should have been thankful that the spotting was the only major complication they had, but seeing his wife so exhausted was hard.

"No. Nat thinks you are not sleeping well because you're stressed," Steve explained.

"No, I'm not sleeping because I have something pressing against my back or my bladder. I'm also either too hot or too cold." She slumped in her seat and immediately Tigger jumped on her lap. "Why does my daughter hate me?"

"She doesn't hate you, Wanda," Natasha stated.

"Then why won't she let me sleep?"

"You were complaining not long ago that she was sucking the life out of you," Steve pointed out with an amused smile.

"I take that back. I want her to suck the life out of me." Wanda rubbed her stomach and sighed. "Why are you here this early Natasha?"

"It's nearly 11:00," Natasha replied.

"What?"

"You really did not sleep well last night so I thought I would let you lie in Doll," Steve explained.
"Steve, I have an essay to do by Monday," Wanda complained walking over to her laptop and logging on. She immediately found her essay on *Othello* and began to write about how Iago compared to Othello.

"Okay, before you do that, at least get some food down you," Steve ordered as he pushed forward a plate of scrambled eggs and spinach.

"I'll leave you to it," Natasha said as she grabbed her bag.

Steve sighed and sat in the chair next to Wanda. "Doll, are you sure this is not too much for you?"

"No. I'm fine," Wanda replied shortly.

"I just think that since you're not sleeping too well, your moods are a little out of sync. I know you are taking the lithium but we know from past experience that stress messes with your moods."

Wanda stopped typing. She sat back and ran her hands through her hair. She knew she was overdoing it, and she knew that her body was telling her to slow down. Even though she was taking the lithium, she was teetering on being overly manic.

"Maybe you're right," she replied glumly.

"Now, don't get me wrong, I am proud of you for pushing with this English class. I am not asking or ordering you to give it up. I just need you to take a step back and breathe." Steve turned his phone on and found an app he had downloaded not too long ago when Wanda had been discharged from Acres. It was a meditation app that was designed to allow the listener to breathe and empty their thoughts. "I'm going to put the app on okay?"

Wanda nodded. As the app began to play and Wanda closed her eyes, she felt her breathing level out and the knot in her head loosen. Once the app finished, Wanda opened her eyes, she gave a soft smile.

"Thanks, Steve."

"Don't mention it," Steve replied pressing a kiss on her lips. "So, what do you think about getting away for the weekend before your birthday?"

"Where?"

"Well, what about Virginia? A cabin to ourselves, beautiful scenery, fireplace… It'll be like the cottage in Stonebridge."

Wanda smiled. "Sounds great. It would be a nice last vacation before Milena comes."

-0-

*Twenty-three weeks*

Wanda managed to get the essay submitted on time. By Thursday she had gotten her grade back (A) and by Friday afternoon, she and Steve dropped Tigger off with the Khans, and were in the car and on their way to Mountain Lodging Virginia. They had just passed Philadelphia. Wanda was snoozing in the passenger seat, and she only woke just as they passed Washington DC.

"How far away are we?" she asked rubbing her stomach.

"About three hours," he replied. "Good nap?"
"Not the worst. She's nestled in a more comfortable position. For me at least. Have you been to Virginia?"

"I stayed there for a while after S.H.I.E.L.D fell. Fury sent me there to recover in peace."

"Nice of him."

"It actually was. Gave me the space to get my head together after everything that happened."

"I don't even know how you would process something like that. If Pietro turned up alive after all these years..."

"I honestly did not have the time to process it. All I could do was get Bucky to remember who he was and... Well, you've seen the scars it took."

"At least you managed to do it." Wanda smiled and rubbed her stomach. Just then, she flinched and her eyes widened. "Steve, pull over."

"What? Wanda? What's wrong?"

"Just pull over." Steve did as he was told and found a layby to pull into and stop the car. Before he could ask questions, Wanda grabbed his hand and put it on her belly. He frowned and then a small bump hit his palm. "She's kicking."

Steve smiled brightly as another little bump hit his hand. Wanda laughed at the ticklish feeling. They had seen so many ultrasound images of their daughter but now she was moving and kicking, it felt so real.

"Hey Milena," he whispered. "How does it feel?"

"Really weird," Wanda replied. "I don't know if it was the pressure of my hand but that's the first time I've felt her move."

"She's strong."

"Good. I want her to be strong and healthy." Wanda traced the outline of what was her daughter's foot, pressed a kiss on her fingertips and put it on the little foot. "Come on. We should get to the lodge before sundown."

She had to say it or else Steve would have stayed there forever. He leant over to kiss her stomach and as soon as he saw the road was clear, he pulled out onto the highway.

It was a long three hours. Wanda would have usually read a book, but while the morning sickness had passed, Wanda had gotten a case of travel sickness that was made worse when concentrating. Even though they had stopped twice since passing Washington DC so Wanda could have a bathroom break, Wanda immediately had to go to the bathroom as soon as they arrived at the cabin.

"I'm sorry, but she's sitting right on top of my bladder," Wanda complained as Steve opened the door. Wanda immediately went to relieve herself while Steve grabbed the bags. Steve put them in the bedroom and smiled when he saw Wanda emerge from the bathroom. Pregnancy really suited her. Her face appeared fuller and the pregnancy vitamins had done wonders for her hair. "What?"

"You just look beautiful," he replied.

"Really? Even if I look like swollen jellyfish?"
"You do not look like swollen jellyfish. You're growing life. That's beautiful in itself." Steve walked over and put his hands on her hips. "I'm not saying that for the sake of it."

Wanda smiled and looked down at her stomach. While she sometimes felt fat, now she could feel her daughter moving and kicking, she felt that it was not a negative thing. In fact, she was glad that she felt Milena move. She was twenty-three weeks. Her older brother, Mateo, had been stillborn at twenty-two weeks. Wanda had worried that much that she asked for a check-up to see how her daughter was. Doctor Kwon was sympathetic enough to do the check-up, even if Wanda felt as though she was wasting the doctor's time.

"I know you're not," she said softly. She took his hand and led him to the bathroom. There was a large bathtub and Steve immediately got the hint.

The water soothed the aching muscles and they smiled as Milena wriggled and kicked in response to the pressure of their hands and the sound of the water. It had been a long afternoon. Steve made a stir fry, they read by the firelight and they wrapped in the warm blankets of the bed as night fell.

-W-O-

Wanda was the first to stir the next morning. It had been one of the best periods of sleep she had in weeks and she never felt more alive and refreshed. She placed her hand on her stomach and immediately Milena kicked to greet her mother. Wanda smiled brightly.

"Morning," she whispered to her stomach. She would have stayed there, but Milena made a hard kick against her bladder. Steve was still sleeping so she padded quietly to the bathroom. When she returned to the comfort of the blankets, the shifting of the bed woke Steve.

"Morning Doll," he rasped as he kissed her cheek. "You're awake early."

"Someone else is awake," she replied.

Steve chuckled and lowered his head to her belly. "Morning Milena." He got a kick in the forehead in response and he laughed deeper. Wanda pulled her top over her bump so it was exposed and Steve kissed the stretched skin. "You can go back to sleep. It's Saturday."

"She's got no concept of the time of day," Wanda commented as she threaded her fingers through her hair.

Steve planted one last kiss on her stomach before moving up to Wanda's lips. Her hand pressed the back of his head and Steve kicked the blankets down and pulled Wanda's top over her head. Wanda moaned against his mouth as his hand cupped her swollen breast.

Steve kissed along her jaw and Wanda sighed as she allowed herself to be subjected to whatever Steve had planned. Her hands made swift work of removing her sweatpants and Steve had to take a moment to capture her body in his mind. Her areolas were a dark purple now, and while he always had a thing for her breasts, the growth in cup size was something he was not complaining about.

"Stunning," he whispered as his mouth edged so close to her centre and her legs parted in
surrender. She could feel how wet she had become, even from minor touches, but her increased sensitivity had some perks. However, there was the problem of the bump. She could not see Steve's head. She pushed herself up so her back was against the headboard.

She moaned at the sight of Steve's muscular back and broad shoulders between her legs, but she did not know if she was hungry but the shape his back formed reminded her of a Dorito. She snorted to herself which caused Steve to lift his head from her thigh.

"What?" he asked.

"Nothing. Just thought of something amusing."

Steve shrugged and returned to kissing her thigh. Wanda sighed and leaned back as Steve's nose pressed against her clit and his tongue circled her entrance. Wanda sighed and threaded her fingers into his hair. She bit her lip as his tongue flicked her clit, her hips slightly elevated. Steve cupped one of her buttocks as he buried his face further into her mound. She tasted so much sweeter and Steve could not help but groan.

Wanda wriggled in a bid to get more stimulation from his lips and nose. She mewed and her hand slid down to meet Steve's hand and squeezed it tightly as each wave began. Steve looked up to see his wife's face distorted in pleasure. He smirked at the power he held over her. He could never have enough of hearing her groan and squirm in pleasure.

He knew the signs of how close she was: her legs started to shake, her breaths became shallow and her eyes squeezed shut. He could have teased her by removing his lips from her mound but he could not do something so cruel.

He sucked on her clit and Wanda's back arched and the noise that emerged from Wanda's mouth was a strange combination of a gasp and a scream. The fact her nails bit into his head was a good indication that she had come. He lifted his head from between her thighs and hovered over her face.

"Hey Doll," he whispered as he kissed her forehead. Wanda regained her senses and started kissing his lips. Steve rolled over as Wanda made quick work of removing his boxers. Wanda sighed as she lowered herself onto him, one hand splayed on her belly while the other was wrapped around his erection.

This was something they had to become accustomed to. Steve was so much heavier than she was and he did not want to crush their daughter if he collapsed onto Wanda. Her going on top was the far easier option. They joined together and groaned in unison, her hands planted on his chest and her hips swayed.

Steve was happy to lie down and watch as Wanda took the lead. He had never seen such a more beautiful sight. Wanda's hand found his hand and she leaned down to kiss him. She could not quite get as close to him as she would like as her belly pressed against his stomach. That was something she would miss the bigger she got.

Steve laced one hand in her hair and rested the other hand on her hip as he guided her. Wanda threw her head back as she began to bounce her hips. Her body felt heavy but she could not care less as the tension in her spine and pelvis built.

"God you are so beautiful," Steve grunted.

He grasped one of her breasts in his hand and rolled it, pinching the nipple between his fingers and Wanda felt a gasp in the back of her throat as her nails bit into his chest. Her toes curled and she
could not help but laugh as Steve's hand ventured along every inch of her skin.

When he finally touched her clit, stars began to shine behind her eyes and her head thrown back, her hair stroking her back. Her core pulsed and she let out a strangled gasp. Her arms just held her up her body as Steve groaned as he released.

Milena kicked as Wanda leaned down to kiss him and they chuckled heartedly.

"It's a good thing she was already awake," Wanda commented.

"Surprised she is not a little cockblocker," Steve replied as he turned on his side. He pushed her damp hair from her eyes and kissed her on the lips. The two lay in the bed staring at one another until Steve kissed her head and whispered, "Come on. Let's get some breakfast."

Wanda smiled and heaved herself out of the bed. Once they put some clothes on, Steve grabbed flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, eggs, butter and buttermilk. Wanda smiled and instantly started chopping some strawberries and bananas to put on top of the pancakes. Steve smiled as he watched her move around. She was surprisingly graceful in her movements despite the bump.

"What?" Wanda asked.

"Nothing. Just you."

Wanda gave a soft smile and she moved towards the radio.

As Steve mixed the ingredients together, Wanda started to kiss along his jaw. Steve chuckled and pushed the bowl aside. The mixture needed to rest for thirty minutes. Wanda wrapped her arms around Steve's neck and asked, "Does this constitute a babymoon?"

"I think so. Can't really have vacations on our own now," Steve replied. "I can picture her on a beach. Her little fat legs dipping into the sea."

Wanda smiled and laughed. "That sounds lovely. I honestly can't wait until we can go on holiday with her. So many memories to make."

Steve kissed her again and whispered, "Come on, let's get some food into you."

Steve was actually really good at making pancakes. While she was the main cook in the house, Steve had talents. "Sometimes when I was doing missions for S.H.I.E.L.D I had some time to kill. I recipe tested some pancakes and these turned out to be the best."

"Well, I could do with a walk to burn these off," Wanda replied.

"At least let your stomach settle."

Wanda rolled her eyes, but within twenty minutes, she had her hat and coat on. There was something about the purple bobble hat that made her look extremely cute to Steve. He did not comment because he did not need to. She knew that he thought she was cute. He threw his coat on and Wanda took his hand as they walked out of the cabin.

The air was crisp and the leaves were a beautiful blend of gold, brown, red and orange. Wanda loved autumn for aesthetic reasons. She was not too fond of the cold but she liked simple things like pumpkin pie and the build-up to Christmas.

Her stomach rumbled at the thought of pumpkin pie. "How can I still be hungry after that breakfast?"
Steve snorted. "I think she is telling you not to burn those calories."

"Well, I can't risk having a c-section because she's too big. She already feels like a rock."

"We should start thinking of a birth plan."

"We should actually. Maybe we can do that when we get back." Steve smiled and pressed a kiss to her head. "This is nice. It reminds me of a holiday that I went on with my parents to Germany."

"That sounds nice."

"It was." She took a deep breath. It was the last holiday she had with her parents before their deaths. She and Pietro ate many pretzels that holiday. She gave a sad smile. While she liked to think of positive memories like this, it reminded her of what she was missing. Pietro would have adored his niece and spoilt her rotten. "Did you ever go anywhere?"

"Could not really afford it, nor could Ma get the time off. I think I would actually like to go to Ireland. Visit my roots."

"Maybe we should do it when Milena is born. It would be good for her to know her roots."

"Sounds a nice plan."

"Maybe we can take her on walks like this. Though perhaps in a papoose."

Steve snorted. "Would you think I was less of a man for wearing one?"

"Absolutely not. In fact, it makes you so much more attractive. It doesn't matter what that British twit says."

"I never take notice of him anyway. I doubt he believes anything he says. Just does it for the attention. Though thanks for finding me attractive with a baby strapped to my chest."

"Hey, if you can find me attractive while looking like a cow, I should be able to do that."

Steve could hear a rumble of thunder that indicated it was about to rain. They were not too far away from the cabin so they just about managed to return just as the first drops of water began. Wanda sighed in relief as Steve put the fire on to warm them and she grabbed a notepad. "Do you want me in the birth room?" Steve asked. "Of course I do Steve."

"Sorry, it's just was not common for men to be in the birth room when I was younger."

"At least it wasn't because you would be freaked out by the idea of me pushing our daughter out."

"Well… I am purposely trying to avoid birth videos. I find that if I think of you in pain then I will lose focus on supporting you. Though if I do start freaking out, we should have Nat in the room."

"Good idea." She felt a kick and she rubbed her stomach. Steve kissed her cheek and then opened the kitchen drawer. He pulled out a wrapped gift and held it out to Wanda. "It's not my birthday until Tuesday."

"I know, but I wanted something for you to open this weekend."
Wanda took the gifted and pulled the paper off. Steve observed as Wanda discovered a drawing of herself. She was sitting in a rocking chair with her hand on her belly. She had remembered singing to their daughter and it seemed that Steve had sneakily taken a photograph and sketched the image as a memento to the pregnancy. Steve had done a great job polishing the flaws, making her look more radiant and angelic.

"This is beautiful," Wanda whispered.

"I thought it would be a reminder you would like."

"Honestly, Steve, this whole weekend… is a reminder of this pregnancy I will treasure forever."

Wanda walked over to the radio and switched it on. The second turned it on, the sound of Ariana Grande's 'Into You' belted out of the speakers.

'So baby, come light me up and baby I'll let you on it. A little bit dangerous, but baby, that's how I want it. A little less conversation, and a little more touch my body. 'Cause I'm so into you, into you, into you.'

Wanda held her hand out and Steve took it. He pulled her close, her belly the only thing preventing them from being as close as they wanted. Steve put his hands on her hips and Wanda wrapped her arms around Steve's neck. They weren't great dancers but they could sway to the music and enjoy this moment between them.

Wanda felt so much peace with her husband and their unborn daughter in a secluded cabin with a fireplace and the rain patting on the windows outside. She thought her last two birthdays had been perfect but this is nothing compared to what she had right now.
Chapter Nine

Wanda wanted to do a proper Thanksgiving meal. She did not know why but she felt a compulsion to establish traditions in the family, even if it was a tradition she found to have unfortunate implications. Still, Milena was from a diverse family background, and since her father was American, it was important to know and experience the customs and traditions of her family life. It was important since the only blood relatives Milena would have was her mother and father. That said, she did have a few adopted uncles and aunts and it was important that they cemented their bond with the youngest member of their family.

The only problem was that Wanda had never cooked a proper Thanksgiving meal before. She knew that turkey was essential, but she had not realised that side accompaniments such as yams, gravy, cranberry sauce, vegetables and the dessert pies were also a huge part.

Hence why she ended up roping Natasha and Pepper to help her since they actually knew what they were doing.

"This is enough food to feed everyone?" Wanda asked when she presented the number of ingredients for the meal.

"I think this is enough to feed Britain for a week," Natasha replied.

"I have twelve people coming for dinner, one is an Asgardian."

"Well, I guess that these yams are not going to peel themselves," Natasha commented as she grabbed the vegetable peeler and the pile of yams.

"Do you want to do the turkey or shall I?" Pepper asked Wanda.

"Um… I think I can do it," she replied looking at the bird. She had left it to brine in the fridge overnight and it looked quite pink. "Right so I need butter, sage and garlic."

The three women got to work preparing the meal. Natasha peeled and chopped the yams. Pepper began work on the pumpkin and pecan pies. Wanda got to work to remove the wings and the wishbone (it made for easy carving apparently) and began to massage butter under the skin. Once her hands were clean, she chopped onion, carrot, and celery and threw in some low sodium chicken broth into the bottom of a roasting pan to help make the gravy.

In the meantime, Steve was pushing the sofa in the living room back so he could bring in a table they would seat twelve people He had been left with the responsibility of setting the table. The only issue was that Thor and Rhodes were up for a game of football in the garden.

"Steve, come on," Rhodes protested as Steve laid the table cloth over. "Dinner won't be done until four and since we can't watch the Bears and Lions, this is the next best thing. I need you to smush Thor."

"Rhodey, I would but I don't want the women doing everything," Steve countered. "The Khans are coming over about 15:00 so maybe you should ask Yusef and Aamir. Well, maybe Aamir."
"This would not have happened if we did this in the Compound," Rhodes muttered. Steve sighed and started picking up some of the table decorations to arrange. He had no delicate eye when it came to this but he knew that Pepper would rearrange it anyway. Bruce came walking in looking at what looked to be a research paper. "Hey, you in?"

"I would Rhody but someone sent me this interesting research paper and I need to peer review it," Bruce replied.

"It's Thanksgiving. A public holiday. Work can wait until tomorrow."

"Except I am being dragged to the Black Friday sales by Natasha. Usually, they would be a problem but since the Other Guy doesn't fancy coming out anytime soon… But seriously, this paper is interesting."

"What is it about?" Steve asked.

"The genetics of enhanced beings." Steve frowned. "It's mostly been on Inhumans rather than beings like yourself and Wanda, but it's saying that there is a link."

"How strong?"

"Well, they are saying it only takes one biological parent…"

Steve gulped. He peeked into the kitchen to see Wanda placing the turkey into the oven. While the results of the amniocentesis had proven inconclusive, there was a feeling that it would be the case that Milena would be enhanced. The other night, Milena had kicked quite hard and Wanda had a bruise on the side of her stomach where the kick had been. Given that Wanda did not possess superstrength, the only conclusion was that Milena had inherited his abilities.

"How strong is the genetics equipment in the Compound?" Steve asked.

Bruce blinked and rubbed his eyes. "You're still thinking your daughter may be enhanced."

"I'm just saying because the baby kicked harder than she should have the other night. I'm guessing that you might be able to detect the radiation that enhanced me…"

"It's possible. We have the components of the serum you were given so it may be possible. If you could get Wanda's OB to send the results of her amniocentesis then maybe I could have a look."

"Thanks, Bruce."

The doorbell rang and Wanda came rushing – well waddling – towards the front door. The Khans were all present and correct. "Hi, come in," Wanda said, a little puffed out.

"Happy Thanksgiving," Yusef said presenting a bottle of red wine to Wanda.

"Thank you. Though I thought you were coming at 15:00."

"We were but Kamala insisted that we should spend the day with you," Muneeba replied.

"Hey, are you Aamir?" Rhodes asked the younger Khan male.

"I am?" Aamir replied confused.

"You play football?"
Wanda sighed and rubbed her stomach as she walked into her bedroom. She had the intention to change into something fancier than her maternity yoga pants but all she wanted to do was sleep.

"You okay Doll?" Steve asked as he joined her.

"I'm just exhausted." Wanda replied. "I know I have only put the turkey into the oven but I did not realise how exhausting Thanksgiving dinner was."

"You have Nat and Pepper to help."

"You forget your daughter drains about eighty-nine percent of my energy."

"Why is she only my daughter when she is causing you pain?"

"I don't know. I think that is just the way it works Steve. Even Pietro would be blaming you."

Wanda flopped on the bed and rubbed her belly. "Are you okay Steve?"

"Umm… Bruce might be able to detect if Melina has my genes or not."

"Oh… She might not have my genes?"

"It could be possible…. But given she left a bruise on you and I am the only one out of the two of us who has super strength..." Wanda lifted up her shirt and exposed the bruise on her protruding stomach. It looked quite sore and Wanda had been struggling to move around for the best part of three days. "It may have not been developed enough to be noticeable when you had the amnio."

"At least she has not broken a rib." Wanda rubbed her hand over her belly. "I'll be okay. Just a few more months."

"Well, while the food is cooking, how about we sit outside and watch the football?"

"You may have to explain the rules to me but okay."

With the food prepped and cooking, everyone had gathered in the garden. Pepper and Natasha could not help but shake their heads as they observed the scrappiness of the football game in front of them. The men were like kindergarten kids fighting over the last toy and were climbing on top of each other just to get the ball.

"Get off me, you cretin!" Rhodes yelled as Thor had his arms wrapped around Rhodes' waist in a bid to knock him down.

"Why can I not join?" Kamala complained.

"They are fully grown men, Kamala; they can seriously hurt you," Muneeba chastised.

"To be honest, the Hulk is not coming out anytime soon you might be okay," Natasha pointed out.

"Still, no."

Wanda was sitting on the swing with Pepper who then asked, "Are you going to be this protective over your daughter?"

"I don't know. I guess we have to protect her from certain things… especially since she could have Steve's abilities. My mother used to wrap me in cotton wool while Pietro could get away with
murder. Well, up until he took a trip down the stairs with a skateboard."

Wanda had remembered that day well. It had been the same day the news reports of Srebrenica came through and the day her grandmother sat down to explain what happened to her during World War II.

"Pietro, I don't think that this is a good idea," Wanda whispered loudly as Pietro prepared to slide down the stairs on his new skateboard. "What if Mummy and Daddy come in?"

"They'll only know if you tattle-tale," Pietro countered.

"But Pietro-"

"I am going to skate down these stairs and you are not going to stop me. I am going to be Sokovia's first gold medallist at the Winter Olympics."

Wanda scowled and turned around to walk back into their apartment, only she heard a loud crash and a yell from the bottom of the stairs. She ran and saw her twin splayed out, his left arm bent in an unnatural position and him moaning in agony.

"Wanda, Pietro, what is going on out here?" Marya asked as she walked out to see what the disturbance was. Wanda could only point down the stairs with a face of terror as she knew her brother was going to be in big trouble. Marya looked down the stairs and saw her son's state. "Django! Get an ambulance!"

Wanda snapped out of the memory when he heard a yell from Rhodes that the game was over and he had been declared victorious. "Right, shall we get some food into us?"

Wanda nodded and she, Pepper and Natasha returned to the kitchen to start plating up the food. Yams were done. The vegetable side dishes were cooked. The one test was the turkey. It looked golden and beautifully cooked. Wanda got the meat thermometer and tested the turkey breast. A perfect one hundred-and-sixty-degrees Fahrenheit. She knew she needed it to rest but the temperature would rise by five degrees so she got to work on the gravy. She took out the big pieces, sieved the rest into a pan and began to stir the gravy, adding some flour in order to thicken it.

"Okay, I think we are all done," she said as she poured the gravy into a creamer carafe.

"We'll start taking the food in so you can bring in the turkey," Natasha said as she lifted the platter to yams up. She also grabbed the creamer carafe. Pepper grabbed the other platters and Wanda watched through the window to see everyone gathering around the decorated table and the food being laid out.

She took a deep breath as Melina took a swift kick. Wanda rubbed her stomach and smiled. This time last year, she never thought that she would be hosting a Thanksgiving meal, let alone be married and pregnant. She never thought this would be possible at the start of the year. She was happy. She had her life together.

Wanda lifted the plate with the turkey and brought it through to the living room. The men cheered at the sight of the bird and Wanda laid it down for Steve to begin carving. Everyone started to help themselves to the sides while Wanda felt as though she could relax for the first time today. While she would liked to have had Sam and Bucky in attendance, she was thankful to have the people around her who loved and cared for her welfare. Her eyes started weeping a little and she quickly had to grab her napkin to wipe her eyes.

"You okay Doll?" Steve whispered.
"I'm fine. I'm just so grateful for everything," she replied. Steve smiled and kissed her forehead.

He looked around at the table. Their guests were bantering with one another, especially since Bruce had checked the football score and Rhodes was losing his bet. Natasha and Pepper were making conversation with the Khans. Thor was piling his plate with that much food that he doubted there would be leftovers. Steve had a lot to be grateful for as well.

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Twenty-eight weeks

The Monday after Thanksgiving, Wanda went directly to Bruce to ask him to perform another amniocentesis. However, Bruce was not comfortable with the idea of sticking a needle into Wanda's stomach when she had undergone the procedure before. However, he did have an idea.

"Maybe I can take a sample of your blood. It's possible that given how advanced Steve's genes are, they could be filtering into your bloodstream. It won't be a lot, but it should give some confirmation that your daughter has abilities." Wanda nodded. She sat on the chair and waited as Bruce prepared a syringe to extract Wanda's blood. Bruce found a vein on her left arm and drew a small sample of her blood. "Okay Wanda, I need you to listen to me: your DNA is complicated and your blood results may take a while to pick apart. I don't want you to worry about it because it could raise your blood pressure."

"My blood pressure is okay."

"I'm just noticing that your hands are a little swollen."

"Everything is swollen. My stomach, my feet, my ass. It's called being pregnant."

"I'm saying this as a friend: you are not due until 25th February but I think your body is telling you to slow down. You are taking a lot on at once."

"Everyone is saying that."

"Because we all want you to be okay. You've been through a rough year and we want you and the baby to be healthy."

"I still have to go to school. I have my finals coming up for this semester. I can't quit again."

"You quit before?"

"Three years ago. I suffered a panic attack and could not cope with being an Avenger and school."

"Maybe… Maybe suggest that you do your classes at home. I am sure your teacher will give you time off."

"She is when the baby is due. To be honest, it has given me some focus. I feel like I am achieving something. I passed my midterm."

"Okay, but if you start to get any other symptoms, call your doctor so she can check you out."

Wanda nodded as she stood up. Bruce gave her a carton of orange juice and Wanda sipped it on the way to Steve's office. Steve gave a soft smile as he saw Wanda lie on his couch. She said, "Bruce took a blood test. He thinks that if there is a chance Melina has your abilities, it could have gotten into my bloodstream."
“Smart idea. How are you feeling?”

“Bruce thinks I am overdoing it.”

“Well, you are a little.”

“I knew you would say that.” Wanda sat up and rubbed her stomach. “I can’t quit again Steve.”

“I’m not asking you to, but you’ve never been good at pacing yourself. You’ve always been all or nothing.” Wanda snorted. Steve had a point about that. Steve got out of his chair and walked over to her. “I think that you are worrying a lot.”

“How can you tell?”

“You talk in your sleep. Last night you were moaning that HYDRA was going to take her away.”

Wanda tensed and Steve had to touch her arm in reassurance. “It felt so real. I was in the hospital room. She had just been born. She’d just been put into the cot for the night and then a doctor came in to examine her. He looked like Strucker.”

Steve sighed and put his hand on her stomach. “No one is getting their hands on her. They have a whole barrage of people protecting her.”

“Let’s hope.” Wanda rubbed her stomach and allowed Steve to lull her in a hug. “Sometimes I just think the worst because it won’t hurt as much if it does happen.”

“It isn’t going to happen because I won’t let it.”

Later that night, Wanda was fast asleep with Tigger resting on her protruding belly while Steve aimlessly watched a new drama on Netflix. He had the mind to tell Wanda to sleep upstairs but she looked comfortable and he was not going to disturb her.

His phone rang and he saw it was Bruce. “Hey, what’s up?”

“I have the results from Wanda’s blood test. Is she around?”

“She's asleep. I can tell her myself when she's awake.”

“Okay, there does seem to be some traces of vita radiation present in her bloodstream. I broke it down into what was definitely her DNA, toxicology and anything else. The only way that Wanda could have small traces of vita radiation is through your daughter.” Steve looked at Wanda and her stomach. That pretty much confirmed that Milena was enhanced. “I would suggest that you get an appointment with Doctor Kwon to get her opinion. I think this is why Wanda has been so fatigued. Your body metabolises far greater than the normal human body and it’s likely your daughter is metabolising faster than Wanda can support.”

“Okay. Thanks, Bruce, I’ll let her know.” Steve hung up and sighed. He leaned over and pressed a kiss to Wanda's cheek, stirring her away. “Hey Doll.”

“I get comfortable for once…” Once Wanda's eyes adjusted, she noticed the grim look on her husband's face. “What's happened?”

“Milena is enhanced. Bruce found traces of the vita radiation in your blood, and he thinks that is why you are so fatigued. We should get an appointment as soon as possible.”

-o-
Doctor Kwon managed to fit them in the next afternoon, only she seemed more concerned about Wanda's condition than the baby's condition – which was more than fine. Given the information provided by Bruce, she immediately got to work on checking Wanda's health.

"You are certainly bigger than I would expect for someone of your height and weight to be at this stage in your pregnancy," Doctor Kwon said as she put a measuring tape around Wanda's waist. "You are the size I would expect you to be at nine months."

"So she's going to about fifteen pounds?" Wanda asked.

"Well, she looks to be about three pounds at the moment. That's only a little bigger than what should be expected. Okay, so I think I need to check your blood pressure and check a urine sample. I want to rule out pre-eclampsia." Steve took Wanda's hand as she lay back with the blood pressure cuff on her other arm. Wanda had already given a urine sample so all she had to do was wait for the blood pressure monitor to confirm if she was at risk. "One-forty over ninety. That is a little high Wanda."

"So, what do I do?"

"I think you may need to take some bed rest, Wanda. Just for a week or two so your body can take its time to recover. I think it may be worth doubling your caloric intake as well since your daughter appears to be absorbing the majority of what you eat."

"Great," Wanda whispered under her breath. Steve pressed a kiss to her forehead. "But is the baby okay?"

"She's in outstanding health. I'm just concerned about her mother."

It was later when Steve came to give Wanda her dinner than he found her frowning in frustration. She was tucked up in bed with a stack of books and the television on in the background. She looked tired but mostly resigned. Doctor Kwon has signed her off going to her English class.

"You okay Doll?" Steve asked when he put her protein milkshake drink on the side and lay the tray of chicken, mash potatoes and broccoli on her lap.

"I didn't want to drop out of the class," she said softly.

"You haven't. Doctor Kwon's just given you a sick note and your teacher said you can join when you are ready. She's given you some reading, which, given there is so much Keeping Up with the Kardashians you can watch before your brain goes to mush, is a good thing." Wanda gave a soft smile. "Wanda, I love you no matter what. I am not going to be disappointed if you drop out again."

"It's just that I thought it would d be something simple to accomplish."

"Yeah, well, you can blame me this time, but I think that you need to put your body first. Protein bars, extra calories…"

"If this child ends up being twenty pounds-" Steve kissed her before she could finish her sentence. She gave a soft smile when they detached. "I guess bed rest does not sound too bad."
Chapter Ten

Thirty-two weeks

Hanukah came and went. Wanda had been taken off bed rest with no sign of pre-eclampsia and her blood pressure lowered, and since her calorie intake increased, she found that her fatigue was less severe than it was and she could at least stay awake for more than three hours. Even though she had about two months left on the pregnancy, she was now seeing Doctor Kwon at least once a week to check on Milena's progress. Wanda could feel all of her daughter's three and a half pounds. The kicks and movements had not lost their charm and Wanda would often find herself sitting in the nursery – which had now been fully embellished with pink items and bedding – rocking in the chair and singing old Romani lullabies.

Hanukah was nice. Steve had gotten a chanukiah so Wanda could light it over Hanukah. He smiled at the image of her showing their daughter her culture. He still pictured his daughter with hair as dark as a raven but eyes as bright blue as the sky. He hoped that Milena would look more like Wanda but in his head, Milena would have Wanda's dark hair and her nose and Steve's eyes and lips.

As soon as Hanukah was over, it seemed Christmas had taken over everything. Steve had gotten a tree and he and Wanda had spent the evening decorating it along with the rest of the house. It was so nice to switch off the main lights and allow the Christmas lights to engulf the room. They could sit in front of the television and snuggle up with some popcorn.

On Christmas Eve, New York was covered in snow and Wanda was staring at the tree with a cup of camomile tea. The previous Christmas had been lovely. Seeing *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, and the midnight mass. Yet that had been a time where they had serious doubts as to whether they would be able to return to the United States. Now she was in a home of her own and she was starting a family. It seemed so different, sort of better and sort of worse. Better because they were home, but worse because Sam was no longer there. The year had felt so long. The Battle of Wakanda seemed so long ago that it felt like it had happened five years ago, not in January. It had been the best and worst year of her life, but regardless of the good and bad, she still had Steve. He had been her rock through her recovery and during the pregnancy.

He was preparing dinner for the next day. They had invited Natasha, Bruce and Thor over since Pepper was spending the holidays with her mother and Rhodes with his family. Wanda was looking forward to it. It felt like the Decembers of her childhood before the bomb where there were loads of people around the house.

"Cranberry sauce… how do you make cranberry sauce?" Steve asked.

"Brown sugar, orange juice and cranberries," Wanda replied as she pushed herself out of her seat. "I mean we could just buy a jar. I'm sure there will be some in the Compound."

"I thought you wanted a full homemade dinner."

"Well, it's only a handful of us. There is no real need for stress yourself out over cranberry sauce." She wrapped her arms around his waist and managed to press a kiss to Steve's shoulder. "It's so
"It won't be next year. She'll be running around the place like no tomorrow."

"She'll only be ten months old."

"A hyper-advanced toddler." Wanda chuckled as Steve turned around. "There will be a lot of firsts next year."

"I know. I can't wait."

"She'll still be too young to understand it."

"I don't know. Maybe she'll have your brains. It's kind of just hitting me that we're going to be parents."

"Me too. We're going to be a family." Steve noticed that Wanda's eyes started to brim with tears and he quickly gathered her in his arms. Wanda breathed him in: he smelt like sugar cookies. "I'm sorry. It's just all I have wanted since I was ten."

Steve gently rocked her back and forth. He could feel Milena kick him in the stomach. That made him smile. Three years ago, he had given up on the hope of a normal life, but he had not expected to fall for Wanda. That was among the best things to come out of the previous three years. Christmas in London felt like a distant memory. Even the previous Christmas felt like a lifetime ago. However, Steve wanted to be in the here and now.

"What time are you leaving for Midnight Mass?" Wanda asked.

"Probably about half eleven."

"Fancy a companion, even though I probably will be unconscious by ten?"

"I think it might be better to let you rest. I'll be fine. I'd rather you were in the comfort and warmth of our home than with me in a cold church."

Truth be told, Steve did not like the idea of Wanda being out in the cold. While her bipolar disorder had been stable for months, the fact he had nearly lost her to hypothermia had put him more on edge. He had been making sure Wanda was wrapped in a coat, scarf and hat as well as a jumper. Wanda complained that her altered body temperature made it feel like an oven.

"I guess. It might just sit and watch a movie. She's not really sleeping at night."

"Getting the practice in." Steve kissed the top of Wanda's head and pressed his hand to her stomach. Milena kicked at the pressure and he gently stroked the little foot. Tigger began purring in frustration for not receiving attention immediately. "I think she's going to be jealous of the baby."

Wanda squatted down to lift Tigger up and stroke her. Tigger purred in response. "To be fair, Tigger, the baby was here before you were."

Wanda pressed a kiss to Tigger's head and walked to the couch. Tigger slipped out Wanda's arms and took her place on her bed. Wanda yawned and lifted the remote to find a movie. Eventually, she did settle on *Love Actually*. She gave a soft smile. Two Christmases ago, she had been exposed to the movie for the first time and she found it incredibly heart-warming and it made her feel happy.

"Whenever I get gloomy with the state of the world," Hugh Grant's voice echoed around the room. "I
think about the arrivals gate at Heathrow Airport. General opinion's starting to make out that we live in a world of hatred and greed, but I don't see that. It seems to me that love is everywhere. Often, it's not particularly dignified or newsworthy, but it's always there - fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, old friends. When the planes hit the Twin Towers, as far as I know, none of the phone calls from the people on board were messages of hate or revenge - they were all messages of love. If you look for it, I've got a sneaky feeling you'll find that love actually is all around."

If Wanda had heard that four years ago while shivering in a stone cell while her powers were in flux and being stabbed by needles, Wanda would never have believed that 'love is actually all around'. Other than her brother, she had been so starved of love for the best part of fifteen years. Wanda had struggled with the idea that there was love in the world. Steve had shown her that love did exist, and she loved her daughter more than anything. She had been shown care and affection by her friends. She still struggled given that there was hate in the world, but closer to home, she believed it could be possible.

"You okay Doll?" Steve asked as he came to sit by his wife.

"I was just thinking about love."

"Anything interesting?"

"Nothing much. I'm just feeling grateful for everything."

Steve leaned down to kiss her. He wrapped her in a blanket, and they settled to watch the rest of the movie. When it got to the end, Wanda hummed along to 'God Only Knows' because she did not know what she could be without Steve. It was during some old Rankin and Bass Christmas movie that Wanda fell asleep on the couch. Steve was close to waking her up so she could sleep in a normal bed, but she seemed so calm, warm, and comfortable he dared not wake her. Tigger would also be disturbed

It was nearly eleven anyway, and he needed to leave for Midnight Mass. He left the television on in the background and the fire on so Wanda was not left in the cold and the dark. He gave a soft smile and kissed her cheek as he went to grab his jacket. The air was incredibly icy as he walked out but the church was not too far away for it to bother him. He had slept in colder places.

He had lost so many years that he had genuinely forgotten how to enjoy events such as his birthday and Christmas. Going on the run had been a blessing in disguise as it meant he had the time to appreciate these events, mainly because he had someone to celebrate with. The last time he really celebrated Christmas was in 1941.

"So what do you think is going to happen?" Josie asked as she lay the plates on the table. The radio was blasting out some of the latest development about the United States' entrance into The Second World War.

"My guess is that they are going to start drafting people in. They lost a lot of men in Pearl Harbour,"
Jodie replied.

"Does that mean you'll have to go Bucky?" Jenny asked her brother as he grabbed the turkey to put on the table.

"I don't know," Bucky replied. "We'll see."

Steve was in the process of laying knives and forks on the table when he and Bucky made a glance at
one another. They both knew that if Bucky was drafted, Steve would not be. Steve had been eager to join the army, more so than Bucky had been. He had even dropped out of art school as soon as it was announced that the United States was entering the war in Europe and declaring war on Japan.

"Is this damn meal ready yet?" Mrs Barnes croaked as she walked into the kitchen. She was hunched over, dressed in her pyjamas still and her hair was a mess. This was one of her low days.

"Almost Ma," Jenny answered as she pulled a seat up for their mother. She looked over at the meal. It was not really much for a group of six people.

"This looks great," Steve commented as he took his seat.

"Thanks, Stevie," Josie replied. Steve grumbled. He still hated being called Stevie.

"So what are you going to do Steve if Bucky goes to war?" Jodie asked.

"I'm going with him," Steve answered. Bucky looked between his sisters and Steve. They could tell that Bucky did not want Steve to risk his life given that he could be blown over in the wind. "I don't like bullies and Adolf Hitler and Hideki Tojo are the biggest bullies I know."

"You do know that you will never come up against Hitler, right?" Bucky asked.

"The world is getting weirder each day Buck."

The meal was quiet for the most part, save Mrs Barnes muttering under her breath. The turkey was a little bland but it was the best they could do to feed them all. It was later that Bucky dragged Steve to the gym where there was a punch bag and some glove ready.

"What is all this?" Steve asked.

"I doubt you'll get into the army Steve, but if I end up going, I am not leaving you defenceless," Bucky answered as he passed the gloves to Steve. Steve slipped them on as Bucky put the focus pads on his hands. He smacked them together and instructed, "Okay, right leg back and bend your knees a little." Steve did as he was told. "Okay, make sure your body is covered."

"I'm not sure that they will give me a chance to do this given my size."

"People play dirty, so you have to be the better person. Right," Bucky said as he got into a stance and held his arms out. "Right, left jabs." Steve hit the pads so weakly that Bucky had to raise his eyebrows. "Come on Steve, you can do better than that."

"I'm sorry but I have chicken arms."

"True but at least put some force into it. I've seen you try to fend off kids twice your size." Steve punched the pads again, only with a bit more force. "Okay, better."

"Do you really think that you will end up going to Europe?"

"It's a possibility. They'll want young men to join. I'm twenty-four and in good health."

"Would you sign up?"

"Maybe. I don't know. I don't want to leave the girls with Ma, but I don't think I have much choice."

"There is always a choice Buck."
"I guess."

It had been the strangest Christmas. The aftershocks of Pearl Harbour had not quite waned and the potential for Bucky being drafted made for many nerves. Bucky had been conscripted in 1942 after they made an attempt to join the army. Steve had been given a 4F on his forms, the first of many. Steve did not know what was to come. He never expected that Abraham Erskine would find him. He never expected to be as enhanced. He never expected to fall into the ocean and freeze for nearly seventy years. He never thought he would end up married and with a child on the way.

He was sitting at the back of the church on Christmas night, listening to the choir singing 'Come all ye faithful', and thinking about how much he did have to be grateful for. In a year that was so chaotic, he found a moment of peace to think and pray.

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Wanda tossed and turned until she fluttered her eyes open. The television was still blaring and the fire still burning. She glanced at the clock: 00:30. Steve was at mass and would not be home for about an hour. She did make an attempt to fall back asleep, only Milena made a swift kick to her bladder and Wanda had to get up. It seemed her daughter was also hungry so after relieving herself, she went to the kitchen to eat some sugar cookies.

She and Steve had spent the afternoon baking and decorating them and it was easy to tell who decorated which cookies. Steve's delicate artist hands had decorated his cookies with intricate and precise designs. Wanda's looked as though someone had dropped it on the floor. Still, they tasted delicious.

This would be the first real Christmas in a home since she was nine. That Christmas was the first after her grandmother died. Given that her grandmother had put more of a focus on Christmas, Wanda had not felt like celebrating that year.

"Wanda? Dušica?" Marya called through the halls. She looked in on the twins' room and found her daughter sitting on the bed with a frown on her face and her arms around her legs. "It's Christmas morning. There are presents under the tree."

"I don't want to unwrap anything," Wanda replied. "It's not Christmas without Baka."

"I know Dušica, but I don't think she'd want you to miss out. Pietro is already playing with his fire truck." Wanda buried her head in her lap to avoid looking at her mother. Marya went to sit on the bed and reached for Wanda's hand. "Wanda, Christmas meant a lot to Baka, so the best way you can honour her memory is by celebrating it with the people who love you. Daddy has cooked a meal for us, and it would be a shame for it to go to waste."

Wanda sighed. She lifted her head and, reluctantly, nodded. Marya took Wanda's hand and led her to the living room where Pietro and Django were sitting around the small Christmas tree with brightly coloured wrapping paper thrown across the floor. Pietro was pushing his fire truck back and forth, making the sirens go off. Wanda hated sirens – it always told her something bad had happened.

Under the tree was a red with white polka-dots wrapped gift. Wanda looked between her parents who nodded encouragingly. Wanda knelt to pick the gift up and tentatively peeled back the paper. It was a doll. She was wearing a green dress, had big blue eyes and dark brown hair.

"Isn't she pretty?" Django asked.
Wanda nodded, "Thank you."

"It wasn't-" Pietro began before Django interrupted.

"You're welcome Dušica." It had been bought by his mother-in-law as a last gift for the twins and Django did not want to upset his daughter further. "So, do you like her?"

Wanda nodded. She took the doll from the box and grabbed a hairbrush to start combing the synthetic hair. There was something soothing about brushing fake hair. It was like she was able to take care of something else rather than herself for once.

The doll had not survived the shell hitting the apartment block. Over time, Wanda had realised that the doll and the fire truck had been presents from her grandmother. She had named it Lilly. She had given Wanda plenty of comfort on nights where she could not sleep. After the shell attack, she needed that emotional comfort.

She did not need a doll. She had Steve. She had her daughter. She had her friends. She had Tigger. She had living things to give her comfort. Yet she did miss that one last gift from her grandmother. Still, she was naming her daughter after her grandmother, and that was worth more than a doll.

Wanda stretched her back as she thought it would be a wise idea to sleep in a comfortable bed. She could wait up for Steve, but she knew that Steve would prefer her to get as much rest as she could. She turned the television off and lowered the gas on the fireplace so it was completely off. She took one glance at the Christmas tree and smiled. Next year she would have a daughter to watch open the presents and enjoy the holiday season. This year, she was content with spending it with Steve, Natasha and Bruce.

She just managed to get to the top step when she heard the letterbox clatter. She frowned. Who was posting things through the letterbox at 00:40? She noticed a card on the floor by the door and against her better judgement, she picked it up. There was just a scribble of 'W&S' – which Wanda suspected meant Wanda and Steve. Wanda peeled the envelope open and opened the card. All it said was:

Merry Christmas, and good luck with the ankle biter.

C.

"Clint?" Wanda asked herself. He was the only person she knew whose name started with C. She grabbed her keys and walked out the front door into the cold Christmas night. She looked down both sides of the streets but she could not see any sign of Clint. She ran her hands through her hair. If it had been Clint, why had he not asked to come in and see her? Why did he just leave a card after all these months?

"Wanda?" Steve asked as he walked up to her. "Why are you out of the house? You must be freezing." Steve grabbed his jacket and put it around his wife. Wanda snapped out of whatever she was thinking and turned her head towards him. Steve looked at her hands and saw the card. He took it from her and read the message. "Who's C?"

"I think it's Clint," Wanda replied. Steve frowned in confusion, but he saw Wanda starting to shiver too much for his liking and he had to shuffle her back to warmth. "Why would he just leave a card?"

"I don't know. We don't even know if it is him."

"I just… After all this time…"

Steve enveloped her in his arms. He was just as confused about it as she was. That said, if it was
Clint, there may be a chance to see him again. "If it is him, then he'll be back."

*End of Part Eight*

Chapter End Notes

Okay... everyone get yourselves ready because next week, we're launching into Avengers: Endgame. Make sure you have seen in before I publish it next week because there will be spoilers. Who am I kidding, you already have.
Part Nine: Live to Rise

Chapter Notes

Hi, welcome to the endgame. So yeah, I had to make some changes, least of all Wanda being in the majority of the storyline. To save confusion, I have kept the five-year jump but from The Battle of Wakanda. So everything from Chapter 37 - 59 all take place within a year from the end of Infinity War. Thus some details have changed in this chapter.

That said, the plot has stayed mostly intact. I have omitted some key pieces such as Thor on Asgard and Nebula and Rhodey on Morag save the important details that need to be known for the rest of it to make sense.

All that aside, let's go.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Part Nine: Live to Rise

Like the sun, we will live to rise.
Like the sun, we will live and die,
And then ignite again.
Like the sun, we will live to rise, again.

Chapter One

Thirty-three weeks

Wanda sighed as she listened to the sound of her daughter's heartbeat echo through the room. Doctor Kwon had suggested that Wanda have some non-stress tests to see how the baby was doing given that there was the risk that the placenta could detach. Milena was nearing five pounds, and Wanda was only seven weeks away from her due date. However, Wanda has passed out on the floor the day before out of nowhere and Doctor Kwon wanted to check Wanda over in case.

Steve was reading his book when Doctor Kwon finally entered the room. "Hey, how are we feeling?" she asked as she walked over to the monitor.

"Better," Wanda replied.

"Well, you've passed the test. Have you been feeling any contractions?"

"Other than the Braxton Hicks? Not really."

"Your blood pressure is good but I don't want to risk you becoming overdue, so when you hit forty weeks we'll induce you. Though it may come sooner than that."

"Okay," Wanda said as she was detached from the monitors.

"The best advice I can give you is to relax while you can. Save your energy for the birth because you
Wanda nodded as she pushed herself off the bed. She felt exhausted just doing that. She was ready for her daughter to be born and she was tempted to ask if she could be induced sooner but she knew that Doctor Kwon would only do it if it was a medical necessity.

Steve wrapped his arm around her and pulled her close. "That wasn't so bad," he said softly.

"I know it is about the baby but I feel stressed when I am attached," Wanda replied. "I was sort of hoping the machine would detect a contraction. I want her out."

Steve smiled and pressed his lips to the top of her head. "She'll come out in her own time."

Wanda huffed. He did not have to put up with the constant back pain, swollen feet and insomnia – and it was his DNA that was causing it. Still, she had a birth plan and her birth partner. It was all in order, and in seven weeks or less, she would be a mother.

"Right, Pepper has invited us for lunch at her place, so are we going to look cheerful?" Steve asked.

"I suppose." Wanda managed to crack a smile as she took Steve's hand. "At least I won't be overdue. It feels weird though. I thought we would be more prepared by now. We haven't gotten half the equipment yet."

"We will. Just be patient."

Within half an hour, they arrived at Pepper's apartment block. Steve got out of the car and started to walk towards the building when he noticed that his wife was struggling to get out of the seat. She was trying to hoist herself up by pushing on the seat. However, she just could not manage it.

"Need some help?" Steve asked with an amused look on his face. Wanda raised an eyebrow and Steve went over to help her. He lifted her to her feet and Wanda sighed. "You look beautiful if it helps."

Wanda huffed, "You have to say that."

Steve pressed a kiss to her head. He was not going to argue with her over it. He knew she looked beautiful. Once the car was locked, the couple made their way to the elevator and finally to the apartment.

However, the second they opened the door, Wanda was greeted by the sight of her friends beaming away, surrounded by white and pink wrapped gifts, pink coloured food and a banner stating, 'Baby Shower for Baby Girl Maximoff-Rogers'.

"We would have put the name on the banner but you aren't telling us until she's eight days old," Natasha stated as she guided Wanda to the couch. "Welcome to your baby shower."

"Okay..." Wanda was just so stunned that she could not process what was going on. "You kept this quiet."

"We wanted it to be a surprise," Pepper explained handing Wanda what looked to be pink lemonade. "You've not really been out the house save for hospital appointments and we thought it would be a nice way to see out your pregnancy."

"That's if it ever ends," Wanda muttered into her drink. "So what is happening then?"
"Well, you are going to relax and open presents. Eat some food and enjoy some company," Bruce explained as he picked at a pink cupcake.

"Is this why we haven't gotten anything?" Wanda asked her husband.

"I said I was happy getting the stuff myself but they insisted," Steve replied as he sat by her. "Come on: let yourself be spoiled for a change."

Wanda gave in and nodded. Exhausted as she was, she could deal with this for a couple of hours. For one, she didn't have to move as people were coming to her.

"If I ever have kids, I hope to look as good as you," Sharon commented as she came to sit by Wanda.

"Thanks," Wanda replied. She knew Sharon was being nice but there was a sincerity about it that Wanda appreciated. "I feel like death at the moment but this is nice."

"I bet Steve is really excited. Your daughter is going to be so lucky to have a dad like him."

"Oh he dotes on her and she's not even out yet. She responds to his voice more than mine. I am excited but at the moment I can't get my energy higher than this. We've done the right stuff and my blood pressure is better but this what happens when you have a super soldier's baby."

"She'll be out before you know it."

"I guess. This pregnancy has gone rather quickly. Especially since this whole year has been so long."

Wanda's lips went thin. It would the anniversary of the Decimation in a week's time and Wanda was trying to put it out of her mind. She looked around and, in her head, she pictured Sam and Bucky being present at this baby shower. She took a deep breath in a bid to prevent herself from crying. Opening the presents gave her some time to focus on something else. They received an abundance of clothes, soft toys, and essentials that Wanda was worried about how they were going to get everything into the car. She was especially worried since Natasha and Pepper had gotten a rocking swing and a bassinet respectively.

"It'll fit," Steve insisted.

"Have you been to a birthing class yet?" Bruce asked.

It was then Wanda burst out laughing. They had gone to a birthing class two days ago and it had been uneventful with them explaining how to breathe and how to prevent tearing. Then they brought out the birthing tape and Wanda had never seen the colour drain from her husband's face so quickly. In fact, it took him half an hour before he could process any words.

"I did not see that coming," Steve commented as they entered the house. He still looked dumbfounded.

"I thought you had read all the books," Wanda replied as she took a seat on the couch.

"I have but it's one thing to read it and one thing to see something the size of a watermelon be pushed out of a small hole."

"Just remember who is pushing that watermelon out," Wanda reminded him.

"I'm so sorry Doll for making you go through that."
"Steve, we were trying to have a baby. Sure, it is going to hurt. Sure, I may call you so many names under the sun. However, we are going to have a daughter out of this. She'll be worth the pain."

"Seriously, the birth tape freaked you out?" Rhodes asked.

"They do say that every labour is different," Pepper injected.

"That is true. Aamir was like spitting out a watermelon seed while Kamala struggled for hours," Muneeba commented. "You may be lucky."

"Let's hope," Wanda whispered rubbing her belly.

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"I hate you," Wanda said firmly when Steve walked out the bathroom. Steve could only blink. He was not sure what he had done to warrant Wanda's small outburst. "How can you look like that and I look like a whale?"

Steve looked down and noticed he was wearing his white vest-top and black sweat pants. He guessed the reason she yelled at him was the fact that the vest-top was well-fitted. He wanted so much to burst out laughing because of how ridiculous Wanda sounded but he knew better than to mock his clearly hormonal wife.

"Sorry," he replied sheepishly. He gave a soft smile as he walked over to her. "If I took this off would it help?"

"No, because you have Greek God abs and shoulders."

The pout on her lips was kind of adorable. In fact, there was a lot that was adorable about her: her messy bun, her face bare of makeup and her t-shirt barely covering her protruding stomach. "I just want my old body back."

"You will, but you do look beautiful even now."

"You keep saying that but it's hard to feel attractive when you have something that feels like a brick sticking out." Wanda sighed and rubbed her stomach. Their daughter kicked under her palm. "I just don't feel like myself. In my head, I do, but my body feels like it's been taken over by an alien."

Steve put his hand over hers and asked, "Do you want me to massage your feet?"

"You can massage all over," Wanda replied. Steve laughed and began rubbing her ankle. "That feels so good."

"Were you okay with the baby shower?" Steve asked.

"It was lovely, Steve. It took me by surprise but it was nice."

"I just know that you've been a little frustrated lately what with Clint's message and with the bed rest. You just needed that afternoon to be a normal pregnant woman. And in just a few weeks, we'll have our baby girl." Wanda gave a faint smile as Steve kissed her head. He was just about to kiss her on the lips when his phone rang. He sighed and grabbed it off the side. He hit the green button and asked, "Nat?"

"Steve, you need to come to the Compound now," Natasha ordered down the phone.

"What's going on?" Wanda watched as Steve's face went from confusion to frozen in shock. "Okay, I'll be there as soon as."
"What's going on Steve?" Wanda asked as he hung up and went to put a shirt on.

"They've found Tony. He's alive."

Steve knew he had lost the battle as soon as Wanda managed to get her shoes on. She was coming with him whether he liked it or not. The car ride from Brooklyn to the Compound was silent aside from the sound of the radio. Steve was wondering what state Tony was going to be in, and he wondered what he was going to say. Wanda did not know why she was coming, especially in her condition. She guessed she wanted to see it for her own eyes. A more likely reason was to give her husband moral support.

Steve pulled up haphazardly and helped Wanda out of the car before walking in. In the middle of the lounge area, everyone was gathered around a very emaciated looking Tony. He had a drip in his arm and was confined for what looked to be a wheelchair. Wanda glanced around and saw a woman with blue skin and dark eyes glaring around the room. The other woman Wanda was familiar with.

"This is a nightmare," Steve commented as he, Natasha, and Wanda watched as they saw the death tolls for each country rise. Each country was coming to fifty percent of the original population.

"I've had better nightmares," Natasha replied.

"3.8 billion people," Wanda whispered. She laced her hand with Steve's who squeezed it.

"Hey," Rhodes said walking in. "So that thing just stopped doing whatever the hell it was doing."

Natasha and Bruce had recovered a pager from where Nick Fury and Maria Hill were last seen alive. It had been flashing a red and blue background with a gold star. Almost as though it was calling someone. The three of them followed Rhodes and Bruce turned when Natasha asked, "What do we have?"

"The signal probably crapped out," Bruce answered.

"I thought we bypassed the battery," Steve commented.

"We did," Rhodes replied. "It's still plugged in but it just…"

"Have you tried rebooting it?" Wanda asked.

"Yeah," Bruce replied, "but we don't know what this is."

"Fury did," Natasha imputed. "The second you get a signal, tell us. I want to know who is on the other end of that thing."

Steve, Wanda and Natasha were about to turn around when a woman stood before them. She looked dishevelled, but Wanda instantly recognised the star on her suit. This woman must have been who Fury was trying to contact before he was disintegrated.

"Where's Fury?" the woman asked anxiously.

"He's… He's gone. I'm sorry," Steve replied. "We think he contacted you before he went."

"Who are you?" Natasha asked.

"Carol Danvers," she replied. "Fury and I knew each other about twenty-three years ago. He helped me a lot and in exchange, I gave him that for emergencies."
“Nothing says emergencies such as half the universe disappearing,” Bruce muttered.

"Can you help us fix this?” Wanda asked.

"We need to find some people,” Steve injected. "Tony Stark, Peter Parker, Stephen Strange all went up with a ship. They haven't been seen since."

"Wait, Steve how do we know she can find them?"

"You say they went up with a ship?" Carol asked. "Into space?"

"I guess."

"I can fly through space. If they're still alive then I should be able to bring them home."

"And then what?" Natasha asked.

"We can work out a plan," Steve replied.

Carol gave a soft smile to Wanda as they stood beside each other. Carol looked no different in the year since she had left to find Tony. Wanda was wondering what Carol was thinking about the change in her physical appearance.

"You okay?” Carol mimed. Wanda smiled and nodded.

"How many?" Tony asked grimly.

"Half the world's population. We lost Sam,” Natasha began. "Others we have lost are T'Challa, Barnes, and Vision. Well, Vision wasn't disintegrated."

"Well, I gathered he got to Vision. Nice job there guys."

Wanda felt a sudden amount of rage fill her veins and she felt Natasha's hand on her arm preventing her to walk over to Tony and smack him for that comment. Instead, she spat, "I had to kill him with my own hands. It worked, but Thanos brought him back and crushed his head."

The anger and venom in Wanda's voice seemed to make Tony see that his comment was stupid, especially when he knew how Vision was brought back. "Where is Thanos?"

"I don't know," Steve replied. "He just opened a portal and walked through."

Everyone turned to Thor who was sitting alone. Wanda had been noticing how Thor had been away with his thoughts. It seemed that what happened in Wakanda had finally hit him. "What's up with him?" Tony asked.

"He's pissed," Rocket answered. "Thinks he failed, which of course he did, but there is a lot of that going around isn't there."

"Honestly, until this exact second, I thought you were a Build-a-Bear.” Wanda rolled her eyes. For someone so weak from starvation and dehydration, he could still make crass comments.

"We've been hunting Thanos for nearly a year," Steve injected. "Space scans, satellites and we have nothing." After a moment, he stated, "Tony, you fought him."

"No, I didn't fight him. He wiped my face with a planet while the Bleecker Street Magician handed the stone over. That's what happened, there was no fight."
"Okay," Steve said nodding. Wanda instantly knew that this was going to end badly. "Did he give you any clues, any coordinates, anything?"

Tony made a noise that suggested he was mocking Steve's question. "You know, a couple of years back, Sabrina the Fertile Witch here gave me a vision-"

Steve stood because he knew there was a risk that Tony could insult Wanda even more and that she would lash out with her short fuse. "Tony, you have to keep focused-"

"And in that vision, you needed me. As in past tense because you, Banner, Romanoff, Barton and Thor were all dead. You woke up and told me that I could have saved you. Well, I needed you a couple of years ago. We could have faced that Purple Grape together. For this last year, I needed you, and it seems you have been too busy repopulating the Earth. I needed you, so that trumps what you need now."

"Yeah, well, we needed you to tell Ross that he was an evil bastard to shoving me in a straitjacket and an electric collar," Wanda snapped. Tony looked away from her. She scoffed. He still could not look her in the eye.

"You know what I need," Tony fired back as he made an attempt to stand. "I need a shave. I don't believe I remember telling you guys that what we needed was a suit of armour around the world. Remember that? Whether that impacted our precious freedoms or not, that's what we needed."

"Well, that didn't work out did it?" Steve pointed out. Tony took a glance at Wanda and then back at Steve.

"I'd said we lose. You said we'll do it together too. And guess what Cap, we lost. You weren't there. But that's what we do right? Our best work-" Tony was starting to become unsteady on his feet and Rhodes just about held him up while his best friend continued to rant, "The Avengers? We're the Avengers? Not the Prevengers, right?"

"Okay, you've made your point Tony, just sit down okay?" Rhodes begged.

"No, no, no…" Tony broke free from Rhodes' arms and pointed at Carol. "We need you; you're new blood. Not some tired old meals." Tony staggered towards Steve and Wanda was preparing her hands to blast him in case it got physical. "I've got some words for you Cap: no coordinates, no clues, no strategies, no options, zero, nada, no trust." Steve's face softened. This is what it had to come down to. "Liar." Tony ripped off the arc reactor and put it in Steve's hand. "Here. Take this. You put that on and hide."

Tony collapsed to his knees and Steve followed down to grab him. "Tony-"

"I'm fine. I-" At that point, Tony did collapse in a heap at Wanda's feet. As everyone scrambled to get him back in the chair and to the medical bay, Wanda and Steve were left alone in the middle of the room.

"I could have slapped him for that," she said.

"I know," he replied. "Maybe he has a point though."

"He doesn't. He doesn't know what it was like for us back here. If he was there to see… See me get as low as I did…"

"Shush," Steve soothed as he walked to her and hugged her close. He could feel Milena take a sharp kick to his abdomen and kissed the side of her head. "It'll work out."
"How do you know?"

"Tony will get better. He'll calm down. He usually does." Wanda grabbed his hand and then saw the rest of the team return to the living area. He turned his head and saw the blue woman in the corner. "Thank you…"

"Nebula," she responded.

"Thank you, Nebula, for keeping him alive all this time."

"They've given him a sedative," Natasha stated. "They'll get some food and water into him and he'll be as good as new."

"So what now?" Rhodes asked.

"We go after Thanos," Carol stated as she walked into the room.

"Nice idea but how?" Bruce asked.

"We don't even know where to start," Rhodes pointed out.

"Yes we do," Nebula announced. "I know where he is. Thanos has spent a long time trying to perfect me. Often he talked about his great plan. Even disassembled I wanted to please him. I would ask him where we were going. He always said to The Garden."

Rocket pulled up a holograph of the Earth from the previous January. "When Thanos used the stones, Earth became ground zero for a surge of cosmic energy. Fast forward to two days ago." The hologram changed to another planet. "Planet 0259-S. Similar energy surge."

"He's used the stones again," Natasha commented as she looked closer at the hologram.

"We'd be going in short-handed you know," Bruce said.

"Look, he still has the stones so-" Rhodes began.

"So let's get them. Use them to bring everyone back," Carol interrupted.

"Just like that?" Wanda asked.

"Yeah. Just like that," Steve replied. Wanda could see that Steve was deadly serious about this and almost as though he was going along with this crazy idea.

"Even if there's a small chance that we can undo this," Natasha began. "I mean we owe it to everyone who's not in this room to try."

Bruce and Rhodes looked at Carol, Natasha and Steve as though this was a very bad idea. Wanda could feel her heart pounding as it symbolised what Steve's determination to find Thanos could mean.

"If we do this, how do we know it's going to end any differently than it did before?" Bruce asked.

"Nat, Steve, I'm with Bruce on this one," Wanda said. "It sounds too risky."

"Before you didn't have me," Carol injected.

"Hey, New Girl," Rhodes began. "Everybody in this room is about that superhero life and if you
don't mind my asking, where the hell have you been all this time?"

"There are a lot of other planets in the universe and unfortunately, they didn't have you guys."

Everyone turned to Thor for a moment. He had been sitting and listening patiently. Wanda knew deep down that he was ready to take on Thanos without blinking. He stood and towered himself over Carol, arm outstretched, and Stormbreaker flew into his hand. The wind blew Carol's hair but she did not flinch one inch.

"I like this one," Thor stated.

Wanda turned back to Steve and squeezed his hand. Secretly she was pleading that he would not consider going after Thanos but she knew if there was one chance that he could bring back Bucky, Sam and the others, he was going to do it.

"Let's go get this son of a bitch," Steve announced.

-o-

"I thought you were stepping away from being Captain America," Wanda said when Steve emerged from the kit room in his Captain America suit.

"I am, but they need me, Wanda," he replied. He could see it in her eyes that she was scared that Steve was not going to come back. "We're just going to retrieve the stones and be back before you can count to ten."

"I just wish I could join you."

"You would be a great help." He gave her a reassuring smile and kissed her on her lips. "I love you."

"I love you so much," Wanda replied as she pressed her forehead against his. "Just come home. Milena needs her daddy."

Steve got to his knees in front of Wanda's belly. He gently stroked the bump, feeling his daughter wriggle under his palm. "Hey Milena, I promise that I will be back. You and your mommy are the most important people to me now so I am going to fight to keep myself alive for you."

He kissed the bump and stood strong. He pressed one last kiss to Wanda's lips, squeezed her hand and turned to jog towards the hanger. Wanda could only stand and watch as the ship launched into the sky. Wanda sniffed as she rubbed her belly. "He's going to be fine Milena. He will be fine. I know he will."

In the meantime, Steve could only feel his heart pound as the ship broke the atmosphere. He wondered how strong the oxygen would be to get them to Planet 0259-S and back. He pulled off his gloves and stared at his wedding band. Wanda was playing on his mind. He was scared in case he did not come back. She would have to raise their daughter by herself.

"Who here hasn't been to space?" Rocket asked. Steve, Rhodes and Natasha raised their hands apprehensively. "You'd better not throw up on my ship."

"Approaching jump in three, two, one," Nebula announced. The ship made what felt like a hyperjump, Carol headed out to look on the planet's surface. Steve took a deep breath. He pulled out the 3D ultrasound of his daughter from only a few short weeks ago. He could see Wanda's features already in Milena's face, especially the nose.
"It's going to work Steve," Natasha said soothingly.

"I know it will because I don't know what to do if it doesn't," he replied.

"No satellites, no ships, no armies, no defences of any kind," Carol announced as she floated outside the window. "It's just him."

"Then that's enough," Nebula whispered.

"Okay, Carol should head in first, take him off guard," Steve announced his plan. "Bruce, use Hulkbuster to help restrain him, same for you Rhodey. Thor, get that glove off him." Carol saluted and made way down to the planet's surface again. Nebula landed the ship and Thor grabbed Stormbreaker. Bruce got the Hulkbuster suit on and Rhodes flipped his helmet up. "Ready. Let's roll."

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"I swear he looked better after Afghanistan," Pepper commented when Wanda came waddling into the doorway of Tony's medical room. "Any news?"

"No, not yet," Wanda replied. "It's hard to think that ten hours ago we were at my baby shower… Now the rest of them are trying to fight Thanos again."

"It's been a very weird day. I thought I would never see him again."

"Well, I was close to hitting him earlier." Wanda sat down and rubbed her stomach. "I never thought I would be referred to as Sabrina the Fertile Witch."

"He's been through a lot this last year."

"So have we. Let's face it, I was that. We all saw people die in front of us."

"But we all had each other."

Wanda guessed Pepper had a point. That said, she still considered Tony's rant to be uncalled for, especially when he criticised them for failing to stop Thanos from getting the Mind Stone. She did have a mind to be more sympathetic given that Tony had been stuck in space for a year and was very close to starving to death. That said, she had spent longer on the streets and in a HYDRA cell in even worst conditions. He had someone looking after him.

"So what happens next for you two?" Wanda asked.

"Don't know. Make sure he gets better. Get married. Settle down. Do what you and Steve are doing."

"That would be nice. I just hope that if- when Steve comes back, he packs Captain America up for once and for all."

"Don't you feel the urge to go back out there?"

"Do I wish I was up there with Steve giving Thanos a piece of his medicine? Yeah. But I have someone who is so precious to me who I want to ensure get's the best life possible."

"Makes sense I guess. You're going to be a really good mother Wanda. You love that little girl more than I have seen anyone love anything. More than Steve loves you."
Wanda gave a faint smile. As frustrated as she was with the pregnancy, she would do it all again, just to have that precious budle at the end.

-o-

Steve's plan went so perfectly until the moment Rocket turned Thanos' disembodied hand and saw none of the stones were inside the glove. The group looked at the beast and saw that his entire left side was burnt. They knew his arm had burnt when he snapped his fingers the first time. They could not get what had caused the further damage to his face and arm.

"Where are they?" Steve asked calmly.

"Answer the question," Carol ordered as she increased the pressure around Thanos' neck.

"The universe required correction," Thanos groaned. "After that, the stones served no purpose beyond temptation."

"You murdered trillions!" Bruce bellowed as he launched at Thanos and knocked the weakened Titan to the ground.

"You should be grateful," Thanos responded. Bruce punched Thanos in the face.

"Where are the stones?" Natasha asked, her voice shaking.

"Gone. Reduced to atoms."

"You used them two days ago!" Bruce yelled.

"I used the stones to destroy the stones. It nearly killed me, but the work is done. It always will be. I am inevitable."

"We've got to turn this place apart," Rhodes suggested in desperation. "He has to be lying."

"My father is many things," Nebula began, "but a liar is not one of them."

"Ah," Thanos breathed. "Thank you, daughter. Perhaps I treated you too harshly."

Everything came in such slow motion. Thor lifted Stormbreaker and slashed Thanos' head clean off his body. Everyone froze and just stared at Thor, who looked stunned himself at what he had done.

"What did you do?" Rocket asked.

"I went for the head," Thor explained in a voice that was so filled with shock that it felt as though he could never snap out of it. As Thor started to move away, it dawned on the rest of them: they had one shot to bring their fallen friends back and they blew it.

-o-

Wanda just about managed to drift off when she saw a light flash through the window of Tony's hospital room. It seemed to stir Pepper as well as they both looked out to see the ship land. Wanda held her breath until she saw Steve leave the ship with the rest. Everyone was present and correct.

Wanda beamed with delight as she rushed as fast as her heavy body would let her towards the front garden. However, the face on her husband was the gravest she'd ever seen it.

"What happened?" she asked.
"He destroyed the stones. We're not getting anyone back Doll."

Wanda ran her hands through her hair. "I knew something was wrong. Remember when I collapsed on the floor the other day?" Steve nodded. "I think that was it. That was the moment he destroyed the stones and my connection was severed." Steve sighed and pulled her in for a hug. "What do we do now?"

"I don't know Doll."

Chapter End Notes

So, tune in next week where the stork will finally arrive.
Chapter Two

Thirty-nine weeks

Wanda groaned as she started to feel some very sharp cramps seize her stomach and it immediately woke her up. When she glanced at the clock, she saw that it was 01:23. She waited until she felt the next cramp, this time at 01:28 before shaking Steve awake.

"Steve, wake up," she said as she turned the light on. "I think I'm in labour."

Steve immediately snapped awake and asked, "How do you know?"

"I was awoken by a contraction and then I had another one five minutes later."

"Okay, have your waters broken?"

"Not as far as I know."

"Right, I'm going to call Doctor Kwon. Just focus on your breathing while I get the bag and car keys. Oh and I need to drop Tigger at the Khans." Wanda nodded as Steve went to grab the phone. Wanda tried to focus her thoughts on anything but the pain. The next contraction came at 01:33 exactly and Wanda took very deep breaths. The actual pain was not so bad at that point, but it helped her mind to focus. "Okay, since your contractions are five minutes apart, she wants us to come in now. You okay?"

"Yeah, the contraction is just passing." Once the contraction had dissipated, Wanda took one final deep breath. "You have the keys and the bag?"

"Bag is in the car. Just got to get you into the car."

Wanda smiled as Steve helped her up off the bed. They got to the car without a contraction and Wanda's next contraction occurred as they got to the bottom of the block. Steve allowed her to take his hand to squeeze with each contraction.

They arrived at the hospital within half an hour and as soon as Wanda was checked in and set up on the equipment, Steve called Natasha.

"Okay, Wanda, I am going to check how far dilated you are," Doctor Kwon announced as she checked Wanda's vitals and the baby's vitals. "How are you feeling at the moment?"

"The contractions seem okay so far," Wanda replied. "I thought they would come on slower than that though."

"It's possible that you have been contracting for the last day or so but not feeling them. Maybe you'll be lucky and not need the pain meds." Wanda snorted. She leaned back as her cervix was examined. "Okay, good, you are already four centimetres. Since your waters haven't broken and everything is stable, I think you can walk around for a little while to get things moving along."

Wanda would have happily laid in the bed but if it meant that she could make the labour go quicker,
she was going to take it. She grabbed a hold of Steve's hand. He gave her a small smile.

"How are you feeling?" Wanda asked.

"Honestly, I am excited to finally meet her."

"Me too." Wanda had to stop when the next contraction started. She winced and breathed until she felt it pass. "Okay, I think they are getting longer."

"That's a good sign I think." They started walking – waddling in Wanda's case – around the corridors, and Wanda's waters broke on their fourth lap. "Okay, back to bed." He found a nearby wheelchair and wheeled her back to their private labour room. Wanda then started moaning as the contraction appeared to be far stronger than it had been. "You're doing so well Doll."

Doctor Kwon examined her again. Wanda was now up to six centimetres. It was all moving in the right direction. Natasha arrived not long after to see Wanda hooked up to the machine. The baby's heartbeat was strong and echoing through the room.

"How are we doing?" she asked.

"Already up to six centimetres," Wanda replied. "She might be out before midday."

"Any pain meds?"

"No, they're not that bad." However, the second she said it, a contraction surged, only this one felt as though her stomach was caught in a vice. "Oh god." Steve took her hand and Wanda squeezed the life out of it until the contraction dissipated. "Okay, that really hurt."

After six hours of being in the hospital, Wanda was getting frustrated and her tolerance for the pain was waning. Steve had gotten into the habit of using his body for her to support and dig her nails into his skin. He whispered encouraging words into her ear in a bid to keep her morale up. Natasha would look on in slight amusement at the sight of Wanda crushing all her strength into Steve.

"Doctor Kwon, how much longer?" Wanda asked. She was out of breath from the latest contraction (now coming a minute apart). Steve rubbed her hand while Natasha patted her forehead with a damp sponge. Doctor Kwon gave a small sympathetic smile as she did her next examination.

"Well, I think we can start wheeling you to delivery. You're ten centimetres," Doctor Kwon replied with a small smile. "You ready?"

Wanda nodded as the bars of her bed were lifted. The last time Steve had seen bars being lifted on Wanda's hospital bed was to go to an ICU. They had come such a long way since then, and he had never felt so proud of anyone as he had done Wanda for how far she had come. She had her fingers laced with his and he glanced at her. Her face was mixed with nerves and excitement. They had waited for this for so long and he could not help feeling the apprehension his wife was experiencing.

Once Wanda was all set up and the paediatric and neo-natal team were ready, Doctor Kwon had put a blue gown on with gloves. Natasha and Steve were also expected to put on a blue gown and hat. Wanda was propped up by the bed and Steve's supportive arm. They gave one last look at one another and Steve pressed a kiss to her head. "I love you so much," he whispered.

"I love you too," she replied softly. "Though I have a feeling I will not in less than ten minutes." Steve chuckled and pressed one last kiss to her lips.

"You ready?" Natasha asked rubbing Wanda's arm. Wanda nodded and took a deep breath as she
waited for her next instruction.

"Okay, Wanda, on your next contraction, I want you to push as hard as you can," Doctor Kwon instructed. "Take deep breaths and guide her out slowly." Wanda nodded. The contraction took hold and she pushed all her strength into her lower half. Her hand crushed Steve and Natasha's hands like a vice but Steve did not care as chanted some encouragement. Finally, after forty-five minutes of pushing, Doctor Kwon announced, "Okay, I can see her head. Well done. Steve, do you want to look?"

Steve was curious to see it but he had no chance to take a look until Wanda's contraction started again and he had to return to his station. Natasha peeked and she had to blink a few times to process what she had just seen. It was then Wanda made a yell that she did not think was possibly human as their daughter's head emerged into the world. Wanda's legs and pelvis were that sore she barely felt the rest of her daughter slip out. Steve seemed to have frozen while Wanda flopped back in exhaustion. Yet through the pain, as she heard the most beautiful sound in the world: her baby's cry.

Wanda was still trying to regain her breath when she felt the tiny weight pressed on her chest. She looked up and saw a shock of dark hair. Steve seemed to have snapped out of his shock when he knelt down to get a better look at their daughter. He was crying but happy tears and Wanda burst out laughing from the shock of everything. Natasha was smiling brightly as she rubbed Wanda's shoulder.

"Hi," Wanda whispered. "We've been waiting for you."

Steve was handed a pair of scissors to cut the umbilical cord. After a moment, the paediatric team took their daughter to be examined. Steve composed himself and pressed a kiss to Wanda's lips. She was so sweaty and red-faced, but Steve had thought she was just as beautiful as the day they married.

"Well, you two have a very healthy, beautiful nine-pound baby girl," the paediatric nurse said as she handed Milena back, only she had been cleaned up and was wrapped in a white blanket.

Wanda was finally able to see her daughter's face. Even though Milena's face was a little scrunched and her eyes puffy, she could make out her nose and Steve's lips instantly. The crying had stopped the second the baby had been placed in Wanda's arms and Wanda felt the tiniest fist wrap around her index finger. Wanda knew that she loved her daughter the second she found out she was pregnant, but she was not prepared for the crush of unconditional love that was filling her body at the moment. This little girl meant more to her than any precious metal or gem and she would die or kill for her daughter. She started weeping and she pressed a kiss to Milena's forehead.

"You okay Doll?" Steve asked.

"More than okay. She's just perfect."

-0-

Doctor Kwon wanted Wanda to stay in the hospital for a couple of days to keep a check on her moods, but for the most part, she did not seem to have much to worry about. It had helped that the labour had been very smooth with no complications. After the placenta was delivered, Wanda was wheeled to a recovery room. Milena was diapered and Wanda lowered her hospital gown so the paediatrician could rest the baby on Wanda's bare skin.

"This is good for bonding. It's more heart-on-heart than skin-on-skin," the paediatrician explained as a small blanket was placed over Milena's back.
Wanda could only smile as the baby instantly settled on her chest. She noticed her breast swell but it hurt her to say she had decided not to breastfeed. Even though Milena had been exposed to lithium throughout the pregnancy, Wanda did not want to risk any more going through her daughter's bloodstream, enhanced blood or no enhanced blood. That said, the feeling of her daughter on her chest was purely magical. Steve could not take his eyes off her. He was still trying to keep some composure but his overwhelming love for this little girl was too much to take.

"I just can't believe that she's here," he said as he stroked her tiny hand.

"Me neither," Wanda replied tiredly.

"She's just… Oh god, we're one of those parents who say every word to describe their child as the best thing ever. She is though. You and her. You are both the best thing to ever happen to me."

Wanda smiled. "You two are as well." A knock on the door snapped them out of their thoughts. Natasha and Bruce were standing in the doorway with small smiles on their face. "Hey come in."

"How are you feeling?" Natasha asked.

"Tired but I don't think I am going to sleep."

"She's a real beauty," Bruce commented as he took a peek at Milena.

"You still not going to tell us the name until she's eight days old?" Natasha asked.

"I think you can wait eight days," Steve replied. "Do you want to hold her?"

When Steve and Natasha met, he never thought that she would like children and babies. However, seeing her with Clint's children had shown a side to her that he never considered. Natasha nodded and Wanda gently passed Milena over to Natasha, careful not to expose her breasts as she slipped her gown back on. Natasha smiled softly at the baby. "She's a keeper," she commented.

"Rhodey, Carol, Thor and Pepper will be here soon," Bruce informed.

"What about Tony?" Steve asked.

"Well, I guess he'll be coming with Pepper." It was still rather tense between Steve and Tony since their reunion six weeks previously. Tony had to be put in the hospital in order for him to fully recover from his experience. He had only been discharged a couple of days previously so they had not really sat down to clear the air. "I saw him yesterday and he seems to have cooled off a bit."

"Well, he doesn't hate you." The mood seemed to be brought down a little by the conversation until Steve perked up and said, "Listen, you two, I want to ask something important: we would like you to be our daughter's godparents."

"You serious?" Natasha asked.

"If anything happened to us, we'd want you to be her guardians. Nothing about God, just making sure she's looked after and get's the best life possible," Wanda explained.

"Well, I am- Well, I was godmother to three others so I guess I could squeeze in one more."

"You sure you can trust me though?" Bruce asked.

"We can," Wanda replied.
Okay. I'll do it." Natasha handed the baby over to Bruce who took the opportunity to bop his
goddaughter on her cute little nose. "How are you, Wanda?"

"I guess you are talking about my head? So far so good. I've been weeping but that could just be the
hormones."

"They're keeping her in to see how she is for the next couple days," Steve replied. "But it was a
smooth delivery all things said."

"Say that to my vagina," Wanda whispered. Natasha snorted.

Rhodes and Carol arrived an hour later bearing flowers and balloons. Carol instantly went to Steve to
take a peek at the baby, who was now suckling on a bottle of sterilised milk. Her eyes had finally
opened and they were the same shade of blue as her father's.

"She's so little," Rhodes commented as he tapped Steve on the shoulder.

"I know, I could eat that ear," Carol commented. "I remember when my best friend Maria had her
daughter. I could have put her feet in a pita pocket. I saw her the other day. She's not that tiny
anymore. She'll grow before you know it."

Wanda smiled. She had grown to like Carol over the last six weeks. There was another knock on the
door and Thor appeared. He gave a weak smile but was holding up what looked to be a teddy bear.

"Hey Buddy," Steve said. "Where have you been?"

"Asgard," Thor replied. "Well, New Asgard. My friend Valkyrie has spent time rebuilding what's
left." Thor walked over and took a peek at the baby. "I think the stars have nothing on her."

Wanda smiled. Finally, the door knocked to see Pepper arrive. One glance behind them saw an
uncharacteristically sheepish Tony. Everyone waited on bated breath if there was going to be another
outburst like the one in the Compound, but it seemed Tony knew he was going to be civil.

"Congratulations," he said.

"Thanks, Tony," Steve said with a small smile.

Pepper walked in and handed the gift to Wanda. "It's more from Tony than me."

"Oh." Wanda peeled the wrapping paper back and saw that Tony had gotten a small red, white and
blue top that read 'Daddy's Little Super Soldier'. "Thanks, Tony, it's cute."

"No problem. So what's her name?" Tony asked.

"They're having a celebration to announce the name in eight days," Natasha explained. "I just think
they haven't decided yet."

"We know what her name is," Steve replied. "It's a Jewish custom. We settled on eight days in case
she was a boy."

"Speaking of which, we need to call Rabbi Moszkowski," Wanda pointed out.

"Yeah, good point." Steve moved and handed Milena back to her mother. "You okay?"

"I think I may need some more pain killers but I'm okay."
"You pushed that out of you without any drugs but you need the pain meds now?" Rhodes asked.

"Well, my entire lower half is sore and I would like to sleep."

"Well, it's a good thing I got you that doughnut pillow," Carol commented. "Maria swore on it after Monica was born."

"I'm not going to lie, I am in love with the person who made pads that double as an ice pack."

"Okay, this is getting kind of gross," Natasha commented. "Anyone hungry?"

"I know it sounds bad but all I want is a McDonald's. Chicken burger, fries, sundae and a coke."

"I think that's the lack of sleep," Bruce commented. "Studies have shown that sleep deprivation makes us crave fat and sugar-"

"Here big guy, get whatever the lady wants. She's just pushed a human out of her," Tony said giving Bruce his credit card. "While you're there get me a cheeseburger."

"Oooh, could you get me some McNuggets?" Carol asked.

Suddenly, everyone was injecting their orders and Bruce rolled his eyes. "You know I have seven PhDs right?"

It was later that night that Wanda and Steve had drifted off. Milena was sleeping soundly in her plastic cot beside Wanda's bed. Wanda was curled up on her side while Steve had taken the couch. However, Wanda heard her baby whine and instantly snapped her eyes awake. She almost screamed when she saw someone hovering over the cot, but her heart leapt when she saw that it was not someone dangerous.

"Shit," Clint muttered. "I wasn't meant to wake you."

"Are you genuinely here or am I imagining it?" Wanda whispered. Clint put his hand on hers and indicated she was not having post-partum induced hallucination. "Where have you been?"

"Laura and the kids are gone," Clint replied. "Thanos killed them."

"I could tell. Still doesn't explain where you've been for the last year."

"What else am I going to do Wanda?"

"You could have come to us. I needed you."

"You don't need someone who is broken himself." Clint looked back at Milena and gave the saddest smile Wanda had ever seen. "She's beautiful. I remember when Lila was that small."

"You can stay Clint. You have a family here."

Clint snorted, "It's no family. We're at each other's throats half the time."

"But we still get through. You need us as much as we need you."

"Wanda, that little girl is your priority. You have a life. Focus on her."

And just like that Clint was gone again. Wanda would have gotten up to stop him but her lower half was so achy that she could barely manage to move an inch. She sat back in her bed and tried not to
cry. After a moment, she looked at the cot and saw Milena was wide awake. Wanda leaned over and lifted her daughter out of the cot.

"Hey, Slatka devojka. It's okay. Mommy's okay. She just wishes that Uncle Clint will see sense. He may do one day. He's just been through a lot. We all have, but we're all going to be there for you. You are going to have the most peaceful life that we can give you."

-o-

By the time Milena was eight days old, Steve had forgotten what sleep was. She was actually rather mellow during the day but at night she would start whining for food or to be changed or to be cuddled at least six times. Steve had volunteered to take the night shift for the first month so Wanda could get as much sleep as possible in order to prevent her bipolar induced mood swings from making a comeback. Wanda felt guilty for it, but it was paying off. Other than some hormonal weeping, she had been as well as she had been pre-pregnancy.

On the day of Milena's b'rit bat, Wanda walked down the stairs to find Steve asleep on the couch with Milena asleep on his chest. Tigger was curled up on his legs as though she was guarding the baby. Her heart melted instantly at the sight, but it was nearing 09:00, and the ceremony was due to start at 12:00. She knelt down and shook Steve on the shoulder.

Steve groaned, "What time is it?"

"Nearly 09:00. Do you want me to feed her while you get ready?"

"I gave her a bottle about 06:00."

"Then she's due a feed." Wanda gently lifted Milena up and pressed a kiss to her head. "I think I'll drive to the synagogue." Steve nodded and pushed himself off the couch. Tigger meowed in frustration and rubbed herself on Wanda's legs. Wanda gave a faint smile as he trudged up the stairs. "I think you need to give Daddy a bit of a break."

Wanda had already showered but had thrown on some sweatpants and an old t-shirt in case Milena spat up on her. Which she did. When the baby was winded, Wanda began singing a lullaby to settle her down for a nap so she could get ready. Milena instantly took to Wanda's voice and was sound asleep in less than a minute. She also needed to feed Tigger, and with one hand, she managed to rip open a packet of cat food and put it on a plate. Having powers of telekinesis helped in situations like this.

When she went up to put Milena in the bassinet, Wanda found Steve passed out with his trousers halfway up his legs. She held in the laugh in a bid not to wake the baby up as Milena was placed in the bassinet.

"Steve?" Wanda asked as she poked him in the chest.

"I'm not sleeping. Just resting my eyes," he replied as he snapped awake and sat up.

"You are going to kill yourself if you carry on. I'm fine. We can split the night shift."

"I guess. I don't know why she won't sleep at night."

"Well, Carol did warn us that babies have their days and nights mixed up."

"Funny."
Wanda chuckled and kissed his lips. "Come on. She's down for a nap. More than enough time to get ready."

By 11:00, they were ready to leave the house. Steve had managed to drag out his black suit while Wanda opted for a blue maternity dress as she was nowhere near able to get into her pre-pregnancy clothes. Milena had been put in a white dress, though Wanda had packed some spares in case she ended up in a mess.

Everyone had gathered outside the synagogue and were mingling among themselves by the time they arrived. Wanda noticed Bruce speaking with Yusef while Kamala was chatting with Carol. The pre-teen seemed very invested in Carol's stories. So far, it was so peaceful.

Wanda held onto her daughter, who was thankfully snoozing, as they walked into the synagogue. Her fist was wrapped around her mother's fingers as they walked to the front. Wanda had to take a deep breath for a moment. She felt a little overwhelmed. She definitely knew she was not hallucinating because she was picturing her parents, Pietro and her grandmother sitting on the front row intentionally. Sam and Bucky were on the other side. She shook her head and they were gone. There was a time to mourn and a time to celebrate.

Before the ceremony could start, everyone had to join in on a song. Wanda had found the song that had been used at her blessing and had passed it onto Rabbi Moszkowski. As they stood at the front, the song started to play. Wanda managed to sing along. Steve had made a really great attempt at learning Hebrew for the ceremony so he just about managed to join in.

'B'ruchah haba'ah b'sheim zot hanish'kafah k'mo-shachar yafah chal'vanah barah kachamah?'

When everyone was seated, Rabbi Moszkowski began to recite the welcome in Hebrew, "Brucha ha-ba'ah b'shem Adonai. Wanda and Steven welcome you all today to celebrate the birth of their daughter and to welcome her into this synagogue. Today is a day to celebrate the hopes for the future. So I invite Wanda and Steven to come up with their daughter to give their thanksgivings."

Wanda and Steve smiled as they stood in front of their friends. It felt so surreal to Steve. Over nine months ago, they were getting married and now they were celebrating the birth of their daughter. Wanda looked so happy as she held Milena, almost angelic. She had a glow about her.

"Baruch ata Adonai, Eholoheinu melech ha'olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hachnisah bi'v'rit hachayim," Wanda recited with a smile.

She turned to Steve who took a deep breath and began, "Baruch ata Adonai, Eholoheinu melech ha'olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al kidush hachayim."

Finally, they recited together, "Baruch ata Adonai, Eholoheinu melech ha'olam, shehechehyanu, v'ki y'manu, v'higianu laz'man ha-zeh."

Rabbi Moszkowski handed a tallet to Steve, who then wrapped Milena up in the shawl. She whined a little until Wanda bounced her. This was to symbolise that Milena was being welcomed into the Covenant.

Finally, it was time to explain their daughter's name. Wanda announced, "Now in the presence of loved ones, we give to you the name Milena Sarah. Let it become a name honoured and respected for wisdom and good deeds. Milena Sarah, we commit ourselves to the unfolding of your promise, may you walk the path of goodness, beauty, and truth. Do justly and love mercy and be humble before the mystery of life and the grandeur of the universe into which you have been born. May God's blessing rest on you now and always."
"Milena is not a Jewish name, but our daughter is named after two of the most important women in our lives," Steve said.

"Milena Červeňák was my maternal grandmother," Wanda began. "She lived with my family when I was little. She looked after Pietro and me. She explained my family background to me. She was a Holocaust survivor and she was the strongest woman I know. I went through a very hard time when I was little and she sat me down. We had a conversation, and that made me feel so much better. I'm not even sure why or how, but it did. She was wise. She was loving. She was everything that I wanted to be when I was older. She was the best grandmother a girl could ask for. I wanted to honour her and that is why my daughter's secular name is Milena."

"Sarah Rogers was my mother," Steve started his explanation. "She was a single mother who raised her only child on a small wage but enough to see us by. She was strong. She had to be. She lost her husband while pregnant. She had a son who was weak and constantly sick. She had a stressful job. Yet, she always was there to call me Stevie. She always had something on the table. She tried to give me the best life possible. I wanted to honour her memory by giving her name to my daughter. Her Jewish name shall be Sarah."

"We want to raise our daughter with the values of always fighting for what is right, to be wise and loving, to put herself before others and to know that she is loved." Wanda handed Milena over to Steve and pulled out a necklace from the small pocket. It was a small silver Star of David. "This was mine. It was my paternal grandmother's and her mother's. It survived the Holocaust. It is a symbol of fighting for our beliefs." Wanda lay the necklace on the tallat and pressed a kiss to her daughter's cheek.

"And now, Steven and Wanda had invited their dear friend Natasha to read a prayer for Milena," Rabbi Moszkowski announced.

Natasha stood and began to recite the prayer Wanda had given to her, "May you be like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. May God bless you and guard you. May God show you favour, and be gracious to you. May God show you kindness and grant you peace."

Rabbi Moszkowski had a cup of grape juice in his hand. He placed his finger into the juice and a few drops were placed on Milena's lips. "Baruch ata Adonai, Ehloheinu mehlech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen."

With the juice placed on her lips, Milena had been officially welcomed into the Covent.

Now it was time to eat some festive food. The ceremony went quickly in Wanda's eyes, but everyone knew the meaning of their daughter's name and that was all that mattered. While the food was shared, Wanda found Tony sitting in the corner by himself. Milena was being held by Natasha and being cooed over by Pepper. Steve was nearby so Wanda decided to make the effort to speak to him.

"You look better," she commented.

"Amazing what food can do," Tony replied as he bit into some challah. "Good spread here." Wanda sat down and bit the inside of her lip. "You've given her a good name."

"Thanks." Even though she was making an effort to speak to him, it was so incredibly awkward given everything that had happened. "I think Pepper may be getting some ideas."

"Got to get married first."
"Never thought you would be the marriage before the baby type. Actually I never really thought you were the marriage or baby type."

"People change."

"I guess. A few weeks ago, you sounded exactly the same as you did before we went on the run."

Tony rubbed his eye and sighed, "Listen, about-"

"I don't need your apology, Tony. If you had to apologise for everything you have done to me, you will be here all day. The only thing that matters is that my daughter knows the peace that I never had."

"In other words…"

"I'm not saying that you and Steve have to be friends but be civil at least."

"You know what went down in Siberia. Not easy to forgive."

"As I said, you don't have to be friends. All I will say is that the person who killed your parents was not Bucky. It was his body. Not his mind, and take it from someone who hasn't been in control of her own mind, it sucks."

"I did spend some time thinking about that. He still killed my mother. I don't want to kill him but I am never going to forgive."

Wanda's lips went thin but all she could do was a nod. She was not asking him to forgive Bucky. It seemed fair given that she had not forgiven him. That said, she was not going to allow everyone to let their past encounters dictate what happens next. Not when there was a young child in the middle of it.

Wanda got out of her seat and went to Steve. She took his hand and sighed. "You okay Doll?"

"I think so."

"Well, everyone seems to be okay. You are perfect. Milena is perfect. I don't know what else could happen next but it can never be as bad as what we have been through."

Wanda gave a brief smile and allowed Steve to engulf her in a hug. Steve was right: nothing could be worse than what they had been through. They had their daughter to focus on. They were stronger together. They could deal with whatever happened next.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so... you guys remember my frustration about them disintegrating Wanda? That last moment with Tony was part of why and given what happens in Avengers: Endgame, it's one of those dangling plot threads along with Bucky. Like Civil War is a frustrating movie for how many plot threads that don't amount to anything.

In terms of her relationship with Tony, they were never going to be best buds but I think after everything she's been through, Wanda's had enough at being angry. It dominated her life for nearly twenty years, and now after all the therapy, finding love and
becoming her mother, she wants to move on. It isn't to say that she is passed everything that has happened, but she's better equipped to handle it.
Chapter Three

Chapter Notes

Okay, so I thought that we should have glimpses into the four years between Milena's birth and the main Endgame plot. I am going on a much needed holiday next week so I may post the next chapter on Tuesday since the likelihood of the hotel having a decent wifi signal is low.

Chapter Three

June 2019

Wanda looked at the sea of people that swarmed the graduation ceremony. She was wearing a blue gown and mortarboard, waiting for her name to be called to receive the diploma informing her that she had completed and passed a high school English class. Steve was sitting in the audience with Milena on his lap and a big, proud smile on his face. Wanda gave him a smile in response before someone announced, "Wanda Tzipporah Maximoff."

She walked up to the stage, shook hands with the principal and received her scroll. She laughed when she saw Steve stand and wave Milena's arm to show she was waving and cheering. At least her daughter could now hold her head up.

After the ceremony, Steve met Wanda and placed a kiss on her lips. Wanda chuckled as she took their daughter from him. "How does it feel to be married to a woman with a high school level education?"

"Well, I best be getting ready for your college pics," Steve responded.

Wanda had not considered whether she should try to go to college. She wanted to be a good role model for Milena but getting an education while pregnant was stressful enough. Having a young child while at college could be more hassle than it was worth. She would much rather focus on being a mother than have her head stuck in books again.

"Maybe when this one is a bit older," Wanda replied as she kissed her baby's cheek. "Right now, I would rather get something to eat." When they reached the restaurant, Milena had fallen asleep in her car seat and Wanda propped the car seat onto the chair beside her. Milena's fist was wrapped tightly around her mother's index finger and Wanda could not help but have her heart spill out for this little being. "She's changed so much."

"I know. She looks more like you every day."

"Does she?"

"Yeah. Her nose looks just like yours."

"She has your eyes though." Wanda lifted Milena from her car seat and cuddled her closer. "I'm glad this English class is over though. It means I can spend more time with her."

"Would you go back to being an Avenger?"
"I don't know. Nat has a new team with Rocket, Carol, Nebula, Okoye and Rhodey. I know you've given up being Captain America so I don't think it would be fair. I was never that good at it."

"You were good. Just inexperienced."

"I hate that I never got to go to kill Thanos with you. I wanted to rip him apart for what he did."

"He's gone now. Not much point harping on the past."

Wanda gave a small smile and kissed the top of Milena's head. She had her baby to focus on, and she could not think of the past. She needed to focus on a foreseeable future.

-o-

July 2019

"Okay, burgers are coming up!" Rhodes called. The guests at the 4th July/Steve's birthday barbecue started queuing for food. Wanda and Natasha stood back and watched as the men bickered over the condiments. Also, they did not want Milena being near the barbecue. The baby was currently wearing a red, white and blue dress to keep with the theme.

"I think your daughter may be a cat," Natasha commented. Wanda smiled softly as she heard Milena making little mewing sounds. "I guess I should start calling her Mew-Mew."

"Really, Mew-Mew?"

"Well, she reminds me of Mewtwo from Pokémon." Natasha bopped Milena on her nose and said, "I still haven't found any stones. Rocket, Nebula and Carol are looking for them through space. Okoye is keeping track on Earth. Rhodes and I are trying to keep an eye out for Clint."

"Any sign of him?"

"Um... There may have been some sightings in Latvia but nothing confirmed."

Wanda had not told Natasha about Clint coming to the hospital to see Milena. She was not sure she should since that it could cause some friction between the two. However, she needed to be honest.

"Nat, I need to tell you something: Clint came to the hospital after I gave birth."

Natasha blinked and she would have dropped her arms in shock had the baby not been in her arms. "What did he say?"

"He said that Laura and the kids are gone and that he's too broken to be with us. He thinks that we can't keep it together ourselves to help him out."


"I know. If I had any feeling below my pelvis, I would have gone after him."

"I know. I guess that Clint needs some time to get his head together. I just wish I knew a way to bring Laura back."

"Hey," Carol said as she walked up to them. Wanda squinted. Carol had cut her hair short. "How has everything been?"

"Good," Wanda replied. "She's starting to teethe so we have had some sleepless nights."
"Any joy with the stones?" Natasha asked.

"Nat, I've been searching as hard as I can but I think we need to accept that Thanos did destroy them."

"No," Natasha said firmly. "We're not giving up until we've gotten everyone back."

Natasha handed Milena back to Wanda and walked to get some food. Wanda's lips went thin and she looked at Carol. "Do you believe Thanos?" Wanda asked.

"You've felt it yourself. I've felt it."

Wanda nodded and looked at Milena. She gave a small smile and nodded. "I wish there was a way to bring them back. Maybe it'll knock on our door at some point."

-o-

September 2019

Wanda took a deep breath as she stood at the end of the aisle. The light pink bridesmaid dress was a little tight. She had intended to lose enough baby weight to fit into it comfortably, but she still had five pounds that would not shift. Still, it looked decent on her.

When Pepper had asked Wanda to be a bridesmaid, Wanda was surprised. However, Pepper had done so much for her over the past year and a half so it would be rude not to. Natasha was also a bridesmaid.

"How does Tony look?" Pepper asked when they stood at the door waiting for the cue to walk down.

"A bit nervous," Natasha answered as she peeked through. "He'll be fine when you are up there with him."

"You remember how Steve was," Wanda pointed out.

"True," Pepper responded. "Okay, I'm ready."

"It's been a long time coming," Natasha commented.

Wanda and Natasha stood in front of Pepper and waited for the music to start and the guests to stand. The pair clutched the bouquet of flowers they were holding and they made their way up the aisle. Wanda managed to find Steve on the left side, holding onto Milena. The baby smiled brightly as she saw her mother and Wanda smiled brightly at her. She had changed so much in the last seven months. One day she was a sleepy ball of flesh but now she was a bundle of energy that was crawling about, playing, laughing and just being a joy. She was also very headstrong as Steve discovered when they tried to wean her onto purred spinach. He was getting it out of his hair for days.

When they got to the front, Pepper started her way down the aisle. Tony gave a small smile when she reached him. Natasha had been right: it was a long time coming. Rhodes and Happy were beaming away, proud that this moment was finally happening.

However, Wanda starting to notice something was off with Pepper when they got to the reception. For one thing, Pepper declined a glass of champagne, and the only way Pepper would have declined that was if she was pregnant or seriously ill.
When there was a moment that she could catch Pepper, she asked, "Does Tony know?"

Pepper looked around and shook her head. "I only took the test this morning. I was going to tell him later."

"How are you feeling?"

"I don't know. Excited, I guess. It just seems to be a lot happening all at once. And I am also older so…"

"Trust me, it's better not to worry about things. It's how I ended up on bed rest. I think you should tell Tony now. Make him fly to the moon- Actually, no because he hates space. Make him fly to Japan and back." Pepper snorted and nodded. The bride went to find her new husband, but Wanda was not left alone for too long as Steve approached. Wanda grinned as she took Milena into her arms and kissed the baby on the cheek, "Hey Slatka devojka."

"Well, she's done well today. Even if she needed an emergency change of clothes," Steve said kissing his wife on the lips. "So, what were you and Pepper just talking about?"

"Nothing much. Just saying thanks for asking me to be a bridesmaid."

-o-

October 2019

"Do you think that Wanda will like this?" Pepper asked as she finished hanging a banner on the wall of Steve's kitchen.

"She didn't want a massive party for her thirtieth so we settled on a birthday brunch," Steve replied as he laid the plates on the table.

"It is a good idea," Natasha commented. "It's simple but sociable."

"When is everyone else arriving?" Pepper asked.

"In ten minutes," Steve said. "Okay. We're done. Just have to get her up."

Steve padded up the stairs and popped his head into Milena's nursery. His daughter was rubbing her eyes to show she was waking up. She looked very grumpy at being woken up. Steve smiled and lifted her out of the crib. "Come on Munchkin, let's see Mommy."

Steve walked into his bedroom where Wanda was just starting to wake up. Steve put Milena on the bed and the baby started crawling towards her mother. Wanda opened her eyes and saw her daughter's bright face.

"Hey Slatka devojka," Wanda said as she pressed a kiss to Milena's head.

"Happy birthday Doll," Steve stated as he kissed Wanda on the lips. "Well, now you are awake, I think that we should head down and get some breakfast."

"I should clean myself up first."

With her teeth cleaned and face scrubbed, Wanda grabbed her slippers and while holding Milena in one arm, she walked down the stairs.

"Surprise!" everyone yelled as Wanda entered the kitchen. Wanda blinked as she saw the banners,
the table decorated and Natasha, Pepper, Bruce, Rhodes and Carol standing around the table.

"Wow," Wanda breathed. "You guys did all this?"

"Well, we thought it was better than a party," Natasha replied. "Happy thirtieth birthday."

"I would complain but I haven't got anything that I would want before I turned thirty." Wanda pressed a kiss against Milena's cheek and set her down in the high chair.

"So, Wanda, we have a proposal for you," Rhodes said.

"I'm already married but go ahead."

"Bruce and I will babysit tonight so that you and Steve can have a date night," Natasha explained.

"You serious?"

"We just thought that you could do with having some time alone together," Bruce replied as he handed a plate of smushed banana to Milena.

"Tony managed to get a private seat at one of the best restaurants in the city," Pepper added.

"Very fancy. Though I would suggest eating before you go," Carol commented with a wink.

Later, Wanda emerged from her bathroom wearing a red wrap dress, her hair curled and her makeup looking spotless. Steve was waiting at the bottom of the stairs in a pair of black trousers and a blue shirt. He wore a bright smile when he saw her stroll down the stairs. "You look amazing," he commented as he kissed her cheek.

"You don't look bad yourself soldier," Wanda replied as she laced her hand with his. They turned and saw Natasha holding onto Milena, who was rubbing her eyes tiredly. "You know she won't sleep without her hippo?"

"Bruce has it all prepared. We've even got that recording you made of that lullaby," Natasha answered. "And yes, I have your numbers in case there is a problem."

Wanda chuckled before walking over to Milena and planting a kiss on her daughter's cheek. "Okay, bye Milena."

Steve waved at his daughter before leaving the house. The restaurant was very quiet and it was then that Wanda realised that Tony must have ordered it to cancel all other reservations. In addition, the sound of their wedding playlist was blaring through the speakers. The maître d' led them to the table and handed the set menu. Wanda chose the tomato broth, sweet potato Keralan curry and chocolate mousse. Steve ordered the ham hock croquette, steak and also the chocolate mousse.

"Do you reckon she's okay?" Wanda asked as she sipped her water.

"Milena? Yeah, she'll be fine. She's a better sleeper now we've sleep trained her," Steve replied.

"I know but this is the first time we've left her since she's been born. What if she says her first word?"

"I know she's advanced but she's eight months old. Come on, it's your birthday. She's in good hands."

Wanda gave a small smile. "I guess you're right. I'm just not used to being without her."
They managed to get through dinner without mentioning Milena and left the restaurant with smiles on the faces. It had been so long since it was just the two of them that Wanda wanted it to last a little longer.

"I am thinking that we should go to a hotel and have some alone time," she said as Steve was about to open the car door for her.

"Seems a waste of money," Steve pointed out. He glanced at the car for a moment and whispered in her ear what his idea was.

Wanda raised her eyebrow, "I knew you liked to live dangerously sometimes, but..."

Steve kissed her and with dopey grins they got into the car and Steve managed to find a private spot to park the car. Wanda wasted no time in climbing onto his lap and undoing the knot on her dress. Steve pushed the seat back and started kissing her, his hands placed firmly on her bare hips. Her stomach still had the battle scars from the pregnancy, yet Wanda did not feel self-conscious about it. Steve made it clear that he still found her body beautiful.

Wanda started working on his trousers and she pulled them down alongside her knickers. She gripped him and slid down his length, and started a steady pace. There was the element of arousal that they could be caught but it did not bother them.

Wanda moaned softly as her hips moved and Steve groaned as the grip on her hips tightened. He pushed the hair from her face and planted a kiss on her lips. The tension in Wanda's spine started to build and she could feel her body starting to shake, which gave Steve a good indication that she was close.

Steve put his finger between them and gently rubbed her clit. Wanda gasped as her whole body felt like a wave had rushed through her. Steve gasped and moaned as Wanda could feel him pulse his seed into her.

They pressed their foreheads together and panted. They giggled at what they had done and shared a brief kiss. "Well, that was a new experience," she whispered.

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February 2020

Wanda smiled as she watched everyone interacting around her living room. It was Milena's first birthday and she and Steve were hosting a small party for her. The birthday girl was being the centre of attention as she was passed around from person to person. Rhodes was currently holding her as she clapped her hands on his face.

"She's strong," Rhodes commented.

"And fast too," Steve replied. "She would win gold in the crawling Olympics. The other day, she crawled from the front door to the back door in under seven seconds."

"She not walking yet?"

"She can stand and hold herself up on the table or couch, but she's not taken her steps yet. She's a stubborn one."

"Bit like Mom and Dad," Tony muttered. "Can I hold her?"
Steve frowned in confusion. Tony had mainly interacted with Milena through social engagements but never asked to hold her before. Granted with Pepper due to have their daughter in a matter of weeks, he probably wanted to get used to the idea of holding a baby first. Steve nodded and Rhodes passed Milena to Tony. Milena blinked her big blue eyes at Tony but smiled when she traced her little finger around the outline of his beard.

"I think she likes you," Steve commented.

"Well, she's not too bad herself," Tony commented.

Wanda watched from the corner with Pepper and Natasha as they tried to work out whether this was a positive move for Steve and Tony. For so long, it had felt as though Tony had tagged along for Pepper's sake, but maybe he was softening up for the sake of their children.

"He's quite good with her," Natasha commented.

"Milena likes anyone," Wanda replied. "Seriously, she will say hello to everyone when we take her out in the stroller."

"I wonder where she got that from," Pepper injected. Wanda frowned. "I mean because you and Steve are both introverts."

"Maybe she will be more introverted in future. She's only one after all."

"True. Anyway, can someone help me up? I think this baby is using my bladder as a squeeze toy."

Wanda smiled, "I know the feeling."

After the party was over, Steve watched as Milena held herself up on the coffee table while watching *Paw Patrol*. Wanda had just come into the room when Milena started, walking along the edge of the coffee table and then stood on her own. She started padding her little feet towards her mother. Steve and Wanda looked at one another in shock until Wanda started encouraging Milena to toddle towards her.

"Come on Milena, you can do it," Wanda said as Milena managed to reach her arms with a big smile on her face. "Well done *Slatka devojka*."

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*March 2020*

Wanda gently bounced the newborn in her arms and smiled. Morgan Howard Stark was extremely adorable with her borderline black hair and freckled nose and it almost made Wanda contemplate having another baby. However, she thought it was worth waiting until Milena was a bit older, especially when it appeared, she had become possessive of her parents. The thirteen-month-old was currently pouting in the corner of the room.

"How did you feel when Milena was born?" Pepper asked.

"Like I would throw myself into a burning building to save her," Wanda replied. Wanda looked up and noticed that Pepper seemed rather down. "You feeling okay?"

"I don't know. I love her. I really do, but… I just don't feel we have a lot in common. I mean look at her: she's her father through and through."
"Well, Tony is toilet trained so that is something they don't have in common," Wanda pointed out.

Pepper snorted. Morgan let out a squeaky squawk. "You know I was thinking of going back to work in a few weeks."

"Pepper, I know you are CEO but you need to take some time for yourself. Throwing yourself into work won't solve the problem. Have you been to the doctor since Morgan was born?"

"I have an appointment tomorrow."

"Ask about postpartum depression. It may be too early, but from experience, it is better to get help earlier than later."

"I'm fine I just…"

"You're not. Getting help is the best thing you can for yourself."

Pepper nodded as Wanda handed the baby back to her. She glanced at her daughter and gave a sad smile. "Okay."

-o-

April 2022

Steve groaned as he finished pushing the cab to the cottage he, Wanda and Milena were staying in. They had arrived in Uiscetaibhse, a small village on the coast of Ireland where Steve's parents had grown up, and Steve had found some distant relatives in the village. He was looking forward to meeting them in order to gain a fuller picture of who his parents were before they moved to the United States.

"Cheers mate," the taxi driver said as the car stopped.

"No problem," Steve replied as he popped the boot open to get the bags and the stroller out. Wanda helped Milena out of her car seat and started to point to the sea. Even though they lived near an ocean, the air was so different from New York. It smelt fresher for a start and cleaner. "Right, let's head in and head down to the centre."

"Good day for it," Wanda replied. "Though someone is a little bit grouchy." Milena rubbed her eyes. It had been her first long haul flight and the time difference had disrupted her sleeping pattern. Wanda pressed a kiss into her daughter's curls and opened the stroller up for her. Even though she could walk, Milena generally napped better in her stroller.

With the bags in the cottage and a sleeping Milena snoozing in the stroller, the couple headed down to the town centre where there looked to be a party going on. Wanda noticed the posters that announced it was Spring Festival so there were many people in costumes and people selling on the market stores. Wanda noticed Steve scan the crowd until he found the person he was looking for: his first cousin once removed Domhnall.

"Ah, I would recognise a Rogers even if there were millions in this village," Domhnall said as Steve and Wanda approached. "It's good to finally meet you."

"Likewise," Steve replied shaking his hand. "This is my wife, Wanda, and our daughter Milena."

"It's nice to meet you Domhnall," Wanda said. "It's a beautiful village."
"Bit different to New York I expect," Domhnall commented.

"Very."

Later, they were at dinner with the rest of the Rogers family. Domhnall had introduced Steve to his other distant cousins Adeen, Padraig, Matthew, Sinead, and Siobhan. Wanda could see the Rogers genes in each of them as they all had similar blue eyes. Steve was enjoying himself among his relatives. It felt a bit weird since he could have been physically so much older than them but he felt like one of the younger members of the family.

Later, Steve looked through some old family albums where it looked like his father had sent photographs of him and Steve's mother when they had moved to the United States. Then it seemed that his mother had sent photographs because there were some with Steve's baby pictures.

"You really do look like your father," Wanda commented. "And I can see where Milena got her curly from."

"Yeah, I wondered if it was from my mother."

"So are you glad that you came?"

"Yeah, it's been great to know that I have some family in the world."

"Maybe in future, we could go to Germany," Wanda suggested. "Show Milena another part of her roots."

"That sounds like a good plan."

Wanda turned her head towards Milena, who was playing with some of her cousins in the corner. "Steve, I think I want another baby."

Steve blinked. "You sure?"

"I've been thinking about it for a while but Milena's old enough and I think we're ready to take on a second baby."

Steve smiled and nodded, "Okay, let's do it."

-◊-

November 2022

Wanda squirmed as the ultrasound probe was inserted into her. She commented, "I thought that I would have gotten used to that the first time around."

"You'd be surprised how much I hear that, though usually, that refers to labour," Doctor Kwon replied with a smile. She turned to the screen to have a look in Wanda's uterus. Steve then noticed her frown.

"Is everything okay?" he asked as he squeezed his wife's hand.

After a few moments, Doctor Kwon turned her chair to face Wanda. Her face looked sympathetic more than anything. "Wanda, I'm sorry. I can't find a heartbeat and the baby does not seem to have grown since the sixth week." Steve took a glance at his wife's face. He could see she was trying to hold it together but her eyes were welling with tears. "I'll give you two a moment alone."
Wanda nodded as Doctor Kwon got out of her chair and left the room. Wanda sniffed and said, "I knew something was wrong. I could feel it."

"It's okay Wanda," Steve soothed. "It's not your fault."

"At least no one knows. We don't have to tell people." It was at that point, Wanda started to cry. She wiped her eyes and tried to compose herself. "I just thought…"

"I know. Maybe it was not to be this time."

"What do we do Steve?"

"I think we should give ourselves some time and try again when we're both ready."

He leaned to kiss her forehead. At that point, Doctor Kwon came in with a sympathetic smile. "You two okay?"

"Yeah…" Wanda replied as she wiped her eyes. "So what happens now?"

"So, what I am going to recommend is getting a D&C to remove the tissue. I will inform Doctor Uzair and that way we can get you the best support." Wanda nodded. Steve had his hand on hers while the procedure was performed. Wanda tried to avoid looking, focusing at the ceiling more than anything. Once Doctor Kwon had finished the procedure, she said, "Okay Wanda. I think it will be best if you go home and get some rest. I'll contact Doctor Uzair to get a session for you. If you think something is seriously wrong, get yourself to the emergency room."

It was later in the afternoon that Steve pulled up outside Tony and Pepper's house. Steve wanted to get Milena home. Being only three, she was unaware that she would have been a big sister but he just wanted to have his daughter close. He took a deep breath and got out of the car.

"Hey, come see what the girls have done," Pepper encouraged. She showed a picture of some pumpkins that looked to have been stamped on with apples. "I think Milena may have her dad's artistic talents." Steve smiled and took the picture. "You okay Steve?"

"Yeah. Perfectly fine. How has she been?"

"I'm beginning to wonder if she was swapped at the hospital. I've never seen a more outgoing child." Steve snorted. He did wonder where Milena got her confidence from because it certainly was not Steve or Wanda. "I can imagine if you and Wanda have another she will be the dominant sibling."

Steve had to take a deep breath to prevent himself from exploding. He knew Pepper's comment came from a place of innocence but it still stung.

"Daddy!" Milena cheered as she ran to her father.

"Hey Munchkin," Steve said. "I love this picture. It's one of my favourites." He lifted her into his arms and kissed her on the cheek. "You ready to come home?"

Milena nodded. She waved to Pepper who waved back. In the car, Milena was speaking about how she and Morgan had been playing with corn kernels all day and Steve was trying his best to acknowledge her. When they arrived home, Steve lifted Milena out of her car seat and said, "Okay Munchkin, Mommy is a bit unwell and sad. So what I think you can do to make her feel better is showing her your picture?"

Milena nodded. Steve took her up the stairs to the bedroom where Wanda was sitting up in bed
aimlessly watching *The Good Place*. The second she saw her daughter, her arms opened and Milena went in for a cuddle.

"Hi *Slatka devojka,*" she whispered. "What do you have there?"

"I did apple stamping."

"It looks beautiful. I think we might need to start saving for art school." Steve gave a faint but sad smile. He went to sit with them and pressed a kiss to Wanda's forehead. Wanda pressed her lips to Milena's head and said, "I love you."

"I love you too Mommy. Did the picture make you feel better?"

"I think it did."

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*January 2023*

"I cannot believe you're actually moving," Wanda commented to Mubeena as they watched Steve, Yusef and Aamir place the Khan's belongings in a moving van.

"I know," Mubeena replied. "However, this job in Jersey City is a good opportunity for us, and it has a great school district for Kamala. Aamir is staying at Columbia obviously but he'll move back after graduation."

"Seems a shame. Milena adores Kamala."

"And vis versa." They were watching as Kamala was swinging Milena around. Milena was laughing gleefully at the movement. "I never thought living next to superheroes would be so peaceful."

"Let's hope the new neighbours are more interesting then." Wanda looked at Kamala and smiled sadly. "She's grown so much."

"Just wait until your daughter is that age. It will happen without you noticing."

"I know. She's already grown so much and she's four next month. I guess all I can do is make the best memories I can."

"That is all you can do. Give her the best life." Wanda gave a faint smile. She was still reeling from the miscarriage but having been checked out, she felt ready to start trying again. "It's been five years and I still think about what could have happened."

"I still have Steve, Milena and Natasha. I doubt anyone will try to take them away anytime soon."

"Right, that is everything," Yusef announced as he shut the van door. He held his hand out to shake with Steve, and Steve shook it eagerly. "I'm not going to lie, I am going to miss this."

"Us too," Steve replied.

Kamala put Milena down and walked over to Wanda. "Do you think we'll see each other again?"

"Well, if your brother gets married then maybe," Wanda replied. She hugged the teenager close. "Oh, I forgot. Carol left a gift for you the last time she was here."

Wanda pulled went to the inside of her house and presented a hoodie designed like Carol's suit. "I
love it."

"Good. She'll be happy to hear it." Wanda gave Mubeena one last hug before the Khans got into their car. They waved as they left the street for good. "I guess life moves on in other ways."

"Well, we're always constant," Steve replied picking Milena up. "Nothing is going to break us."
Chapter Four

August 2023

In the five years since the Decimation, Steve had become the leader in his support group. He did not know how he did, but it did give him some purpose. Many people had come and gone over the years. Some joined fairly recently, seemingly as a delayed reaction. He had been rather overwhelmed lately. He and Wanda had started trying again. The miscarriage still weighed on his mind but compared to where they were five years previously, they had emerged out of that trauma stronger than ever. However, since they had started trying again, they had really struggled to conceive naturally, hence they had an appointment three days earlier to inseminate the three of the embryos they had frozen five years previously. It was worth a shot to see if they could have another baby before considering other means.

Steve was sitting pensively in the seat as he listened to people sharing what had happened during the week. Wanda and Milena were at an induction day for Milena's kindergarten and he was wishing he was there to see his daughter interact with other children and bond with them. That said, he was not one to leave people behind.

"I went on a date the other day," one of his members began. "First time in five years, you know, had dinner, but I had no idea what to talk about."

"What did you talk about?" Steve asked encouragingly.

"Ugh, same old crap you know. How things have changed. My job, his job. How much we miss the Mets. Then things got quiet and then he cried as they were serving the salads."

"What about you?" another member asked.

"I cried just before dessert. But I'm seeing him again tomorrow so…"

Steve nodded, "That's great. You did the hardest part: you didn't know where to jump and where you were coming down. And that's it. That's those little great baby steps we got to take to try to become whole again, to find purpose. I went in the ice in '45 right after I met the woman who I thought was the one. I woke up seventy years later. Eleven years on, I have a wife and daughter. Now my wife is the one. I never thought I would love another woman but Wanda took my heart and made me hers. And I am at the happiest point in my life. The world is in our hands. We got to do something with it. Otherwise, Thanos should have killed all of us."

After the meeting, Steve was stacking chairs when he heard, "Daddy!" He smiled and turned to greet his daughter. Wanda came up to him and kissed his cheek.

"How was it Munchkin?" he asked.

"Fandabulous," Milena replied with a big smile.

"She loved it," Wanda replied. "It was perfect for her. She made loads of new friends."
"Did Mommy like it?"

"Mommy liked it a lot. It's actually fun to interact with other mothers for once. I should have taken the chance to go to those mother and baby classes when she was born," Wanda replied. Steve noticed that Wanda seemed put out by something. He was about to ask what was up when she stated, "I took a pregnancy test."

"Oh."

"It was negative."

"Hey, come on Doll. We've only just done the insemination process. It could still take a couple of weeks for it to show." He gathered her into a hug and kissed her head.

Wanda sighed but relaxed into the hug, "I know but I thought since the embryos were frozen at five days."

"I think you need to just allow things to happen in their own time. It's not guaranteed all three with implant into your lining."

Wanda had to laugh. The Steve she knew eight years ago may have been less willing to talk openly about linings and periods but since he had been invested in her pregnancy with Milena from the second she showed him the pregnancy test, he was less phased by it. "I know, but I at least hope one of them will. I'm just thinking... I would be nearly due by now."

"I know."

"He should be here."

"I know." Steve rocked her gently and kissed the top of her head. He waited a moment until Wanda softened and pulled out of his hug. "Right, so who wants to go see Aunty Nat?"

"Me!" Milena exclaimed.

-o-

"Aunty Nat! Aunty Nat!" Milena chanted as she ran into the kitchen. Natasha had seemed a hundred miles away because she did not notice her goddaughter's overzealous entrance until she was bombarded with the force of a tree. Wanda noticed that Natasha looked to have been crying. If she was that person, she would have poked inside her best friend's head to see what she was thinking and what was upsetting her but Wanda was better than that and would encourage her friend to open up.

"Hey Mew-Mew," Natasha said wiping her eyes. She put on a false smile as she hugged Milena close. "How was kindergarten?"

"I met Tyresse, Lindsay and Amoli," Milena replied. "They're my new friends."

"Well, you're certainly better at making friends than your parents." Natasha sniffed and looked up at Steve, "What?"

"You know, I would offer to cook you dinner but you seem pretty miserable already," Steve quipped.

"What's up, Nat?" Wanda asked taking a seat. She reached into a bag to grab a sketch pad and
crayons for Milena to doodle on. Milena took pride of place on her godmother's lap and Natasha started to play with the curls.

"Nothing," Natasha answered. "Just frustration. Rocket and Nebula are still having no luck in finding any of the Infinity Stones. Okoye says that a shift in the earth was just a shift in the earth. Carol said she's not coming back for a while. Rhodes thinks Clint's been in Mexico making ceviche out of a cartel."

"Isn't it Peruvian?" Steve asked.

"I preferred it when you used to not be able to make pop culture references. I blame Sam."

"You know, I saw a pod of whales when we were coming in, over the bridge," Wanda stated.

"In the Hudson?" Natasha asked sceptically.

"Fewer ships, cleaner water…" Steve added in support of his wife.

"You know, if you two are about to tell me to look on the bright side, I'm about to hit you both in the head with a peanut butter sandwich."

Wanda smiled. She then noted the number of files that were flung across the table and she said, "What's all this about?"

"I'm still trying to find a way to bring everyone back."

"Nat," Steve said before interrupted him.

"If I move on, who does this?"

"Maybe it doesn't need to be done," Steve said.

"I used to have nothing. Then I got this. This job. This family," Natasha choked a little as she twirled one of Milena's curls in her finger. She adored Milena. She had been the one ray of hope in the last five years. "And I was better because of it. And even though Sam and Vision are gone, I'm still trying to be better. I suppose I should get a life, especially since you two have. You two will have a thousand babies and I'll be a cat lady on my own here."

Wanda snorted. "Maybe not a thousand given my lack of eggs. We do worry about you Nat. I thought you and Bruce were making a go of it after Wakanda-"

"As I said, work just gets in the way."

"It doesn't, and I don't know how much of it is work or you being unable to let go of the past. Most of us have made peace with it. Bruce made the right choice with Vision. Bringing him back was not going to fix anything. I know Sam wouldn't want us to hold ourselves back on his behalf."

Natasha sighed and nodded. "Maybe it is time for me to move on. You're right. Sam wouldn't want this."

"I get it though: if I had the chance, I would want Pietro back. I would want my parents and my grandmother. I remember when I was up on that balcony. I know it was the psychosis but everyone kept saying that I shouldn't let the past drag me down, and I have spent the last five years making peace with it."

The three gave a small smile to one another and nodded in agreement. They had the memories of
Sam, Bucky and Pietro to think about and tell Milena when she was old enough to understand why they were not around anymore. Just then, one of the screens flashed to signal that someone was ringing. Natasha swiped it and suddenly a frantic voice echoed through the room. All three of the adults froze in shock.

"Hi! Uh, is anyone home? This is Scott Lang. We met a few years ago? At the airport? In Germany? I got really big."

"Scott?" Wanda asked standing up.

"Is this an old message?" Steve asked.

"Ant-Man? Ant-Man I know you know wh - I know you know that!"

"That's the front gate," Natasha replied.

"That's me. Can you buzz me in?"

Steve immediately ran to grab it and within seconds, Scott came in babbling to him about what had happened. Wanda could just make out 'quantum' 'realm' and 'trapped'.

"Scott, are you okay?" Wanda asked as she came up to hug him.

"Yeah," he replied. "Little bit freaked out since I was gone five years." He then noticed Milena walk up to him with big inquisitive blue eyes. "Hey, I'm Scott."

"Hi Scott," Milena replied.

"Hey, Munchkin," Steve said leaning down to his daughter's level, "why don't you go find those toys for a minute." Milena nodded and ran to find the toy box in the corner. Steve wrapped his arm around Wanda and raised his left hand, flashing his wedding band. "It's been a long seven years."

"I can tell. She's adorable," Scott replied. "You would not believe how big my Cassie has grown – she's practically a woman."

"She survived?" Wanda asked.

"Yeah, both her and her mother. However…" Scott stopped for a moment. It seemed that whoever he was about to mention meant a lot to him. "Anyway, I did come here for a specific purpose."

" Shoot," Steve ordered.

"Have any of you guys ever studied quantum physics?"

"Only for conversation," Natasha replied sarcastically.

"Alright, five years ago, right before Thanos, I was in a place called Quantum Realm. The Quantum Realm is like its own microscopic universe. To get in there, you have to be incredibly small. Hope, she is my ah... she was my ah... she was supposed to pull me out and then Thanos happened and I got stuck in there."

"Sorry, that must have been a very long five years," Wanda said.

"It wasn't. For me, it was five hours. See, the rules of the Quantum Realm aren't like they are up here. Everything is unpredictable. Is that anybody's sandwich? I am starving." Scott picked up Natasha's peanut butter and jelly sandwich, earning some looks from Natasha, but she was more
interested in what he was talking about.

"Scott, what are you talking about?" Steve asked.

"So, what I am saying is... Time works differently in the Quantum Realm. I can't stop thinking about what if we could control the chaos and we could navigate it. What if there was a way we could enter the Quantum Realm at a certain point in time, but then exit the Quantum Realm at another point in time, like before Thanos."

"Wait, are you talking about a time machine?" Wanda asked.

"No, of course not, not a time machine. This is more like a... yeah, like a time machine. I know it's crazy, it's crazy but I can't stop thinking about it. There is got to be some... it's crazy."

"Scott, I get emails from a racoon, so nothing sounds crazy anymore," Natasha stated.

Wanda looked at Natasha, wondering how she was buying into this absurd thought. She then looked to her husband, who actually seemed rather interested.

"So, who do we talk to about this?" Scott asked.

"Tony. Tony will know," Steve replied. "Come on. We can catch him at home."

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The second they pulled out outside Tony's house, Milena started scrambling on Scott's lap to get out. She could see that Tony was playing with Morgan (now no longer a little baby) in the little tent that she and Milena had built as a den. Steve was glad that the girls were best friends despite past differences between their fathers. Tony had just lifted Morgan up when Scott – in desperation to get Milena off his groin – opened the door. Milena went flying out. The girl was fast, and Wanda knew that it could have only been Steve's enhancements. She was also strong, as evidenced when she nearly knocked Tony and Morgan to the ground by simply bumping into him.

"Seriously, where do you get this energy Mini-Cap?" Tony asked putting Morgan down.

"Pietro was exactly the same," Wanda replied as she, Steve, Natasha and Scott walked up. "At least she has my brains and not decided to fling herself down the stairs on a skateboard."

"Who's this?" Tony asked nodding towards Scott.

"Um... Scott," Scott replied. "I was the guy who grew big in Germany? I got inside your suit?"

"Oh. Right," Tony commented. "Bit weird all four of you coming 'round. Feels like I am being approached for a loan."

"We need to talk to you about something," Steve said. He looked over to see Milena and Morgan had gone to play in their den.

"And I hate to say it but we need your brain," Natasha added. "Scott has a theory that we can go back in time and save everyone Thanos killed." There was a small pause for a moment before Tony started giggling. "To be honest, I expected a worse reaction."

"Really?" Scott asked. Wanda nodded with thin lips. "Listen, I know what it sounds like…"

"Tony, after everything you've seen do you think-" Steve began before being interrupted.
"Quantum fluctuationmesses with the Planck's scale, which then triggers the Doidge proposition," Tony argued. "Can we agree on that?" Wanda, Steve and Natasha looked blankly at Tony as though he had spoken in a foreign language that none of them understood. "In layman's terms, it means, you are not coming home."

"I did," Scott countered.

"No, you accidentally survived. It's a billion-in-one cosmic fluke. Now you want to pull out... what you call it?"

"A time heist?"

"Yeah, a time heist. Of course. Why didn't I think of this before? Oh, because it's laughable and because it's a pipe dream."

"The stones are in the past. We could go back, we could get them," Natasha pointed out. "We can snap our own fingers. We can bring everybody back."

"Or screw up worse than Thanos already has, right?"

"I don't believe we would," Steve argued.

"Got to say that sometimes I miss that giddy optimism. However, high hopes won't help, if there is no logical, tangible way for me to safely execute the said, time heist. I believe the most likely outcome would be our collective demise."

"So, what you are saying is that if we go back in time and change our past, we could erase..." Wanda began before nodding at the den. Milena and Morgan were playing with the Rescue helmet Tony had been designing.

"Essentially."

"I can't believe I am saying this but I actually agree with Tony here guys." Steve took Wanda's hand. Quite frankly, if it cost them their daughter, Steve did not think the risk was worth it. "It could work, but at what cost?"

"Not if we strictly follow the rules of time travel. I mean, no talking to our past-selves, no betting on sporting events..." Scott began before he realised how dumb he sounded.

"I'm going to stop you right there, Scott. Are you seriously telling me that your plan to save the universe is based on Back to Future Part Two?" Tony asked.

"No." The sheepish tone in Scott's voice indicated he was not too sure if he was basing it on the science of the Back to the Future movies.

"Good, you got me worried there because that would be horse shit. That's not how quantum physics works."

"Tony, we have to take a stand," Natasha insisted.

"We did stand and yet here we are."

"I know you got a lot on the line," Scott pleaded. "You got a wife, a daughter. But I lost someone very important to me. A lot of people dead and now, now... we have a chance to bring her back, bring everyone back and you're telling me..."
"That's right Scott I won't. Leave it. I can't.

"Daddy! I'm coming to save you!" Morgan exclaimed as she ran with the Rescue helmet on. Milena followed though it seemed she had rubbed dirt on herself.

"Milena," Wanda chided. "What are you doing?"

"Being a big bad monster," Milena responded innocently.

"Well," Tony began lifting Morgan up, "I think the big bad monster needs to go home and have a bath. You have saved me."

Wanda bent down and shook her head. "I stand corrected, you are exactly like Uncle Pietro."

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It was over dinner that Wanda noticed Steve twirling his pasta but not actually eat it. She glanced at her daughter who was eating out of a princess plate that was designed to children with picky eating habits. Milena had become a really picky eater lately and Wanda had bought the plate as a positive incentive. So far, it was working as Milena was treating it like a game rather than a chore. She looked back at Steve and asked, "Do I need to give you the special princess plate?"

Steve snorted and put his fork down. "I'm just thinking that Scott had a good idea there."

"He did, but I agree with Tony that it is too risky. It's like that movie where the guy goes back in time to save his sister and when he returns, he finds out his daughter had not been born and instead he has a son."

"Should we really base time travel on movies?"

Wanda shrugged. "I just think that given everything that we went through to get to where we are now... Sure I would love to wipe the suicide attempt from my history but I don't think I would be where I am now without it. I just could not bear to lose her." Wanda started to play with Milena's hair and Steve reached his hand over to squeeze his wife's hand. "I just can't imagine a world without her."

"Me neither. I don't know. Maybe Scott will find a way."

"Mommy, I finished," Milena announced holding her plate up.

Wanda smiled and kissed her daughter's head. "Good girl. Right, are you going to watch some TV for a bit?"

Milena jogged to the living room, jumped on the sofa, disturbing Tigger, and grabbed the remote. She turned on the television and the sound of Dora the Explorer filled the room. It was one of the few children's TV shows Wanda could tolerate since it was mildly educational.

"Do you think that Scott will find a way?" Wanda asked.

"I don't know," Steve replied. "Someone else may have the solution."

"And if not?"

"I guess keep going with this life we've built."
Like I said last week, I am holiday until next Wednesday so the next chapter should come around then. Until then...
Chapter Five

Wanda raised her eyebrow when she saw her daughter at the bottom at the step wearing a bumblebee outfit. She knew it was a mistake to allow Milena to dress herself. They were starting to give her more responsibilities, but it may have been a bit of a stretch to trust her with being able to dress herself.

"At least she put it on right," Steve pointed out.

"Don't defend her," Wanda argued. "Milena, why don't you put on your blue sweater and jeans? They'll be more comfortable."

"No, I like this," Milena protested.

Wanda nodded and then picked Milena up. The four-year-old shrieked as Wanda marched up the stairs. Steve winced but he knew that they had to establish boundaries or Milena will run riot when she's older. Just as he heard the yelling stop, the doorbell rang.

"Only us," Natasha announced. Scott was with her. "Where's Mew-Mew?"

"Fighting against the clothes police," Steve replied.

"She wanting to dress in something impractical?" Scott asked.

"Bumblebee costume."

"Been there but with a rabbit costume."

Just then, Wanda came down the stairs with a properly dressed Milena, who had a scowl on her face. Natasha noted how much Milena looked like her mother with that expression. "Reminds me of someone who did not want to go to therapy."

"Funny," Wanda replied sarcastically.

"Anyway, Bruce said he'll meet us in a diner down the street. He's just got back from Harvard." The look on Natasha and Scott's face suggested that there was something on the agenda. "We're going to ask him if he will help with this time travel plan."

"Nat," Steve began.

"I know where you two stand, but Tony is not the only genius we know."

"Stark is right that going back in time could cause damaging effects on our present, but we can find a way to reverse it," Scott added.

Steve looked at Wanda and shrugged, "It might be worth hearing it out Doll."

Wanda sighed, "Fine."

-o-

"What…" Wanda exclaimed the second she walked into the diner and saw Bruce, only it looked like
he was in the middle of Hulking out. However, he was acting like how Bruce normally would. She looked between Steve and Natasha, who both had a very confused expression on their face.

"Hey guys," Bruce said waving his big green hand. Upon hearing the sound of his voice, Milena went running to hug him. "Hey Milena, you've gotten so big."

"We were just about to say the same thing," Natasha commented as the four adults sat down.

"Come on have some eggs," Bruce said.

"I'm so confused," Scott commented.

"I get it, these are confusing times."

"How..." Wanda began as Milena scrambled over to sit on her father's lap.

"I know; it's crazy. I'm wearing shirts now. Well, you know how we got our ass kicked five years ago, except it was worse for me because I lost twice. First Hulk lost then Banner lost and then we all lost."

"No one blames you, Bruce," Natasha insisted.

"I do. So, for years I have been treating The Hulk like a disease... but then I started looking at him as the curer. Eighteen months in the gamma lab and I put the brains and the brawn together and now look at me. Best of both worlds."

At that point, three children walked up to Bruce with what looked to be a smartphone. "Excuse me, Mr Hulk. Can we get a photo?"

"One hundred percent little person." Bruce handed the phone to Scott who took it despite still being confused. "Say green."

The kids simultaneously said, "Green." Steve had to laugh when Milena mimicked them.

"That's good," Scott said handing the phone back. "Do you want to grab one with me? I'm Ant-Man." Bruce seemed to want to encourage the kids but they had no clue who Scott was. "You're Hulk fans; they don't know me." Wanda, Steve and Natasha could not make out the conversation as Bruce and Scott were talking over one another until, finally, Scott said, "Take the goddamn phone."

The kids turned away and said, "Thank you Mr Hulk."

"No problem. Hulk out!"

Bruce then dabbed and Wanda choked on her tea. "Did that just happen?"

"Bruce," Steve said snapping his friend's attention back. "We need some help."

Scott explained his theory while Natasha added Tony's refusal. Bruce sat there for a minute and pondered.

"A time travel do-over you say?" Bruce asked. "You know guys, it's outside my area of expertise."

"Well, you pulled this off," Natasha countered. "I remember a time when that seemed pretty impossible too."

Wanda had to smile a little. While the two did try to make a go of things after they returned from
Wakanda, it sort of fizzled out. Natasha buried her head in work trying to find the Infinity Stones and Bruce had accepted that they were gone for good. There was not a huge blowout, but it had to come to an amicable decision to part ways. Still, Wanda could tell there were some underlying feelings between the two.

Bruce sat back and thought. Eventually, he said, "Okay, we could find a way that gets the stones but keeps the present intact – kind of."

"Great, shall we get started?" Natasha asked as she, Bruce and Scott got up. "You two coming?"

"In a moment," Steve replied. Once the other three had left, Steve gave a faint smile. "We have a chance to fix it, Wanda."

"And what if it goes badly wrong Steve?" she asked. "What if you get trapped in the Quantum Realm? Scott was stuck there for five years. He missed his daughter grow up. Also, what if we screw up more and Thanos exterminates everyone? What will we do then?"

"Wanda…" He really was stumped on how to respond to her concerns because Wanda was absolutely right to say those concerns.

"I've lost my family, Sam, and my baby. If I lost you or Nat…"

"I know."

"I'm not saying don't do it, but I am saying is think through what could happen." Wanda stroked her daughter's curly hair. "Right, Milena, are you ready to spend some time in the park?"

"Yeah," Milena said climbing off Steve's lap. She kissed her father's cheek and took her mother's hand. "Love you, Daddy."

"Love you too Munchkin." He looked up at Wanda and gave a small smile. "I love you Doll."

"I love you, Steve," she responded. "Come on Milena. Let's play on the swings."

-o-

Steve had to take a minute to stand outside. For two days they were trying to build this time machine but all it had resulted in was Scott being de-aged and aged up. They just could not work out how to get it right for them to go through time to get the stones. Natasha was getting frustrated but they were determined to keep going. Steve was beginning to doubt whether it was going to work.

He was about to head back inside when a car pulled up in front of him and Tony rolled down his window. "Why the long face?" he asked. "Let me guess: he turned into a baby."

"Amongst other things," Steve replied. "I thought we had a shot of it but you and Wanda were right."

Tony started to get out of the car and laughed. "You know there is a spot in hell now because your wife and I agree on something."

"She's been through a lot. Especially recently." Tony leant against the car and his eyebrow raised to press for more information. "We… We were expecting another baby."

"Congratu-" Tony was about to finish the word when he realised that the sentence was in the past tense. "Oh."
"End of last year we went for a scan, but our OB could not find a heartbeat."

"So she's already anxious enough about losing that baby so she does not want to lose the baby she already has."

"Pretty much. I don't want to lose Milena either so that is why we are trying to work out how not to break the present. What are you doing here anyway?"

"I may have a solution. It's the EPR paradox. You're pushing time through Lang rather than Lang through time. It's tricky and dangerous and I cautioned you against it."

"You did," Steve admitted.

"Oh did I? Well thank god I am here. Regardless, I fixed it. A fully functional time space GPS."

Steve had to smile in relief that Tony had found the solution to their problems. "I just want peace. Turns out resentment is corrosive, and I hate it."

"Me too."

"At Milena's b'rit bat, Wanda said she wanted you and me to be civil. We have been. Not best buds but it worked, but now we actually need to work together. We have a shot of getting these stones but I got to tell you my priorities: bring back everyone - I hope - yes but I have to keep what I have at all cost."

Steve nodded, "Me too."

"And maybe not die trying would be nice."

Steve held out his hand and Tony shook it. Bad as it may have been for the two of them, they knew they could work together when the world depended on it. "You got yourself a deal. You mind trying to convince my wife on this."

-o-

"You seriously think that you have found a way around this?" Wanda asked when she found that Steve had brought home Tony, Natasha, Scott and Bruce.

"Simple really. If we take the stones out of their place in time, we use them to bring everyone back and then return them to where we got them from," Tony explained. "It will be like they were never gone. The present won't be affected save about another 3.8 billion people and trillions across the galaxy."

"We just need to get a plan together and we're all set," Natasha insisted. "Rhodey, Nebula and Rocket are on their way. We then need to get Thor and Clint."

Wanda's lips went thin. "You really think Clint will be on board with this?"

"If it gets his family back? Maybe."

"We could use you," Scott insisted. "You did pretty much saved our asses in Germany."

"And in Wakanda," Bruce added.

"It is true Doll, we are useless without you," Steve insisted.

"Milena and Morgan are going to be okay," Tony insisted. "I would not have been on board with
this if I had not ensured that."

Wanda looked around the group and sighed, "Okay. Where do we start?" As soon as people started to talk over one another for ideas, Wanda walked into the kitchen to get some drinks. It seemed Tony was eager to help since he followed her into the kitchen. "What made you change your mind?"

"Not a what, a who," Tony replied pulling out a picture. It was of himself and a teenage boy. "Peter Benjamin Parker. Born 10th August 2001 to Richard and Mary Parker who died in a car accident when Peter was three. He was raised by his Uncle Ben and Aunt May. Ben Parker was killed in a mugging about 2015 and around the same time, Peter became Spider-Man."

"He's the kid in the airport."

"I keep wondering whether I should have dragged him into it and whether that would change things. He was a kid on my watch. He shouldn't have been up there."

"I don't think it makes much difference. We may have stood a chance if Strange had not handed the Time Stone over."

"He said it was the only way to beat Thanos. I don't know whether he meant chopping his head off or reversing what he did."

"Or both."

-o-

Over the next two days, Nebula, Rocket and Rhodes arrived while Bruce and Rocket going to collect Thor from New Asgard. In the meantime, Wanda and Natasha got intel that Clint had ended up in Japan. They wondered if Clint would be convinced with the two of them going so, they decided to try it in case it did work.

"Do you think that he'll listen to us?" Wanda asked as they bordered the quinjet.

"He'll take a lot of convincing after five years but maybe we can snap him back to his senses," Natasha replied. "We need him."

"We've needed him the past five years."

"You know what grief can do."

"I know. Maybe I can use that to talk him round."

When they got to the scene, however, it was a blood bath. Clint had just slit the throat of what looked to be some gangster and impaled him. However, he seemed to know their presence as he lowered his hood. "You shouldn't be here."

"Neither should you," Natasha replied.

Clint turned to face them. He looked so much older and world-weary that it did remind Wanda of herself about five years previously. He scoffed and said, "I got a job to do."

"Is that what you are calling this?" Wanda asked as she approached him. "How are all these people going to bring your family back?"

Natasha began to follow and said, "We found something. A chance maybe."
Clint shook his head and there was a break in his voice when he said, "No. Don't give me hope."

"I'm sorry that I didn't get it to you sooner."

Wanda took Clint's hand and said, "If I had the chance, I would do anything possible to save my family. Pietro saved your life for a reason, Clint."

Clint snorted, "You going to use that as a guilt trip every time."

"You've snapped me out of moments when I felt I had no hope. I am just returning the favour."

"Come on, let's go home," Natasha insisted.

Even though Wanda could tell that Clint was reluctant to follow them, he appeared to find the strength to lift his legs and move them towards the quinjet. Clint dropped his weapons to the ground and sat with his head between his legs.

"You okay?" Wanda asked.

"Do you think you can bring them back?" he asked.

"We have a shot. The plan sounds crazy - and it is - but if it works, we can bring back Laura and everyone else."

"Why them? Why did did he have to to take them?" Wanda bit her lip and looked at Natasha. Five years had taken their toll on Clint from how old and world weary he looked. Yet it seemed there was some hope in his eyes at the possibility of getting Laura, Cooper, Lila and Nathaniel back. "How's your baby?"

"She's not a baby anymore," Wanda replied as she took her phone out. She found a picture from Milena's kindergarten induction and said, "Her name is Milena Sarah - after my grandmother and Steve's mother."

Clint took the phone and had to smile at the little girl's smiling bright face. "She looks the double of you. Only happy."

Wanda hit him on the shoulder though she knew the comment was in jest. "She's a very happy little girl."

"You seem happier in yourself."

"I have my moments."

-o-

"Thor?" Clint asked as he, Natasha and Wanda left the hanger of their quinjet. Thor was standing in front of them but he looked nothing like the Thor they knew. His hair had grown but rather than the smooth locks, it was matted and all over the place. His beard was about the same length but also incredibly tangled. More shockingly, he had gained a lot of weight (possibly due to an excess of beer) to the point where he was sporting an obvious pudge.

"Clint! How marvellous to see you again," Thor exclaimed as he hugged Clint close.

"Okay, someone needs a shower," Natasha said wrinkling her nose. "You look…"

"Oh, this?" Thor asked touching his stomach. "This is nothing. Well, maybe too much. Maybe let
Wanda then noticed that Thor was holding a can of what looked and smelt like beer. She had not touched a drop of alcohol in five years but she instantly knew what was going on with Thor. He felt he had failed with what happened in The Garden. Now he was drinking to forget.

"Okay Thor," she said softly as she took the can of beer away from him. "How about you get in the shower and then we can get you a nice glass of water."

"You trying to say I stink?" Thor asked.

"Like old fish," Clint replied.

Wanda and Natasha led Thor away to the shower stalls and waited while Thor washed and sobered up. Wanda lay some clothes for him to change into and once he was clean and dressed, Wanda put a hair dryer through his hair.

"I like that it is long again," she commented. "Felt weird seeing you without it."

"Well, I have to reclaim myself somehow," Thor replied quietly.

"Do you remember when I was going through that manic episode and you managed to get through to me somehow? You made sure I was okay. You gave me your coat. You told me that I was safe. We need our Strongest Avenger, Thor."

"You really think we can get everyone back?"

"We can try our best. I know that in the past our best has not always been good enough, but Thanos is not around to stop us anymore. You made sure of that."

Thor managed to crack a smile at this reassurance. "How is Milena? The last time I saw her was at her naming ceremony."

"Well, she's not a little baby anymore. She's growing up so fast but I think she'll want to play Prince and Princesses with her Uncle Thor."

"She'd be a worthy maiden."

Wanda smiled softly and said, "Well, you look more like yourself than you did an hour ago."

"You think this plan will work?"

"They're running some tests to see if these suits will work and that we can go through time without turning ourselves into babies."

"Shame, I was a very cute baby."

"You're a very cute grown man."

-0-

With the test runs still going, Natasha, Wanda and Steve knew that it would all be for nothing if they could not locate where the stones were in time. After there had been a successful test run with Clint, everyone gathered in the living area with some Chinese takeout, pads of paper and the computers.

As they were tucking into their meals, Steve said, "Okay so our machine works, now we got to
figure out the when and the where. Almost everyone here has had an encounter with each one of the stones."

"Or substitute encounter as being nearly been goddamn killed by them," Tony added.

"We only have enough Pym-particles for one round trip each and the stones have been in a lot of different places in our history," Bruce added.

"So not a lot of convenient spots to just drop in," Wanda commented. "We know the Mind Stone was in HYDRA's base between 2014 and 2015."

"Good start," Tony said.

"But we have to pick our targets carefully," Clint added. "We already know that the Tesseract and Loki's sceptre were in New York in 2012. That's two down."

Wanda nodded and made a note on one of the pads and then transferred the information to the screen. "Okay, we have Space and Mind down."

"So, I think we should talk the Aether next," Steve said turning to Thor. Everyone looked at him. He was slouching in his chair. He was also wearing sunglasses, so no one could tell if he was awake or not. "Thor?"

"Is he asleep?" Natasha asked.

"No, I think he's dead," Rhodes replied throwing a prawn cracker at him.

Thor flinched and removed his glasses. He rubbed his eye and complain, "I was having a nice dream about sitting in the pool at Asgard with some of the most beautiful women in the galaxy. They were invested in-

"Okay Big Guy," Rocket interrupted before the room became uncomfortable. "Tell us where and when you encountered the Aether."

Thor got up and looked at the screen. He slurried, "Ugh where to start. The Aether… well, it's not really a stone more of an angry sludge. Here's an interesting story about the Aether: my grandfather many years ago had to hide the sludge from The Dark Elves. Whooo…" Everyone looked at one another wondering where this was going. "So Jane – remember Jane? Jane was an old flame of mine. She stuck her hand inside a rock this one time and then the Aether stuck itself inside of her. She then became very, very sick and I took her Asgard which is where I am from and we had to try to fix her. We were dating at the time you see and I got to introduce her to my mother… who's dead. And my father… who's also dead. Oh and Jane and I are not even together anymore but these things happen though, nothing last forever- Has anyone got any beer in here?"

"No, we threw out all the alcohol," Rhodes replied.

"So… We know the Aether is on Asgard but in what year?" Natasha asked.

"This was about 2013 I think," Steve replied. "Okay, Rocket and Nebula. What do you have?"

"Well, we have the Power Stone for you," Rocket announced. "Quill said he stole the stone from Morag."

"Is that a person?" Bruce asked.
"Morag is a planet. Quill was a person. Yeah, we met each other back in… 2014."

"Okay, brilliant," Wanda said making a note. "Nebula?"

"Thanos found the Soul Stone on Vormir. It's a dominion of death," Nebula said.

"I remember. Thanos murdered your sister to get the stone." Nebula nodded. "Did anyone manage to get to the stone before him?"

"The stone was hidden there for centuries before Thanos claimed it."

"It would have been there in 2014," Wanda told Natasha. "That'll save us a jump."

"Right, Time Stone," Natasha said. "Who had that?"

"Strange," Tony replied. "Jackass."

"Nice place though," Bruce commented.

"Hm… On Sullivan Street?"

"No, it was Bleecker Street."

"Wait he lived in New York?" Steve asked. Everyone looked at one another and realised that they had three stones in one year and in the same place. Tony put all the data into the computer and it showed up three different times and places.

The Mind, Time and Space Stones were all in New York in 2012.

The Aether could be found on Asgard in 2013.

The Soul and Power Stones could both be found in 2014.

"Right, who wants to take what?" Tony asked.

-o-

It was at 02:43 when Steve woke to find an empty side of the bed completely empty. He pushed himself out of the bed but luckily Wanda was not too far away. She was in Milena's room and sitting on the small bed. Their daughter was sleeping so peacefully that Steve dared not make a sound in fear of waking her. In her sleep, Steve was astounded how much Milena looked like her mother. The dark head of hair and small button nose gave that away.

"Doll?" he whispered.

"Sorry, I just had to come in and look at her," Wanda replied quietly. "I'm just… Thinking over what may happen tomorrow."

Steve sighed and walked over to the bed. He took Wanda's hand and kissed her forehead. "I know. It's going to be the hardest mission we've ever been on."

"Maybe it will work. The best-case scenario is that we get everyone back."

"Hopefully." It's got to work Steve or else this will all be for nothing," Wanda said.

"I know," he replied softly. "It has to work because I don't know what else we can do."
Wanda turned to Steve and pressed a kiss to his shoulder. "Well, if we keep positive, we're going to have to explain so much to Sam and Bucky."

Steve chuckled. "The fact we got married without them? That Bruce is our daughter's godfather?"

"I know, I remember when Sam claimed he was going to be our first child's godparent."

"He's going to be pissed." Wanda smiled and leaned over to kiss him. "It would be nice though to retire for good."

Wanda smiled and rested her head on Steve's chest. Steve kissed the top of her head. They had come so far since they met. She had thrown him down the stairs. He had saved her from drinking herself to death after Pietro's death. She had saved him from Rumlow's bomb in Lagos. He had supported her through her bipolar diagnosis. They had joined together in Yekaterinburg. They had survived Wakanda and its aftermath. Now they had a life with their daughter. He was determined to survive for that reason alone.

-o-

Wanda looked at the map where everyone was going. Thor and Rocket were going to get the Aether from Asgard in 2013. Steve, Tony, Bruce and Scott were heading for New York in 2012. Nebula and Rhodes were on Morag in 2014 with Natasha, Clint and herself travelling to Vormir from Morag to save on wasting the Pym Particles.

She also had a new outfit. Since having a baby, she could not quite manage to get into the corset of her old outfit on the account that her breasts had grown three cup sizes. Natasha looked to have been working on an outfit since the one she was presented with fitted her like a glove. The outfit was mostly a black one-piece with a block of red around her waist and along the arms. There was a cloak as well, but Wanda decided to put that aside for now but she found a tiara.

"I just thought since your hair has a habit of getting in the way," Natasha explained. "It'll also help to focus your telekinetic energy."

"I love it, Nat," Wanda said as she put it on. "How do I look?"

"Well, it certainly beats saving the world in a dress and my red leather jacket. Which you still have not returned."

"You can have it back. Doubt it will fit me anymore."

"Okay, we all set?" Steve asked as he walked in with his Captain America suit on. "You look…"

"Okay, Lover Boy. You can celebrate when we bring everyone back," Natasha said as she finished tying her hair into a braid.

"Besides, you are not fully prepared," Tony commented walking in with the body of the Iron Man suit on. In his hand, Steve noticed the shield he had dropped back in Siberia. "He made it for you and, honestly, I have to get it out of my garage before Morgan uses it as a sledge."

Steve took the shield and slid it onto his arm. He smiled and nodded, "Thank you, Tony."

"Ugh, someone pass me the puke bucket," Rocket yelled.

"You always have to kill a good moment don't you?" Wanda asked rolling her eyes. Just then Scott and Clint rolled in a railing of Quantum Suits designed to fit with each person. "Those may be the
ugliest things I have ever seen."

"You wanna get ripped apart in the Quantum Realm?" Scott asked.

"Right, let's suit up," Steve instructed.

As everyone gathered in the briefing room with their Quantum Suits on, Steve stood in front of them. "Okay, we know this play already but in case we have all forgotten: Thor and Rocket, you will get the Aether from Asgard in 2013. Get it out of Jane and get back as quickly as you can. Nebula and Rhodey, you are on Morag in 2014 getting the Orb before Quill gets it."

"Shouldn't be too hard; he is an idiot," Nebula responded. Tony nodded in agreement.

"Nat, Clint and Wanda, you are heading to Vormir – also in 2014 - to get the Soul Stone. Tony, Scott, Bruce and I will be in New York in 2012 to get the remaining three. Bruce will head to The Sanctum while the rest of us will infiltrate Stark Tower. We have a plan, six stones, three teams, one plan."

Scott started clapping and then looked around when everyone looked at him. "Sorry, I guess we don't clap inspirational speeches."

"Does that count as inspirational?" Rocket asked. "It sounded more like we're doing this."

Wanda rolled her eyes but could not help but laugh when she could see Steve smirking at this exchange. She grew serious for a moment before pressing a button on the computer. Around them, the images of everyone they cared about filled the room.


Steve looked around again and began, "Five years ago, we lost. All of us. We lost friends. We lost family. We lost a part of ourselves. Today, we have a chance to take it all back. You know your teams, you know your missions. Get the stones, get them back. One round trip each. No mistakes. No do-overs. Most of us are going somewhere we know, that doesn't mean we should know what to expect. Be careful. Look out for each other. This is the fight of our lives. And we're going to win. Whatever it takes. Good luck."

"Hey," Rocket began, "he's pretty good at that."

"I know right?" Scott replied.

"We ready?" Tony asked standing up. Everyone stood to attention. "Let's roll."

They walked to the hanger area where the machine was standing in their groups and waiting to send them back to their destinations. They held out the GPS devices that were going to be used to send them back to different places.

Wanda took a glance at Steve and mimed, "I love you."

He mimed back, "I love you too."

Clint opened his hand and Rocket saw the mini ship he was going to pilot to Vormir. "You're going to bring that back in one piece, right?" Rocket asked.

"Yeah, yeah," Clint waved it over.
"See you in a minute," Natasha said with a smile as the machine started up. Everyone flipped their helmets on and took a deep breath as they were launched through the Quantum Realm.
Chapter Six

Chapter Notes

So the Phase 4 slate has been announced. Something of a mixed bag in my opinion. Certainly ready for Falcon and The Winter Soldier and Thor: Love and Thunder. Excited for Eternals and Shang-Chi. As for Wanda's place... *beleaguered sigh*. I will have to see about Doctor Strange: The Multiverse of Madness because I am not a fan of the first Doctor Strange movie. As for WandaVision (literally the worst title in the world)... *beleaguered sigh*. Like the idea of Monica. Not so much Vision.

Anyway, enough with that. Onto our regularly scheduled content.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Six

New York, 2012

"Ow," Tony complained as he clicked his neck. "This is why we needed a proper capsule."

Steve cracked his back and looked around. The Chitauri army was flying overhead and they could hear explosions and crashes. Everyone flipped off their Quantum Suits as Steve moved forward. "This was a fun day. Alright, we all have our assignments. Two stones uptown, one stone downtown. Stay low and keep out eyes locked."

They jumped when they heard a crash and turned to find the Hulk smashing a car into a foot soldier, scaring another off and throwing something on the car to prove a point. He then repeatedly jumped on the car. Bruce winced as his past self wandered away.

"Maybe smash a few things along the way," Steve instructed.

"I think it is gratuitous but whatever," Bruce said ripping his vest top off. He tried his best to imitate the Hulk by growling and hitting something, but it was very controlled, unlike the Hulk. Tony sniggered under his breath. "Haha, funny."

"Right, we should head to Stark Tower," Steve said as they began to navigate themselves through the streets. They saw the top of Stark Tower surrounded by the army. However, they managed to get to the building without being noticed.

Scott shrank and jumped on Tony's shoulder as he suited up and flew to the top of the Empire State Building to get a visual inside. It seemed that their past selves were in the process of arresting Loki. "Better hustle Cap, things look like they are wrapping up here."

"Got it," Steve replied. "I'm approaching the elevator now."

"Mr Rogers, I almost forgot: that suit did nothing for your ass."

Steve rolled his eyes, "No one asked you to look, Tony."

"I think you look great Cap," Scott commented. "As far as I am concerned, that is America's ass."
Steve shook his head but then Scott asked something. "Who are these guys?"

"They are S.H.I.E.L.D, well actually HYDRA but we did not know that yet." Tony replied. "Rumlow, Sitwell, Rollins. All present and correct."

"Seriously? They look like bad guys!"

"You're small but you're talking loud."

"Guys, focus," Steve ordered. "What's happening?"

"Rumlow has the sceptre. That's going to Strucker," Tony commented. Steve sighed. This was the start of Strucker's experiments that led to Wanda being enhanced. "Right, you are up Little Buddy: there's our stone."

"Right, flick me."

After a moment, Steve heard Tony order, "Okay Cap, I have our sceptre in the elevator just past the eightieth floor."

Steve pressed a button for the elevator. "On it." He had a plan on how to get the sceptre from Rumlow. He did not want to do it, but it had to be done. "Head to the lobby."

"Alright, I'll see you there."

Steve took a deep breath as the doors opened. In front of his face was Sitwell, Rumlow and Rollins. All HYDRA. He stepped in and faced the door. He pressed a button as Sitwell asked in a confused tone, "Cap, I thought you were co-ordinating search and rescue."

"Change of plans," Steve replied.

"Hey Cap," Rumlow greeted.

"Rumlow." Steve started noticing a hand on Rollins' gun and he had to laugh as it was so reminiscent of the ambush they would perform on him in two years time. "I just got a call from the secretary. I'm going to be running point on the sceptre."

Sitwell turned around and said, "Sir, I don't understand."

"We got word there may be an attempt by some people to steal it."

"Sorry Cap, I can't give you the sceptre," Rumlow injected.

"I'm going to give to call the director," Sitwell added.

"That's okay. Trust me," Steve interrupted. He leaned into Sitwell's ear and with all the effort to not be disgusted with himself, he stated, "Hail HYDRA."

Steve waited a moment until Sitwell nodded and Rumlow reluctantly handed the briefcase over. As the elevator doors opened, Steve smirked that his ruse worked. They were just as foolish as he remembered. He could hear Tony and Scott over the coms and it seemed that their plan was in motion. Until he heard a loud crash and a growl. He forgot about this part when they had made Hulk take the stairs.

"That wasn't supposed to happen, was it?" Scott asked.
"Well we blew it," Tony added.

Steve had just turned a corner and asked, "Tony what's going on? Tell me you found that cube." However, he had to stop because the person blocking his way was himself. "Oh, you gotta be shitting me."

"I have eyes on Loki," the past Steve said into his coms. "Fourteenth floor."

"I'm not Loki," Steve said putting the briefcase down. "And I don't want to hurt you."

The past Steve started to swing his shield and Steve had to use his own to block the onslaught. The two grappled for a moment until his past self kicked Steve across the room and said, "I can do this all day."

Steve rolled his eyes as he got to his feet. "Yeah, I know. I know." They threw the shields at one another, but they rebounded and fell off the bridge. They managed hand-to-hand combat with each other, knocking the briefcase over, falling off the bridge and scuffling until the past Steve got his future self in a headlock. Steve groaned until he found a way that could shock his past self into stopping. He gasped, "Bucky… is… alive." The grip loosened slightly in the shock and Steve elbowed his past self in the face before using the sceptre to knock him unconscious. As he got to his feet, he stared at his backside and nodded. "That is America's ass."

Steve ran from the building and made his way back the ally where he, Bruce, Tony and Scott had emerged. He panted and looked around to find Tony and Scott in a smashed-up car. "Cap," Tony began. "Sorry, buddy we got a problem."

"Yeah we do," Scott added.

"What happened?" Steve asked.

"Remember when we made Banner walk down the stairs and he was not very happy about it?" Tony asked. "Well, Scott's part went excellently and I had the briefcase in my hand when Hulk knocked me down and the Tesseract slid down towards Loki. Loki being Loki decided to use the Tesseract to disappear. He's got the stone now."

"Shit," Steve muttered. "What do we do now?"

"Give me a break Steve, I just got hit in the head with a Hulk."

"You said we had one shot," Scott said. "Yes, this was our shot. We shot it, it's shot. Six stones or nothing-"

"You repeat yourself you know that?" Tony asked. "You're repeating yourself."

"You're repeating yourself," Scott snapped back childishl. "You're repeating yourself."

Steve rolled his eyes. "It's amazing how our daughters are more mature than this," he commented.

"You never wanted a time heist," Scott doubled down on his rant. "You were never on board-"

"I dropped the ball," Tony protested.

"You ruined the time heist."

"Is that what I did?"
Steve sighed and injected quickly before the two of them started brawling, "Are there any other options with the Tesseract?"

"No, no, no," Scott replied. "There's no other option. There are no do-overs. We have one particle left each and that's it."

"Hold on," Tony said standing up. "I got it. There's another way that we can take the Tesseract and we acquire new particles. A little stroll down memory lane. Military installation, Garden State."

Steve realised where Tony was going with this: it was his old training camp where Howard and Peggy set up S.H.I.E.L.D. and he knew that Hank Pym used to work for S.H.I.E.L.D back in the 1970s. "Where were they both there?"

"Vaguely from memory: 1970. The year I was born."

"Any idea on how to get in?"

"We'll have to wing it to get inside."

"Sounds dangerous, but it could work." Steve handed the sceptre to Scott. "Take this back to the Compound. Bruce, do you have the Time Stone?"

"Just got it," Bruce replied.

"That's two out of six. Get back to the Compound."

"What are you doing Cap?"

"Improvising." As Tony and Steve locked in their coordinates, Steve asked, "You sure?"

"Guys, can I remind you that if this does not work then you are not coming back?" Scott injected.

"Nice pep talk Piss-Ant. You trust me, Cap?"

Steve nodded. "I do. Here we go."

They put their Quantum Suits on and with their target locked, they disappeared into the Quantum Realm again.

-o-

New Jersey, 1970

The second they arrived at Camp Lehigh, Steve and Tony had to work out a plan to disguise themselves. Luckily, Steve found some army fatigues to disguise himself and Tony stole a suit from a dry cleaner. He put on his glasses and found a sign that said Birthplace of Captain America.

"Clearly you weren't actually born here right?" Tony asked.

"The idea of me was," Steve replied.

"Right, now imagine you're S.H.I.E.L.D, running a quasi-furtive intelligence organisation, where would you hide it?"

In plain sight," Steve said pointing to a building in front of them. "Nat and I were here in 2014 and that was the old S.H.I.E.L.D headquarters before they moved to D.C."
"Smart thinking," Tony commented as they observed two individuals looking around before entering. Tony pressed on his glasses and scanned the building. They were just about to hack the code when a woman came up to them and smiled. She punched the code in (noting the S.H.I.E.L.D emblem on Tony's stolen jacket, and they followed her into the elevator. She was reading through a file as she looked up. She took a glance before returning to her file. The elevator stopped to where Tony was going to get the Tesseract and he said, "Good luck on your mission Captain."

"Good luck on your project, Doctor," Steve responded.

As soon as the door closed, the woman asked, "You new here?"

"Not exactly," Steve responded.

There was a glint in her eye that looked suspicious but Steve kept his cool or else the whole mission would suffer. He got to the floor where Hank Pym's lab was and took a deep breath. He found a phone and dialled the number for the lab. After a moment, a voice answered, "Hello?"

"Doctor Pym?"

"That would be the number that you called, yes?"

"This is Captain Maximoff from shipping. We have a package for you." Steve did not know why he used his wife's surname but it was the first that sprung to mind.

"Bring it up."

"Well, that's the thing, sir, we can't."

"I'm confused. I thought that was your job."

"Well, it's just – sir the box is glowing and to be honest some of our guys are not feeling too great."

"They didn't open it did they?"

"Uh, yeah, they did. You better get down here." The phone hung up and Steve waited as a man rushed through the halls and pushed people out of the way. "Okay, here we go."

Steve walked into the lab and went straight for the Pym particles, and put them in the protective pad on the Quantum Suits and walked out again.

"You never have seen these two men before," one of the security soldiers ask the woman from the elevator.

"No, I got an eye for them. The two of them looked fishy," she said.

"Can you describe them?"

"One of them had a hippy beard."

"Hippy? Like Bee-Gees or…"

Steve did not have time to hear the rest as he entered the nearest door. He took a deep breath as he listened for the coast to be clear. However, before he could make his escape, a woman's voice asked, "Can I help you?"

The voice was so distinct and familiar that it sent a chill down Steve's spine. He knew that if he could
recognise her voice after all this time, she would recognise his voice if he dared answered. He took a deep breath and turned around. Peggy Carter was sitting at her desk and while he could see that she had aged in the twenty-five years since she had last seen him with lines forming around her eyes and strands of grey in her hair, but she looked like she was still in the prime of her life. Her face paled at the sight of him.

"Hi Peg," he said.

"Steve?" she asked getting out of her seat. "You're alive?"

He had this conversation so many times when Peggy was far older, ill and could not remember having those conversations to the point where Steve's heart broke each time. "Yeah, I am."

"When…"

"They found me in 2012. I'm from the future."

"That's not possible."

"There was a point in history where I was impossible."

"Fair point." It was at that point she noticed the wedding band on Steve's finger and asked, "You're married?"

"Yeah. Her name is Wanda. We've been together for seven years. We have a daughter, Milena."

"That's a lovely name. Do you have a picture?" Steve dug into his pocket and pulled out a recent picture of Milena. It had been part of the holiday card fiasco where they tried to get as many as they could. This was the best one but the hassle of getting all the cards done meant they had more official photos of Milena than they needed. He handed it to Peggy who immediately commented, "She's got your eyes."

Steve smiled. "Yourself?" Steve knew about Peggy's husband and children but since they were sharing he thought it was right to ask about her life.

"Yeah, um… husband Daniel. Met through work actually. Can't take the office out the girl. We have two children. Michael, after my brother, and Evelyn."

"Good names. They're lucky to have a mother like you."

"For the longest time, I was scared of moving on. I thought that you would come back to me and we could have that dance. I think I had to move on just to function really. You're never far from my mind though." Peggy lifted a picture from her desk. It was his skinny self from when he enlisted. Steve gave a faint smile. "I guess you can't give me any hints about my future."

"No, because that could cause an implosion in the space-time continuum."

"Really?"

"No idea, it just sounded clever." Peggy chuckled. "I need to go Peg. I'm actually on a very important mission and um… well, Howard's son will be waiting."

"Oh, he has a boy? I guess I won that bet. His wife Maria is pregnant."

"Oh. Well, I won't reveal his name." Steve nodded before pressing a kiss to Peggy's cheek. "You'll meet me again."
"In forty-two years. I'll be an old woman."

"You look just as good as the day we met."

"Give Wanda and Milena my love. They're lucky to have such a wonderful man as a husband and father."

Steve smiled as he opened the door. Peggy had been dead for a while in the present. Yet, with her dementia, he never really got proper closure. When Wanda had shown him the vision of him in the dancehall, he never thought he could get the life he had wanted with Peggy, but Peggy was happy and that was all that mattered. He was also very happy and he wanted to get back home to his wife and daughter.

He walked out of the building and heard another familiar voice, "Well, if it's a boy, my wife likes Alfonzo."

"Well, you have time," Tony replied. It was then he realised that it was Howard and Tony speaking. He had to laugh at Tony's little dig. Steve put on his sunglasses and slowly approached them.

"Let me ask you a question," Howard said. "When your kid was born, were you nervous?"

"Wildly," Tony replied.

"Did you feel qualified? Like you had any idea on how to successfully operate that thing?"

"I literally pieced it together as I went along. My friend also has a daughter so we learnt together. I thought about what my dad would have done as well."

"Well, my father thought there wasn't a problem he could not solve with a belt."

"I thought my dad was tough on me and now looking back on it I just remember the good stuff. He did drop the odd pearl."

"Yeah like, what?"

"No amount of money ever bought a second of time."

"Smart guy."

"He did his best."

"Tell you what, that kid is not even here yet, and there is nothing I would not do for him." Howard moved away for a moment and Tony caught Steve's eyes. Steve gestured to come over only Tony held his finger up to indicate one minute. Howard held his hand out and shook Tony's hand. "Good to meet you, Potts."

"Yeah, Howard," Tony said and then he hugged his father. Howard looked very bemused at this apparent stranger hugging him. "Everything's going to be alright." Tony returned to Steve and held up the briefcase. "Got the stone."

"That was nice to see," Steve commented.

"He wasn't the best father, but he wanted to do his best. Any joy on the Pym particles?"

"Yeah. Enough to get us home and to take the stones back when we're done." Steve rubbed his eye. "I guess this was good for both of us, and we got the job done."
"Three stones down." Tony got a beep from his wristwatch and saw two messages, one from Rhodes and the other from Rocket. "Power and Reality Stones are in our hands."

"Just the Soul Stone."

-Vormir, 2014-

The second that Wanda has boarded Rocket's ship on Morag, she felt a sense of anxiety she had not felt since they boarded the quinjet to Wakanda in 2018. It was the anxiety of something about to go very badly wrong. She wanted to share that anxiety with Clint and Natasha, but they were happily singing along with Fleetwood Mac's 'The Chain'.

"Listen to the wind blow, down comes the night," Clint sang.

"NATASHA!" Nebula's voice broke through the coms. Wanda went to see what the message was but it broke up and Wanda could not decipher what she was saying other than 'knows'.

She sat down in the seat and took out a picture of Milena. She was two in the picture and she was lunging towards the camera. She had grown so quickly that Wanda wanted to hold onto the idea of her still being a two-year-old forever. So innocent and so happy.

"You okay back there?" Natasha asked.

"Yeah," Wanda lied.

"Milena's fine Wanda," Clint said. "She and Morgan are probably running rings around Pepper."

Wanda nodded and looked out the window. It looked as though they were near their destination. With the ship on autopilot, the three stood at the window and looked out at the planet. "Wow. In different circumstances, this would be totally awesome."

"Right, let's land and get the stone quickly," Natasha said getting into her seat. Then Wanda felt something she had not felt for nearly four years. "Wanda?"

"It's the stone. I can feel it," Wanda replied.

"Okay, you be our guide." They walked for what felt like hours until they came across a mountain.

"You could have parked us closer Clint."

"Yeah yeah," Clint said as they started hiking.

The higher they got, the more snow hit their face and the harder it felt to breathe. Wanda led the way as her senses pulled her towards the top.

"I bet the racoon did not have to climb a mountain," Natasha commented.

"Technically, he's not a racoon you know," Clint responded.

"Whatever, he eats garbage."

"Guys, shush," Wanda said as she stopped.

"Welcome," an eerie voice announced. Clint drew his sword, Natasha her gun and Wanda's hands started to glow in case she needed to start throwing some energy balls. In front of them was dark cloaked figure and he continued, "Natalia, daughter of Ivan. Clint, son of Edith. Wanda, mother of
Milena and one never to be born."

Wanda looked at Natasha and saw her face drop at the mention of her father's name. Wanda felt her own defences weaken as he mentioned the baby she miscarried not long ago. The figure moved towards them and his face revealed to be someone familiar. When she was in the HYDRA base, she had seen posters of this face as someone Strucker worshipped. She recognised him as Red Skull, but her mouth could not vocalise it.

"Who are you?" Natasha asked.

"Consider me a guide to you and all who seek the Soul Stone."

"Oh good, you tell us where it is and we'll be on our way."

"Nat... Do you remember how Thanos got the stone?" Wanda asked.

"He murdered his daughter," Natasha answered. "Like when Lord Voldemort kills, he ripped a part of his soul out. So, tell us where the stone is."

"Oh, if only it was that easy," Red Skull replied. He started upwards and the three followed behind. Wanda could feel her heart pounding as they approached an edge of a cliff and she was suddenly reliving Thanos killing Gamora for the Soul Stone. There was a bright orange light in the distance and Wanda guessed that was the stone. "What you seek lies in front of you, as does what you fear."

Natasha looked over the cliff edge and stated. "The stone's down there."

"For one of you," Red Skull began. "For the other two of you, in order to take the stone, you must lose that in which you love. An everlasting exchange. A soul for a soul."

"He's got to making this shit up," Clint said looking between the two women. Wanda and Natasha took a seat on the ground. Wanda looked scared while Natasha looked like she was pondering something.

"No," Wanda said. "How would he have known about me having a miscarriage when I have not told anyone but Steve?"

"When was this?" Natasha asked.

"November last year. It was just a routine scan but no heartbeat. Steve and I were still trying to process it ourselves. I had one healthy baby..."

"Laura had one," Clint said. "After Cooper, we planned to have another. He was two at the time. Hence why Lila is... Lila was so valuable to me." Clint gave Wanda a faint smile and then turned to Natasha. "Okay, so he knows stuff about us that we already knew."

"He knew my father's name," Natasha stated. "I never knew his name."

Clint blinked and then asked, "What are we going to do?"

"Thanos left here with the stone, without his daughter," Wanda said. "In his mind, he was sacrificing someone he loved."

"Whatever it takes," Natasha said under her breath.

"Whatever it takes," Clint echoed.
Wanda noticed he was looking out at the edge and she instantly knew what he was intending on doing. She got to her feet and took his hand, "Clint."

Natasha stood behind Wanda and turned her around to face her. "If we don't get that stone, billions of people stay dead."

"I know, but I can't lose…" Wanda's eyes started to well with tears. "My whole family… Sam… My baby… I can't lose one of you two as well. Clint, you dragged me out of a funk I never thought possible. Natasha, you're the sister I never had. I can't…"

"I know," Natasha soothed pulling her into a hug. "You have been the greatest sister I never had. You and Mew-Mew have brought me so much joy in the last five years. However, in the last five years, I've been trying to do one thing, get to right here. That's all it's been about. Bringing everybody back. You think I want to do it?"

"Then don't. It's not worth bringing them all back if I have to lose you in the process."

"You won't lose her," Clint said.

"Clint, you have a family waiting for you," Natasha said pulling away from Wanda and facing up to Clint.

"Nat, you know what I have done. You know what I've become."

"Well, I don't judge people on their worst mistakes."

"Maybe you should."

"You didn't."

"You're a pain in my ass, you know that?" The two touched heads affectionately and Wanda could not bear to look as she heard Clint say, "Okay. You win." However, she had to look when she heard Natasha fall to the floor with a thump. "Tell my family I love them."

Wanda barely had time to breathe before Natasha threw a taser at him. "Tell them yourself."

Everything just happened in slow motion as Natasha ran to the edge, Clint shot an exploding arrow at her to knock her to the ground as he made the run for it. Wanda wanted to scream as Clint stepped over the edge, only for Natasha to jump on his back and set of the wire to hold them onto the cliffside. Wanda managed to move her feet to the edge to see them both dangling, Natasha on the bottom. She and Clint both saw whose retractable wire it was, and it was not Natasha's. Clint was holding onto her right hand as Natasha barely clung on.

"Damn you, Nat," Clint said.

Wanda tried to grab an end of the wire, but she was too weak to pull them both up. Wanda and Natasha's eyes met for a moment. Natasha gave Wanda a brave and reassuring smile. Wanda could not help but flashback to all the happy moments they spent as friends. Shopping in Tokyo. The bonding in London and Edinburgh. Wanda's wedding. The birth of Milena. Yet, Natasha had been there in the sad times too. There was the day she had the extreme manic episode and Natasha soothed her in the bathtub. She was there through her suicide attempt and recovery.

"Please no," Wanda whispered.

"Let me go," Natasha said softly. "It's okay."
With one kick against the cliffside, Natasha's hand slipped from Clint's and she fell into the chasm below. Wanda could only see the fall and finally, Natasha's body splayed on the floor. It was so far down but Wanda could see the peace etched on her best friend's face.

Her hand's shook and her body felt detached from its surroundings. She had not felt like this since Pietro died and as she got to her feet, she let out an ear-piercing scream and collapsed to her knees as a cascade of red energy hit everything in sight, including Red Skull. He was being crushed against a rock and the other rocks were piling around him.

Wanda put her hands to the floor as she sobbed and hyperventilated. She felt someone touch her shoulder and she looked up to Clint, who was also crying. He gathered her into his arms and tried his best to soothe her but he was having a hard time himself. Wanda saw his hand was tight-fisted and when she opened it, she saw the bright glowing orange stone in his hand.

Without a word, Clint and Wanda flicked on their Quantum Suits and disappeared into the Quantum Realm.

Chapter End Notes

So, as you can imagine, my reaction to Natasha's death was shocked to say the least, especially since she didn't come back at the end. I think it made sense in her character arc but given how stuffed Civil War and Infinity War were, it's hard to see what her character arc has been since Age of Ultron. Strange though, I spent most of the movie worrying about Steve dying that Natasha never entered my brain.

Don't worry, unlike the movie proper, I will give Natasha a send-off she deserves.
Chapter Seven

Steve knew something was wrong the second that he saw Wanda. She was in such a state of distress that he barely registered that Natasha was not there. Her face was sticky with tears and she was panting as she tried to recover her breath. She looked as though she was about to have a major panic attack and she fell to the floor in a heap.

"Doll?" he said walking over to her. He cupped her face as he tried to get her to look at him. "Hey, it's me."

"What's going on Clint?" Tony asked as he also noticed Wanda's shaking body and then Clint's red eyes. He also bent down to rub Wanda's back as her breathing seemed to increase too much for his liking.

"Clint, where's Nat?" Bruce asked when he realised Natasha was not there. Steve looked up and then it dawned on him that Natasha had not returned with them. Scott, Tony, Bruce, Nebula, Rhodes, Rocket, Thor, Wanda and Clint were all present and correct. Natasha was not, and he felt a chill travel up his spine in the anticipation of being told what he already knew.

"She's gone," Clint replied. "The only way for us to get the stone was for one of us to sacrifice ourselves."

Steve felt his stomach drop as he gathered Wanda into his arms. He could feel her tears pooling on his jacket. He fought back the tears for a moment in a bid to be strong for her but could not hold it in when he heard Bruce punch the floor. Tears dropped on her shoulder and he sniffed as hard as he could. "Oh God, Wanda," he breathed.

Wanda pushed him away and ran as fast as her feet could take her. She found the nearest bathroom and hurled into the toilet. She gripped the ceramic basin as she felt her stomach empty. She could feel her throat burning but she could not stop herself. The anger, grief, and fear needed to be let out. Tears pricked at her eyes and the second she knew that it was just bile in her throat she stopped. She panted as she rubbed her hands against her face. Her head was running at a thousand miles an hour as she kept picturing Natasha's broken body at the bottom of the chasm.

They should have brought her back, but the way Red Skull phrased it, they would not get Natasha's body back. She would have no funeral. Wanda sobbed into her knees for what felt like hours until she got to her feet. She did not know where she was going in the Compound, but she knew where she wanted to go.

She found her old room, clean and pristine. Next was the bed. She looked under the bed, then in an old bag and then she found what she was looking for: whiskey. At the height of her mania in 2018, Wanda had resorted to hiding bottles of alcohol around the Compound. After she had confessed to Steve about the extent of her alcoholism, Steve had made sure that all the alcohol he could find was out of the Compound, only Wanda had snuck this under her bed in case of emergency.

However, as much as she was desperate for a sip, she did not open it. She put the bottle down, sat against the draws and stared at it.

"Doll?" Steve asked softly as he stood at the door.

"She was going to go to any length to get everyone back, even if it meant her life in the process,"
Wanda said, "Why did I not see it sooner?"

"We both should have seen it coming." He turned his attention to the bottle of whiskey and pushed the hair from her eyes.

She swallowed and said, "I was going to drink it because it's an easy solution to deal with my problems."

Steve sat beside his wife and took her hand. "Then why haven't you?"

"Because Natasha would not want that. Because I have a little girl who will need her mother. Because I can't go back to what happened on that balcony."

Steve's eyes welled, partly out of sadness, but mainly pride. Wanda had lost someone so dear to her, they both had. Yet Wanda had fought so hard to overcome the demons of the past, and there was too much at stake for her to go back to where they were five years ago. She could have drunk the whiskey but she made the choice not to. Steve wrapped his arm around her and kissed her head.

"I need some air," she said.

"I think everyone is heading to the lake unless you want it to be me and you."

Wanda shook her head. "I think we need each other more than ever."

Steve helped her up and they walked to the lake where everyone had gathered. They were so solemn and unable to speak. Wanda noticed Bruce was staring out to the water and all she could do was walk over and take his hand.

After what felt like centuries, Tony asked, "Did she have a family?"

"Yeah," Steve replied. "Us."

However, it seemed that Thor was going through the first stage of grief: denial. "What? Why are we acting like she's dead? We have the stone, right? As long as we have the stone, Cap, we can bring her back. Is that right?" Steve fought his hardest to maintain some composure but he was unable to. He and Natasha had been through a lot together: New York, bringing down S.H.I.E.L.D, going on the run, Wakanda and its aftermath. Ironically, she would be the one able to keep everyone together so, with her gone, they were all at a loss. "Right so let's stop this shit. We're the Avengers. Get it together."

He slipped so easily into anger that Wanda wondered when bargaining would start. Eventually, it was Clint who responded, "We can't bring her back."

"I'm sorry, no offence, but you're a very earthly being, okay, and we're talking about space magic. It can seem very difficult..."

"Yeah, look, I know I'm way outside my pay rate here, but she's still dead, isn't she? It can't be undone, or at least that's what the red floating guy had to say! Maybe you ought to go talk to him! Okay, go grab your hammer, and you find and talk to him!" Everyone stayed silent after Clint's rant at Thor, who seemed to have skipped steps three and four and appeared to be accepting that Natasha was actually gone. "It was supposed to be me. Sacrificed her life for that goddamned stone, she put her life on it."

Just then Bruce lifted the bench up and tossed it into the lake in a fit of rage. Wanda knew where that rage was coming from. He loved Natasha differently to the way she, Clint and Steve had done. They
could have had a life. They had that opportunity after Sokovia, but he decided to run away from his problems. He calmed down after a moment and turned around to face the others and said, "She's not coming back. We have to make it worth it. We have to."

Steve stood and went to take Wanda's hand. She sniffed as he gathered her into his arms. "We will."

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Wanda contemplated a moment before pressing a button on Natasha's computer to called Carol and Okoye. They had known Natasha for years and needed to know that their leader had died. Wanda just was not sure how to explain it while she was still trying to process it herself.

Soon enough, Carol appeared through a hologram and gave Wanda a friendly smile. "Hey Wanda, how's Milena?"

"She's good." Just then Okoye appeared beside Carol and the two exchanged a nod. "General."

"Good afternoon Wanda."

Carol noticed how Wanda seemed to be struggling to keep her emotions in check so asked, "You okay?"

"This is going to sound insane but hear me out." Wanda explained Scott turning up on the doors of the Compound with a plan to go back in time, take the Infinity Stones and return everyone who had perished in the Decimation. "We needed the Soul Stone but one of us had to sacrifice ourselves to get it. Nat decided she was going to do it." The two women in front of her seemed to be floored by this and Okoye had to put her hand on her chest for a moment. "I needed you two to know because of how well you all worked together."

"Did she suffer?" Carol asked.

"She threw herself from a cliff so it would have been quick." Wanda sniffed. "We got the stone so... We have all six."

"So you can bring everyone back?" Okoye asked. "You can bring T'Challa back?"

"That's the plan. Can you patch in Shuri?" Okoye nodded and after a moment, Shuri appeared in a hologram, wearing some regal Wakandan dress that made her look far older than she was. "Your highness."

"What is going on?" Shuri asked.

"We have a shot of bringing T'Challa and everyone else back. The odds are that they'll appear where they turned to ash."

"You want us to meet them in the wood?"

"Yes. Carol, how soon can you get to Earth?"

"About an hour. You need me for something?"

"I just have a feeling we may need some extra hands."

With the called ended, Wanda said to herself, "She wouldn't want us to be wasting time. We have all six stones. Let's finish this once and for all."
With everyone gathered in the living area, Wanda noticed something on the counter. "Where did you get your old hammer from Thor?"

"Thought it would be useful. I like Stormbreaker but it doesn't have the old feel to it," Thor replied. Wanda shrugged and returned her attention to Tony, Rocket and Bruce.

"We're putting them in that thing?" Rocket asked as Tony presented the gauntlet they were going to use to hold the Infinity Stones.

"Banner's been researching Thanos' one for years," Tony explained. "It is pretty much fried, but we can replicate the pattern of the stones. From the thumb: Time, Power, Space, Reality, Soul and Mind."

"Okay. If you say so. Everyone watched as Tony, Bruce and Rocket guided each stone into place. The stones fitted in perfectly. "Alright, the glove's ready. The question is who is going to snap their frickin' fingers?"

Thor raised his hand and moved towards the gauntlet. "I'll do it."

"Excuse me?" Bruce asked. Tony, Steve and Scott put their hands against his chest to stop him going forward.

"Thor, just wait," Steve insisted calmly. "We haven't decided who's going to put the glove on yet."

Wanda turned her head and noticed that Nebula had slipped out of the room. She frowned for a moment. The Nebula she knew would want to see her father's plan be undone. Wanda was actually surprised she had not volunteered herself to snap the glove together. While the debate was happening, she quietly followed Nebula out of the room.

"Oh, I'm sorry, are we just waiting around for the right opportunity?" Thor asked.

"We should at least discuss it," Scott pointed out.

"Look, sitting there staring at that going is not going to bring everybody back. I'm the strongest avenger, okay, so this responsibility falls upon me. It's my duty."

"No, no listen," Tony began.

"Let me! Let me do it. Let me do something good, something right."

"No, it's not just the fact that that glove's channelling enough energy to light a continent. I'm telling you, you're in no condition to."

"What do you think is going through my veins right now?"

"Cheese-whizz," Rhodes replied.

Thor glared and turned back to Steve, Tony, Scott and Rocket. "Lightning."

"Lightning won't help you, pal," Bruce injected. "It's gotta be me. You saw what those stones did to Thanos. They almost killed him. None of you could survive."

"How do we know you will?" Steve asked.

"We don't, but the radiation is mostly gamma. It was like I was meant for this."
In the meantime, Wanda had kept a close but quiet trail on Nebula through the corridors. For some reason, she was heading to the hanger where the time machine was. Wanda tip-toed as she hid behind a box and watched what Nebula was up to. She accidentally hit her knee and Nebula turned around at the sound. Wanda covered her mouth to keep herself silent and she frowned as Nebula approached the machine. She heard the sound of metal scraping together, and Wanda lifted her head to see Nebula stick her fingers into the machine.

Wanda then remembered something. Nebula had been trying to contact her, Clint and Natasha as they headed to Vormir. She then remembered, "knows". She then remembered that they would not have been the only ones in 2014 looking for the stones. Nebula had been on Thanos' side then.

"Oh no," Wanda whispered as she got to her feet to warn the others.

In the living area, Bruce was in the process of slipping the gauntlet on. "Okay," Bruce said. "Let's do it."

"Okay, remember: everyone Thanos snapped out of existence five years ago. We're just bringing them back to now, today. Don't change anything from the last five years."

"Got it." Bruce slipped on the gauntlet. Everyone around him suited up in case the stones set off a large surge of energy.

Wanda was nearly in the living area when the shutters came down. "No, no, no, no!" she yelled banging her fists on the shutters. "GUYS! IT'S NEBULA! SHE'S BRINGING THANOS HERE!"

On the other side, no one could hear her as Bruce prepared to take a snap. He groaned as the energy from all the stones shot through his nerves and veins.

"Get it off him!" Thor yelled.

"Wait, Bruce are you okay?" Steve asked.

"Talk to me Banner," Tony ordered.

The groaning continued until Bruce gasped, "I'm okay. I'm okay."

Wanda was still banging on the shutter, her fists undoubtedly bruised, until she heard a crash come from the hanger. Past Nebula had done it. Thanos was there. No one on the other side noticed the crash as they watched Bruce snap his thumb and finger together and collapse on the floor.

"Bruce!" Steve exclaimed as he moved towards him. "Don't move him."

Tony sprayed something over Bruce's wounded arm as Bruce panted, "Did it work?"

Wanda barely noticed the shutters opening until she heard Thor say, "It's okay."

She turned around to see Bruce splayed on the floor and she ran over to the counter of the kitchen island where Clint's phone was resting.

"Where have you been?" Tony asked.

Clint's phone began to ring in the distance and he went over to answer it as Scott went to the open window. "Guys, I think it worked."

"It's Nebula," Wanda was interrupted as a shadow appeared across the room.
Within seconds, the room was filled with smoke and fire. Everyone felt the room collapse around them. Steve, Thor and Tony landed on the ground and Steve could only watch as his wife and Clint fell through the floor.
Chapter Eight

Chapter Notes

You forget how difficult battle scenes are, especially when there are loads of characters to juggle. There is probably a reason they work better in script form than prose but hey.

Chapter Eight

Clint groaned loudly as he pushed himself off the ground and coughed as the dust-filled his lungs. The impact of the fall must have bruised his ribs because the whole of his chest and torso hurt. He turned and saw Wanda lying on the ground, almost as still as a brick. She had a cut on the side of her head that was bleeding profusely but not enough to cause concern.

"Wanda?" he asked hobbling towards her. He turned her over and listened to her chest. She was still alive. "Come on Wanda, wake up." He shook her shoulder and she coughed violently as her eyes started to flutter. "You okay?"

"Dunno. I can't feel anything but pain in my back and head," Wanda replied hoarsely. Her eyes opened and Clint lifted her to her feet. She groaned as she straightened her aching back. "Steve?"

"I don't know." Clint got his torch out and flashed upwards to the hole they had fallen through. "CAP?"

"STEVE!" Wanda yelled upwards, her voice echoing around the pit.

"We're probably too far down for him to hear us. My com is busted. Yours?"

"Can anyone hear me?" Wanda asked into her com. "Steve? Bruce? Rhodey? Anyone? I think the coms must have gotten busted in the blast." Wanda could vaguely hear yelling that sounded like Rhodes and Rocket in the distance, as well as the sounds of water flooding through the foundations. "We should find them." Clint nodded but before they could move, Wanda turned her head and saw something glistening in the torchlight. "Clint, hold the torch there."

Wanda walked over and saw the gauntlet with all the Infinity Stones present. "We should probably take that," Clint said as Wanda lifted it up. Just then, they heard growling in the distance, and Wanda instantly knew what they were: the Outriders that she had encountered in Wakanda. Clint shot an arrow at the Outriders, and he and Wanda knew that they had to make a run for it. Their bodies still felt like bricks but they forced all their energy into lifting their legs as fast as they could.

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"Come on buddy wake up man," Tony ordered as he kicked Steve in the chest. Steve's face was looked as though it was covered in dust or was badly bruised. Steve gasped awake and Tony said, "That's the stuff." Steve looked up as he saw Tony holding the shield. "Lose this again and I'm keeping it."

Steve groaned and tried to force himself up. "Wanda?"

"I don't know. I have tried contacting everyone but the coms are busted."
"Mine's working fine I think. Wanda?"

"Steve?" Wanda sounded like she was running but Steve did not have time to question as Tony pulled him up and dragged him to where Thor was standing and watching a waiting Thanos. The Titian looked pensive, as though he was waiting for them to make the first move before finalising his plan.

"What's he been doing?" Tony asked.

"Absolutely nothing," Thor answered.

"Where are the stones?" Steve questioned.

"Somewhere under all this," Tony replied. "All that I know is that he doesn't have them."

"So we keep it that way."

"You know it's a trap," Thor stated.

"Yeah."

"But I don't much care," Tony added.

"Good: just as long as we're all in agreement." Thunder rumbled above them and a small blast covered Thor in his armour. "Let's kill him properly this time."

The three walked towards Thanos. Steve had to hold his nerve. This was going to be their last stand and someone was going to win. He just had to make sure that it was them and not Thanos.

"You could not live with your own failure, and where did that bring you? Back to me," Thanos jeered coolly. "I thought by eliminating half of life, the other half would thrive. You've shown me that's impossible. As long as there are those that remember what was, there will always be those who are unable to accept what can be and who can resist."

"Yeah, we're all kind of stubborn," Tony replied.

"Yeah, I'm thankful, because now I know what I must do: I will shred this universe to its last atom." Thanos stood and put on the helmet that was placed on a large blade. "And then, with the stones you have collected for me, I will create a new one, teaming with life that does not know what it has lost, only what it has been given. A grateful universe."

"Born out of blood," Steve countered.

"They'll never know it because you won't be alive to tell them."

Thor made the first launch, and he, Steve and Tony made their assault on Thanos. Steve made the first hit, only to be smacked back against some debris. He coughed as he forced himself back up and helped attempt to grab Thanos by the neck while Tony shot him in the chest. The Titan overpowered them and Steve was thrown back yet again.

"Son of a bitch," he groaned.

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Wanda was doing all she could to keep Clint covered as they sprinted away from the Outriders. She was blasting energy balls, weaving them against the wall, even sedating a couple through her mind
manipulation powers. However, she could only do so much. Clint was also trying as he shot arrows towards them. There was two of them, and the sea of mutts chasing them was neverending. Her heart was pounding and her lungs were unable to keep up with the speed she was running. Clint threw one exploding arrow at a pipe and the implosion sent him and Wanda flying forwards onto their fronts. The explosion only did some minor damage to the Outriders as they managed to break through the wall of fire.

"We've...got to... find a... way out... of here," Wanda panted as they started their run again. Clint shot an arrow above them and Wanda looked up. Clint grabbed her by the waist and Wanda clung on as the retractable lead lifted them up. Clint took his sword out to slice a few of the creatures in half as he and Wanda landed on the next floor up. Both wheezed as they found a moment to breathe. "I really do not think that I am able to cope with more bruises to my ribs at this point."

Clint gave a mild chuckle as he looked up to see Nebula stand over him. "Oh hey, I know you."

Wanda blinked and she knew that the Nebula that was standing over them was not the same Nebula who had been with them for the last four years. Nebula took the gauntlet as she announced in her communication device, "I have the stones."

"What?" Clint asked before Nebula stood on his chest. Wanda got to her feet and prepared to shoot an energy ball against the past Nebula.

"You really do not want to do this," Wanda said. "You know what that thing has done to you. He doesn't care about you, or else he would not have done all this to you."

The past Nebula pointed her gun straight at Wanda however a voice broke their stand-off. "Stop." The past Nebula turned and saw a green woman standing with her gun pointed. Wanda recognised her from her vision of Thanos killing the person he 'loved' the most: Gamora. Behind her was the real Nebula.

"You're betraying us sister," the past Nebula observed.

"You don't have to do this," the present Nebula tried to argue.

Wanda could see confliction in the eyes of the past Nebula, but it was a case of whether they could convince her before it was too late. She protested, "I am this."

"No," Gamora replied. "You're not."

"You've seen what we become," the present Nebula said.

"Nebula, please listen: I've been here. I took the wrong side once and it cost my brother's life. You stay with Thanos, and you'll lose Gamora," Wanda added. "It's not worth all this."

"Nebula, listen to her," Gamora pleaded.

"You can change," added the present Nebula.

Gamora lowered the gun as a sign of wanting to make peace. However, it was futile. The past Nebula broke and said, "He won't let me." She lifted her gun to fire but her future self got there first. Wanda blinked as she saw the gaping hole in the past Nebula's chest as she collapsed against the fence. They all watched as life started to slip from the past Nebula, and Wanda could see that the anger and pain in her eyes were replaced with some semblance of relief and peace. "Wait, so why is she not fading away?" Clint asked as he got up.
"I don't know, all I know is that we have to get this gauntlet away from Thanos," Wanda said taking the gauntlet and handing it to Clint. "Run and I'll cover you."

"We'll cover you," Nebula added.

"Okay, let's roll," Clint ordered.

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"Okay Thor," Tony said as he opened the back of his Iron Man suit. "Hit me." Thor used the thunder to power up the suit and Tony blasted as hard as he could at Thanos. However, the beast put up a decent defence.

Thor threw his old hammer at Thanos, only for him to use Tony as a shield and the hammer hit Tony square in the chest. Steve put in his best efforts to take Thanos on, but hand-to-hand combat was proving to be futile. Just then, Steve noticed something happen as Thanos was about to use Stormbreaker against Thor. The old hammer was twitching as focus gazed on it. He suddenly remembered the party where they took turns to try to lift Thor's hammer. It had shifted at his touch. Steve pondered for a moment and then lifted his hand. The hammer lifted off the ground and Steve got to his feet. With his arm outstretched, the hammer hit Thanos and then returned to him.

"I KNEW IT!" Thor declared in delight. Thanos kicked him in the face before proceeding to take on Steve himself.

Steve put up a strong fight with the hammer, but the Titan was far too strong, and he used the double-sided blade to knock the hammer as far away as possible. With the hammer knocked out of his hand, Thanos had the upper hand to start using his blade, and for something designed to be indestructible, Steve's shield broke like porcelain. Thanos practically threw Steve across the remnants of the Compound.

"In all my years of conquest, violence, slaughter," Thanos began, "it was never personal. But I'll tell you now, what I am about to do to your stubborn, annoying little planet, I'm going to enjoy it, very, very much."

There was a blast of light that came from the ship above his head and Thanos' army appeared. Steve's heart faltered. There was no way that he, Thor and Tony could manage on their own. Steve lay on his back for a moment. He thought about laying there and letting Thanos finish him off. However, the thought of Wanda made his heart leap in a different way, and the thought of his little girl, probably unsure what was going on, gave him the motivation. He was going to fight for a world where she could live without fear.

Steve forced himself up and tightened the broken shield on his arm. He began to walk alone towards the army when he heard a familiar but welcome voice.

"Cap, can you read me? Cap, it's Sam can you hear me. On your left."

Steve turned his head to see a glowing portal open. Out of the portal came Shuri and Okoye, with a very alive T'Challa. Sam's voice, Laura's call and now T'Challa's physical presence confirmed that they had brought everyone back. Just then, Sam flew through the portal and dropped by Steve.

"Sam?" Steve breathed.

"Hey Steve," Sam replied with a small smile.

Steve felt someone touch his shoulder and he turned to see Bucky standing beside him. Steve gasped
a laugh out at the sight of his best friend alive again - only this time it genuinely was Bucky.

Steve turned back to the portal that T'Challa, Okoye and Shuri had emerged from and they had brought the Wakandan armies from the Dora Milaje to the Jabari.

"Yibambe!" T'Challa called.

"YIBAMBE!" the Wakandans responded.

As more portals appeared, people Steve had never met but knew through reputation came through: Stephen Strange and Peter Parker with the rest of the Guardians of the Galaxy, the Wakandan armies with Groot coming through, the Asgardians, the Masters of the Mystic Arts, Hope van Dyne, and finally Pepper in what was the Rescue suit. Thor and Tony walked over to Steve and looked as they saw Scott busted through the remains of the Compound holding Bruce, Rhodes and Rocket.

With everyone from Wakandan armies to the Masters of the Mystic Arts aligned and waiting for Steve's instruction, Steve reached his arm out and bellowed, "Avengers..." The hammer reached his hand and he finished, "assemble."

Everyone started charging and yelling towards Thanos' hoards, some flying, some on foot, but they had a chance of stopping this once and for all. It was a sea of chaos of people flying around, rolling on the floor and punches and kicks throwing around. Just as the fighting had started, Wanda, Clint, Nebula and Gamora emerged with the gauntlet and Wanda stopped. "Okay, what are we going to do? There is a lot of people and they're all killing each other."

"Keep going," Gamora replied storming forward. They just reached a blown-out spaceship when they encountered someone in a space helmet stop in front of them. The helmet flipped off and a human-looking man stood still, looking at Gamora like he had seen a ghost. Gamora, on the other hand, looked as though she had no idea who he was.

"Gamora?" he asked as he approached. "I thought I lost you." He gently reached out to touch her face, only she grabbed his hand and kneed him in the groin. Clint winced while Wanda raised her eyebrows in surprise. She kicked him in the groin again as he hit the ground. "You missed the first time, but got them the second time," he groaned.

"Really, this guy?" Gamora asked her sister.

"It was either him or a tree," Nebula replied.

"Do you have any idea what is going on?" Clint asked Wanda.

"Not a clue," Wanda replied. "Anyway, we're in the middle of a battlefield and we have not idea what we are going to do with these stones."

"You need to help," Clint replied. Wanda looked at him and he said, "They need you. I think I'll be well covered."

Wanda nodded. Without even thinking whether she was in physical shape to do so, Wanda made a run for it and pushed herself into the air using her powers. She flew into the heart of the fight where she found Steve. She smiled at him when she saw the hammer in his hand.

"I always knew you were worthy," Wanda commented as she blasted some minions away.

"Worth a shot I guess," Steve replied as he whacked an Outrider with the hammer. "Where's Clint?"
"He's got the stones. Have you got any idea on how we are going to get them away from him?"

"We need to get them back where they came from?" Bruce interrupted as he smashed a mutt into the wall.

"There's no way to get them back, Thanos destroyed the Quantum Tunnel," Tony added through the coms.

"Hold on!" Scott injected. "That wasn't our only time machine."

In the distance, Wanda could hear the sounds of 'La Cucaracha'. "Has anyone seen a big, ugly brown van?" she asked.

"Yes," Thor's friend Valkyrie replied. "But you're not going to like where it's parked."

"Scott, how long do you need to get it working?" Tony asked.

"Maybe ten minutes," Scott answered.

"Get it started and we'll get the stones to you," Steve ordered.

Wanda turned her head for a moment and saw who she believed to be Stephen Strange fly next to her, flattening some foot soldiers in the process with his abilities. "You must be Wanda Maximoff. An interesting subset of powers you have."

Before Wanda could respond, Tony landed and asked, "Hey, you said one out of fourteen million, we'd win, yeah? Tell me this is it."

"If I tell you what happens, it won't happen," Strange replied.

"Wait, so you are telling me that we have only one in fourteen million chances of beating him?" Wanda asked.

"You better be right," Tony added.

Just then, someone threw an Outrider into the space between Strange, Wanda and Tony and Wanda immediately recognised the webbing that was tangled around the Outrider. Peter Parker bounced right next to the mutt and his eyes lit up when he saw Tony, "Hey! Holy cow! You will not believe what's been going on. Do you remember when we were in space? And I got all dusty? And I must've passed out because I woke up and you were gone. But Doctor Strange was there right. And he said 'It's been five years. Come on, they need us.' And he started doing the yellow sparkly thing that he does. Anyway..." Tony interrupted Peter by hugging him in relief on seeing the kid alive. Peter seemed stunned but welcomed the hug. "This is nice."

In the distance, Wanda could see that T'Challa was now in possession of the gauntlet but lost it as he was knocked down. There was an open space where it was in Thanos' eye line and Wanda felt the rage that had built inside her for half a decade. This beast had cost her friends, her sanity and almost her life. He had haunted her nightmares with his taunts and his actions. Without really thinking it through, she flew to the space between Thanos and the gauntlet.

"You took everything from me.""I don't even know you," Thanos mocked.

"Oh, you will."
Wanda lifted herself and her surroundings up as she prepared to make Thanos suffer for what he had done. He had killed Vision with his bare hands. He had taken Sam away from her. He had led to Natasha making a sacrifice. He had led to Wanda to be on the verge of suicide. He was going to try to take her daughter's life away. She was not standing by this time. He was going to burn and pay. She held the blade up strong and smashed it to bits as she threw it back. She held Thanos high in the air, stripping him of his armour. The only thing that stopped her from tearing Thanos limb from limb was the blast that came from the ship above, knocking her to the ground.

"DOLL!" Steve yelled.

"I'm okay," Wanda gasped. In all the chaos, she barely noticed that Peter now had the gauntlet. She rolled onto her back and pushed herself onto her feet and saw a great pool of water starting to break through.

"Is anyone else seeing this?" Pepper asked.

Strange pushed the water back as much as he could only for Peter's voice screeched through the coms, "Can someone help!"

"Heads up Queens," Steve said as he threw the hammer.

Wanda looked up when all of a sudden, the guns stopped and appeared to be pointing upwards and shooting into the distance.

"What the hell is this?" Sam asked. Wanda had never been so relieved to hear a person's voice.

"FRIDAY, what are they firing at?" Tony asked.

Wanda squinted and saw a ball of light smash through the ship and she had to laugh when she realised it was Carol. They finally stood a chance. She jogged over to where Valkyrie and Peter had fallen in the chaos and checked both were okay. Carol landed with a thump, which freaked the teenager out. He was clinging onto the gauntlet so tightly like it was a security blanket.

"Hey, I'm Peter Parker," he whimpered.

Carol smiled at him as he stood up, "Hey, Peter Parker. You got something for me?"

Peter handed the gauntlet over to Carol but froze when he saw Thanos' forces move towards them. "How are you going to get it through all that?"

"Don't worry," Wanda said holding a defensive line with Okoye, Shuri, Nebula, and Pepper. Hope appeared alongside Gamora and Valkyrie. Hope and Mantis formed the last two in the line.

"She's got help," Okoye added.

"You ready for this?" Carol asked.

"What else are we going to do?" Wanda asked as she started to blast a path for Carol to get through. It seemed that their plan was going to work, until Thanos through the severed blade at the van, knocking the time machine dead and blasted Carol back so she also dropped the gauntlet.

Tony managed to spot it as Thanos did. Tony, Thor and Steve made one last-ditch effort to stop Thanos by tackling him, but Tony and was knocked back were knocked back and Steve rendered unconscious. Wanda ran over to him to check he was okay. He looked battered and bruised. She could only watch as Carol made an attempt to get the glove of Thanos' hand only for him to use one
of the stones to attack her. Wanda looked as Tony looked at Strange. She noticed that Strange held one finger up and that was the first sign she knew that this was going to be their only opportunity to defeat Thanos for good.

Tony got up to make a run for the gauntlet. Thanos pushed him back and Wanda squeezed her eyes shut as Thanos said, "I am inevitable."

She heard a snap of the fingers but unlike before, she did not feel any sort of energy. She opened her eyes and then it had dawned on her: Tony had the stones. They filled his hand up and Wanda could see and feel the pain Tony was in at that moment. He made one last look at her and gave a reassuring smile.

"And I am Iron Man."

And with a click of his fingers, Wanda took a sharp breath. She looked around and saw some of Thanos' army and ships turn to dust, the same way Sam, Bucky and T'Challa had done. She looked Thanos in the eye and she noticed that it had dawned on him that he had lost. He took a seat on a piece of concrete and with his head bowed, he crumbled to dust.

Wanda let a tear of relief fall from her eye and she heard a groan vibrate against her chest. Wanda looked at Steve and noticed he was waking up. He groaned, "What did I miss?"

"We won," Wanda breathed as she kissed Steve's lips. However, they were interrupted by Tony stumbling towards them. Thor got there to help him to the floor as Steve got to his knees.

"Tony?" he asked. Tony's face looked to have been burnt. It was as though the nerve endings were singed, and it seemed to have caused some significant if not fatal damage.

Wanda saw Rhodes and Peter land nearby and Wanda looked around for Pepper. Rhodes went over and gave a small smile like he knew that those were going to be his last moments with his best friend.

"Mr Stark," Peter pleaded as he got in front of a weakening Tony. "Mr Stark, please… It's Peter. Hey… we won. Mr Stark, we won. Mr Stark. We won, you did it, sir, you did it."

"Peter," Wanda said softly as she tried to take him away. She took Steve's hand as she saw Pepper land. "Come on. They need a moment together."

Wanda managed to get Peter away but he hugged her so close that she was on the verge of breaking herself. She saw Pepper put her hand on Tony's arc reactor, and his hand on hers. And like that he was gone. She turned her head towards Steve for a moment to see that tears were flooding for his friend. Wanda let Rhodes keep Peter close and went over to Pepper. She gently put her hand on her friend's shoulder as Pepper started to cry and press a kiss onto Tony's cheek.

They had won, but at the same time, Wanda wondered if the cost of losing Natasha and Tony was worth the victory.

*End of Part Nine*
Chapter One

Given the number of injuries that the armies had received, T'Challa ordered that everyone should come to Wakanda to receive treatment as it would mean the vibranium could heal people faster than standard medical treatment. Given the extent of people involved, they had turned the palace into a triage to check for those who would be fine, those who needed medical attention and finally the dead.

"You'll be okay Captain, it just looks to be bruising," the nurse said as she checked Steve over. "A few days rest and you'll be right as rain."

"Thanks," Steve replied as the nurse went to see to her next patient. Wanda had been checked over and other than minor bruising around her ribs from the fall, she was declared fit and healthy. She could not work out what to say next to Steve. He had only stopped crying about half an hour ago and his eyes were red-raw. Wanda had also been crying, mainly out of the shock of everything that had happened in the last two hours. "Have you seen Pepper?"

"They've taken those who have died to private rooms. She's with him," Wanda sniffed. "I just…"

"I remember when we first met. Tony was being a pain in the ass and getting on my nerves. I think the Mind Stone was messing with us, so we were all snapping at each other. I said Tony would not be the one to make the sacrifice play. He proved me wrong in New York. He went up to the portal with the nuclear missile."

"And now he's just saved the universe," Wanda took a seat on the bed and took his hand. "I don't even know how I feel. A part of me still hates him for what happened to my parents, but there is a little girl who is going to grow up without her daddy. And he adored her."

"At least she'll have the good memories."

"Hey," someone said beside Steve and Steve jumped up when he saw it was Bucky. In all the chaos of the battle, the two had not had a chance to reunite. "Still throwing yourself headfirst against people bigger than you."

Steve laughed as he hugged his best friend close. "It's good to see you Buck."

Wanda looked behind Bucky and saw Sam standing there. She sniffed and nearly knocked him off his feet as she hugged him. "I have never been happier to see you."

"Feels good to be back," Sam replied returning the hug. "Five years though. Where's Nat?" Wanda's face froze. She had not forgotten about Natasha, but she did not know how she was going to explain what happened. Sam got the hint and hugged her closer. "Was she in pain?"

"I don't think so," Wanda replied. "She sacrificed herself so we could get the Soul Stone. She got
you all back." Wanda rubbed her eyes and had to take a deep breath. "It's been a hell of a day."

"Well, yeah. We just thought Thanos' army twice in the space of three hours."

"From your perspective. It's been five years since Wakanda for us and quite a lot has happened since then." She looked over Sam's shoulder and saw a portal open up. Happy emerged with Morgan and then Milena. Milena instantly broke free of Happy's hand and ran over to her mother. "Hey, Slatka devojka."

Wanda leaned down and hugged her daughter close. The little girl wrapped her arms around Wanda's neck and Wanda instantly felt a warmth fill her chest. She had thought about nothing else but getting back to her daughter and holding her in her arms, after everything that had happened that day, was the best thing. The tears escaped her eyes and Milena asked, "Are you okay Mommy?"

Wanda sniffed. "I'm just so happy to see you." Wanda touched her daughter's face and looked into her blue eyes. Like Steve's, they had flakes of green in them and Wanda found those eyes so comforting. She kissed her daughter's head and lifted her into her arms. "Okay Milena, this is Uncle Sam."

Milena gave a small wave. Sam smiled and commented, "Hi Milena."

"And this is Uncle Bucky." Bucky smiled as the little girl and she smiled back. "Sam, Bucky, this is Milena. This is our daughter."

"I hazard a guess," Bucky laughed. "She looks the double of you Wanda."

"Daddy you hurt," Milena commented when she saw the bruises on her father's face.

"I know Munchkin. I'll be okay," Steve replied.

"So, um, what do we do now?" Sam asked. "Compound got blown up."

"You two can stay with us," Wanda suggested. "It's not a big house but it'll work out for the short term."

"Mommy, where's Aunty Nat?" Milena asked.

Sam nodded to know they needed to give Wanda and Steve a moment to explain to their daughter where her beloved godmother had gone. Wanda handed Milena to Steve who cuddled his daughter close.

"Aunty Nat had to go somewhere special to help save the world," Steve explained. "However, she said she loves you very much."

"Then why did she leave?"

Wanda's lips went thin and she fought to hold back the tears. She eventually said, "She was putting the whole universe before herself."

"Will she ever come back?"

Wanda shook her head. "No, she won't."

Milena's bottom lip starting quivering and Steve had to hug her closer to soothe her. "Hey Munchkin, it's okay. Mommy and Daddy are still here."
"Want Aunty Nat."

Wanda sniffed and had to wipe tears from her eyes. Milena was too young to understand that Natasha was never coming back. Milena was now sobbing into Steve's chest as Steve tried his best to soothe his daughter. Wanda took a deep breath and got to her knees in front of her daughter. She gave a reassuring smile before opening her arms to her daughter. Milena instantly allowed herself to be engulfed in her mother's arms as Wanda started to rock her gently and sang, "Heaven's gift to me just the way you are, A new aged child from a distant star. It feels so good just to be, So close to your love. You are heaven's gift to me. You are so sweet and pure just the way you are. Mama's precious jewel. Daddy's rising star. There's so much in life for you to see. And so much to be. You are Heaven's gift to me." It seemed the lullaby soothed Milena because Wanda could feel the heavy breaths against her chest that indicated that her daughter was sleeping. Wanda sniffed and pressed a kiss to Milena's head. "I should see if Pepper is okay."

"You sure?" Steve asked.

"She is going to need us more than ever." Wanda gently passed Milena back over to Steve and pressed a kiss to his lips. "I just can't imagine if it was you."

"I know. I thought I lost you for a moment."

"Well, you know by now that it'll take more to bring me down." Wanda gave a faint smile as she stroked the curls on Milena's head. "I won't be too long."

Wanda started to walk down the corridors to find Pepper sitting with Morgan. She guessed she was trying to explain that Tony had passed. Wanda's heart broke. Morgan was far too young to be dealing with the loss of a parent.

"So, Daddy not coming home?" Morgan asked.

"No," Pepper replied. "He loved you very much though and was thinking about you."

"Love me three-thousand?"

"Yeah. He loved you three-thousand." Pepper sniffed and pressed a kiss to her daughter's head. She looked up and saw Wanda standing there. "How is everyone?"

"Hard to say," Wanda replied. "We're so happy to have everyone back but I just had to explain to Milena that Natasha isn't coming back."

"I just don't know how I am going to go on."

"I felt like that when Pietro died. I did everyone wrong: I drank myself stupid and I isolated myself. I thought I had no one. You have us at least." Wanda tried to give a reassuring smile as she sat next to Morgan. "You have her."

"I know." There was a break in Pepper's voice, and she had to wipe her eyes. "I have to try."

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Steve had only just gotten to sleep when he heard Wanda stating to scream in her sleep. He snapped awake and began shaking her to bring her back to reality. Wanda was still screaming to the point where Sam had run into the room to help calm her down.

"Hey, hey, Wanda, it's okay. You're safe," Sam reassured as he put his hand on Wanda's shoulders.
After a moment, Wanda stopped screaming but started sobbing.

Steve rubbed her shoulders when he saw Milena standing at the door confused at the screaming. Bucky was also there, and he and Steve made a silent agreement that Bucky should keep Milena distracted. He picked Milena up and said, "Come on Milena, let's get you back to sleep."

"What's wrong with Mommy?" Milena asked tiredly.

"Just a bad dream."

Wanda took deep breaths to try to calm herself down before she buried her face in her hands. Steve engulfed her in his arms and tried his best to soothe her. After a moment, she stopped crying and was hiccupping against his chest.

"Maybe we should go downstairs," Steve suggested. Wanda sniffed and nodded. They made their way downstairs to the kitchen table and while Sam made tea for them, Steve asked, "What happened Wanda?"

"Nat," Wanda replied quietly. "She... when we were up on that cliff, she kept saying that I could have stopped her. I should have stopped her. That if I had stopped Thanos the first time, she would not have to jump to get the Soul Stone."

"That's not Natasha," Steve said. "You know Natasha would never say that to you."

"I know but it felt so real. And then somehow Milena was there, and Red Skull had to make me choose. I couldn't, so he made the choice for me."

Sam put the tea in front of her and asked, "It was Milena wasn't it?"

"No. He had plans for her apparently. She's got Steve's abilities. Red Skull wanted to use her to become HYDRA's secret weapon. So, in order to stop me from trying to stop him, he threw me over."

It was at that point she started weeping again and Steve enveloped her in his arms. Bucky walked in at that point and said, "She's asleep."

"And she's okay," Steve reassured. "He's not going to get her. HYDRA is done for."

"And besides, if he tries, he'll have to bust through us," Sam added. "Have you been taking your meds since..."

Wanda nodded, "Well, Steve has been making sure I do. I went into a very dark place after Wakanda and I don't want to go back there."

"You're not," Steve said. "You proved that when you didn't drink that whiskey."

"I could with a glass right now. Maybe two. It won't solve the problem though." Wanda looked at Bucky and then realised that he had no idea what she had been going through in the last seven years. "I have bipolar disorder."

"Same as your mother," Steve clarified since Bucky would have been more familiar with Manic Depression as the term.

Bucky nodded as he understood what was going on. "Yeah, I remember after Dad died, Ma would wake up screaming in the night. Then it got worse. Then better. Then worse."
"I've had that. I just needed someone to put it in context," Wanda explained. "But can't get low again."

"You won't," Steve said pressing his lips to her head. "You won't."

"What are we going to do about Natasha though?" Wanda asked. "There's no body…"

"Well, we gave Bucky a memorial without a body. Sam got one with no body."

"I hope my family said good things," Sam commented.

Wanda snorted. "They did. You spoke to them?"

"Well, Gideon was chewing my ear off because someone had appeared on their doorstep all confused about where they had been."

"You called Jodie?" Steve asked Bucky.

"And say what? Hi Sis, I know I have been back from the dead for years but-"

"Buck, she'll want to know you're okay."

"I guess I should call her in the morning."

"You should," Wanda replied.

"Have they said when they're announcing Tony's death to the media?" Sam asked.

"I think they're going to do a press conference tomorrow," Steve replied. "We should announce Natasha as well. People need to know the sacrifice she made."

It was then they heard a small coo. They turned and saw Milena standing in the doorway. Bucky blinked because he was certain that the four-year-old was asleep when he left her. "Hippo wants a cookie," she said pointing to the stuffed hippopotamus that was in her arms. Wanda nodded and went to the cookie jar. "Mommy, you okay?"

"Not really Milena," Wanda replied as she sat down with Milena on her lap. "I don't think I am very well."

"Like a tummy bug?"

"More like a bug on the brain. Mommy gets very sad sometimes and sometimes it is hard for her to be happy again."

"Is it because of Aunty Nat?"

"Yeah. She was very special to me. Like your Uncle Pietro."

"Will I ever meet him?"

"Maybe in another life. I just want you to be happy and not have to worry about me."

"I love you, Mommy."

"I love you too."
Pepper agreed that they should do the press statement together. Wanda was not prepared for how she would feel when she, Steve, Pepper and Bruce walked up and sat behind the chairs. In front of her, there were cameras flashing and reporters ready to ask questions. Pepper's eyes were so bloodshot that it looked as though she had not stopped crying. Wanda gave a small reassuring smile as she looked at Pepper. She put her hand over Steve's as he began to make his statement.

"Two days ago, the Avengers engaged in a battle with a being called Thanos. Beforehand, we had engaged in a mission to collect the Infinity Stones to bring back everyone who had been erased from existence. During that mission, Natasha Romanoff sacrificed her life to get one of the stones. Without her heroic sacrifice, we would have been unable to bring everyone back. Natasha was a dear friend to us; a fantastic godmother and we will miss her dearly."

Pepper took a deep breath and began her statement. "Two days ago, the Avengers engaged in a battle with a being called Thanos. During the battle, Tony Stark sacrificed his life to bring the fight to an end. Tony saved so many lives that day and he died a hero. He was a beloved husband, father and friend. He'll be forever missed. We wish for our families to be respected and left in peace during this time."

The four of them stood and walked off the platform. However, rather than the barrage of questions, there was a slow clap and then applause. Wanda held it together as they moved behind the curtain. Wanda sniffed as she and Pepper hugged one another.

"Well, I want to say that is the hard part over," Wanda commented.

"At least they'll give us the peace I guess," Pepper replied.
Chapter Two

One month later

Wanda could not decide if she wanted to have her hair up or down, but she settled for it to be down. It looked better that way. She rubbed her hand along the black dress she was wearing and walked out of the bedroom. Steve was helping Milena put her shoes on. She was wearing a black dress as well with her curls platted. Wanda did not like seeing her little girl in black. She was not even sure if she was right to bring her to Natasha's memorial. However, she had the right to say goodbye to her godmother.

"Okay Milena, so we're going to have a little celebration for Aunty Nat. We're just going to talk about her life and how much she means to us okay?" Wanda said getting to her knees. "We'll sing a few songs and maybe say a prayer. If some of us start crying, don't worry."

Milena nodded. "Do you think she'll like my dress?"

"She'll love it," Steve answered. "You ready?"

Wanda nodded as she took her daughter's hand. Bucky and Sam were ready in the living room and as soon as Milena was buckled in, Steve drove to a small church on the Queens-Brooklyn border. They could see many people starting to gather: Bruce, Clint, Laura and the kids, Pepper and Morgan, Peter and his Aunt May, Carol and Rhodes, Valkyrie and Thor, Scott and Hope with a very grownup Cassie, T'Challa, Shuri and Okoye, Strange and his friend Wong, and finally Rocket and Nebula with Peter Quill (who Wanda had established as the man Gamora had kicked in the groin), Drax, Groot and Mantis. Steve got out of the car and just as he got Milena out, he heard a voice.

"Nice day for it," Nick Fury stated. Maria Hill was beside him with a small sympathetic smile on her face.

"Sir," Steve said shaking his hand. "It's good to see you."

"Nice to be back," Maria replied. "I think she'll be impressed Cap."

"Well, she would comment on the fact we're doing it in a church."

Wanda watched as Milena went to greet Morgan. Both girls were so blissfully unaware that it hurt her. Tony's funeral had been planned for the next week. She then noticed a small boy toddle towards the girls. Nathaniel looked no older than Morgan yet was supposed to be nearly eight. Everyone who had been brought back was five years younger than everyone else. That was going to be fun to explain.

"Hey," Clint said as he walked towards her. "You okay?"

"Just about," Wanda replied. "I hate funerals. Spent hours trying to prepare what I was going to say."

"Me too." He turned his head towards Laura and gave a smile. "I think she made the right call though."

"Do you?"
"Having Laura back has made me realise that I can't put her through what I went through."

"I guess." Wanda took a deep breath as she took Milena's hand. "We ready?"

Wanda and Steve walked in first, followed by Clint and Laura. Finally, everyone was inside the church. Wanda had chosen a picture of Natasha from her and Steve's wedding day. She looked so bright and happy in that picture that it was a natural choice for her to be remembered.

"We're gathered today to remember the life of Natalia Alianovna Romanov," the priest began. "Natasha was a beloved friend to all of you in this room, and she gave her life to ensure that the universe to be saved. Before I invite her closest friends to share their memories of Natasha, we shall join in song."

Everyone stood and looked at the programmes. It was 'Abide with Me'. Wanda had chosen it because it was meant to be a symbol of presence throughout life. She knew Natasha was not very religious but she did have a fondness for this hymn.

"Abide with me; fast falls the eventide; The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide. When other helpers fail and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me."

Once the whole hymn was sung. Everyone sat down. Clint was the first to share his memories. Laura gave his hand a squeeze and a reassuring smile as he got up. He scratched the back of his head as he began, "Nat and I first met when I was assigned to take down the infamous Black Widow. She had been quite the troublesome inconvenience for us back in 2004 that Fury thought it was best, in his words, 'to squish her'. When I found her in Manama, I saw that she was just a kid who had been brainwashed. I made a different call. Got chewed out for it, but Fury knew I made the right decision. So began a friendship where I had her back and she had mine. I introduced her to my wife and son in full faith that she would not betray us. She was a loyal friend who my kids adored. She was like an aunt to them. When Loki possessed me, Nat did everything she could to try to get me back, including smashing my head into a railing. It worked. We became Avengers. World's mightiest heroes, but she was the only one that was mighty out of the two of us. I have thought about things over the last two weeks, and she did make the right call. I hate it but she saved trillions of people, including my wife and children. I could not be more thankful for it. Natasha was the greatest friend. She was family."

Clint sniffed as he walked back down to Laura. Wanda saw Clint wipe his nose with his hand and it looked as though he was trying to avoid crying. Steve was next to read his eulogy. Then it would be Bruce, and finally Wanda. Wanda squeezed Steve's hand as he got up. She wrapped her arm around Milena and started playing with the end of her daughter's hair.

Steve coughed as he began, "Natasha and I became friends not long after I had been awoken from the ice. It was still a new world to me, but Nat was welcoming, and we ultimately became partners in S.H.I.E.L.D. For two years, we became firm friends. Outside of missions, she would try to set me up on dates with women. Sometimes not at the most appropriate moments but it was nice that she wanted me to get a life. Not a lot of friends would do that. I think it also says a lot about her when she stayed by my side when we had to bring S.H.I.E.L.D down and my best friend suddenly came back to life. And we did have our disagreements, but she always did have my back." Steve gulped and started again, "I just wish I had her back as well."

Wanda gave him a reassuring smile as he came to sit down next to her. Bruce got out of his seat and started his eulogy. "Natasha and I met when she came to Kolkata to recruit me to the Avengers. She seemed calm and collected despite the fact she was facing up to someone who could rage at any moment. I decided to mess with her, and with hindsight, that was mean. The moment where our relationship changed was when we hung out one night in Germany. Then we started hanging out more. However, I made the stupid decision to run away from my problems that face them head-on. I
did love her but I still felt inadequate as a partner to her. Two years of being a gladiator will knock some sense into you. We did make a go for it after Wakanda, but work got in the way eventually. I should have gotten it together sooner. Maybe she would not have sacrificed herself if I have been braver. However, I know she would have done anything she could to bring everyone back. And I am proud of her for it. At least it wasn't in vain."

Wanda held her breath in as she stood to make her speech. She looked at Milena and tried to give a small smile to her daughter. "Natasha was my best friend. In fact, she was more than that: she was my sister. You would not have believed that when I first arrived in the US. Natasha did try to welcome me. However, I had depression and a whole bunch of mental illnesses so I could not process the fact that people were trying to help me. I actually threw a hairdryer at her at one point. We didn't really become friends until we had to go on the run. We bonded in Japan, and it was then I realised that Nat was on my side. Even after I started a relationship with my husband, she was there for us. Even in my lowest moments, Natasha tried her best to get me the help I needed. I loved her for it. What I should have done was notice that she was struggling. I knew she wanted to bring everyone back, and she would have done anything to do so. I did not think she would go to that length. I hate that she did it. I just want her here. I just keep thinking that she'll turn up around the corner. But she isn't coming back. I should think about the good memories. And I do. She was there to see my daughter being born. She gave me away at my wedding. The shopping trips and girls' night in. The parties." Wanda sniffed and tried to bite back the tears. "But I know that if she was standing here now, she would tell me to snap out of it. She would say that she did live a good life and that her sacrifice was not in vain. She saved trillions of people across the universe, and I am proud of her."

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At the bar, everyone was gathered and speaking quietly to one another. Wanda had taken a small booth with Bucky and was watching as Milena introduced herself to some of the other guests. She was currently speaking with Shuri. Given that Shuri had been crowned Queen in T'Challa's absence, she had abdicated upon his return as it was not her crown to hold. She was much happier to be working in the labs.

"She is so much like Steve's mother," Bucky commented.

"In what way?" Wanda replied sipping her water.

"She used to say hello to everyone in the street. Going around a market would take an hour because she would have conversations with everyone she met. Proper social butterfly that woman." Wanda smiled softly. "I'm glad Steve managed to settle down at last."

"So, what do you plan to do after this?"

"Not sure. I've been fixed up so I guess I can return back here for good."

Wanda smiled and said, "Great. Steve would love it."

In the meantime, Steve was sipping his whiskey with Sam when T'Challa approached with his hand open to shake. "Captain."

"Your highness," Steve replied. "Thank you for being here."

"After my father's death, Natasha spoke to me. I told her how death is not the end but a stepping off point. Bast and Sekhmet lead you to the green veld where people can run forever."
"Sounds like a great afterlife. Do you believe it now?" Sam asked.

"I went to the place where all my ancestors have been. I didn't see Shuri, but I guess she did not want the powers of the Black Panther. Yourself?"

"I want to say there was a white light. Maybe there was but I cannot say for sure."

Steve took a deep breath and said, "Do you think there is no life after death?"

"It's complicated. Granted I think my mother will be calling my return a miracle from God."

Steve snorted. "I guess somewhere Natasha and Tony are sparing with one another."

"It would be nice to think."

Clint was leaning on the bar when Wanda walked over and sat by him. Wanda bit her lip and she smelt the whiskey. "Want one?" Clint asked.

"No thanks," Wanda replied.

"You know, I wish there is a way that I can let her know that we won, we did it."

"She knows," Wanda said softly. "So what do you think you're going to do?"

"Properly retire. I have five years to make up for. Maybe my life will be peaceful for once."

"Maybe mine will be too." Clint gave a faint smile and wrapped his arm around Wanda. "Maybe we should move. Give Milena a fresh start."

"Where would you move to?"

"Don't know. Alaska? Canada? Somewhere by the beach."

"Sounds like a nice plan."

Wanda gave a small smile as she saw Milena run over to Steve. He smiled as he lifted her up and cuddled her close. Steve had spent time trying to find their house and she was probably rushing into this idea before consulting it with Steve. There were so many good memories of the house, and Wanda would not be lying if she said she was only running from the memories of Natasha. She was tired of running. She had to learn to live with the memories.
Chapter Three

The day Tony's funeral arrived, and Wanda felt as though her stomach was in knots. Her head had been pounding for the last week or so and she could not work out what was causing it. If she could, she would have asked to stay home, but Wanda wanted to be there for Pepper. They were currently standing outside a crematorium just outside New York with the other guests. The gathering was identical to Natasha's memorial, though it did include some faces that Wanda did not quite recognise - namely a man in his early twenties called Harley. Wanda sighed and turned to see Carol and Hope walking towards her. Wanda was actually surprised to see the Pyms at the funeral given everything that had happened between Howard and Hank.

"God I hate funerals," Hope commented. "I am surprised Dad wanted to come but he said that whatever happened between him and Howard had no bearing on how he felt towards Tony. As a kid, he was quite sweet."

"The best we can do is be there for Pepper really," Carol responded.

"Maybe you could sort your hair out while you're there," Rocket commented as he walked in front of her. Carol made a light kick Rocket's back in response. "I thought Yondu's funeral was grim."

Wanda looked up and saw the rest of Rocket's friends standing with Nebula. While the press had been banned from the funeral, Wanda wondered what they would have made of a talking tree and an insect woman being at the funeral of Tony Stark.

Quill approached Steve and commented, "Tell you what, I only knew him for two hours but he does leave an impression on you."

"Try eleven years," Steve responded with a small smile. "Thanks for staying for the memorial and the funeral."

"Well, Nebula said that she spent a year trying to keep him alive, so she wanted to call him an idiot for wasting her time."

Steve snorted and said, "Nebula has been a great help over the last few years."

"You would not think that she once tried to kill us," Rocket added.

"I am Groot," Groot commented.

"That was Gamora you chopped your arms off."

Wanda's lips went thin and asked, "Any sign of her?"

"Still searching. Stark killed the Thanos from the past so maybe that created an alternative timeline where Gamora was not killed," Quill replied. "She just walked away."

"She didn't know you, if that helps. If she walked away, then maybe you'll find her. You going to leave after this?"
"Five years of us being gone; someone has to help the galaxy rebuild."

Wanda nodded. She could see Bucky standing by the wall with his hands in his pockets and looking very pensive. Wanda walked up to him and he snapped out whatever thoughts he had.

"You okay?" Bucky asked.

"I feel like I want to throw up in the corner. How do you feel?" Wanda replied.

"I don't get why I am here given the last time that Tony and I interacted he tried to kill me."

"Five years can do a lot to a person. I never really forgave him for what happened to my parents, but we were civil. I made it clear that I didn't want to speak about it. It worked for us. Especially for the girls."

Bucky was about to respond when the hearse pulled up. 'Daddy' was written in flowers and resting against the coffin. Pepper, Morgan, Happy and Rhodes got out the car behind the hearse. Pepper looked as though she was trying to hold it together but wanted to scream and shout. Wanda gave a weak smile as she took Milena's hand.

Steve turned to the hearse and he got the signal that the service was due to start. He walked over to Rhodes and the two nodded. He turned around and saw Peter, Happy, Sam, Clint, Thor and Scott standing behind them. Rhodes and Steve took the end of the coffin and lifted it. The other men took hold of the coffin until it was firmly resting on their shoulder. Holding onto it for dear life, they turned and proceeded into the hotel, followed closely by Pepper and Morgan.

Wanda nearly burst out laughing as the sound of AC/DC's 'Back in Black' blared through the speakers as they walked in. Tony was never going to go for traditional hymns as people entered his funeral. Wanda and Milena found a seat behind Pepper as Steve, Rhodes, Happy, Sam, Clint, Peter, Thor and Scott rested coffin on the altar. When Steve joined Wanda, she whispered, "You okay?" Steve nodded, but he was fighting back the urge to cry. As bumpy as their friendship had been, Steve had loved Tony like another brother.

As they sat, the service conductor began, "Today, we're here to remember the life of Anthony Edward Stark. Anthony was many things in his life: the heir to Stark Enterprises, the CEO of Stark Industries, Iron Man. More importantly, he was a husband, father, and friend. His absence will leave a mark on so many people here and on the rest of the world."

Wanda looked at Morgan and gave a sad smile. She had been much older when she had attended her grandmother's funeral and only a little older than that when she and Pietro buried their parents. Pietro's funeral had been worse as she felt she had no one. Morgan was lucky; she had so many people looking out for her.

"I invite Colonel James Rhodes to share his memories of Anthony."

Rhodes stood at the front of everyone and began, "Tony and I met when we were starting MIT. Tony was this obnoxious teenager who believed he knew everything. He did. Except for how to talk to people." The audience gave a soft laugh. "Some people wonder how we ever became friends, and sometimes I wonder that too. I mean, as I said at his wedding, you know that he will have offended someone when his lips have moved. I guess what it comes down to him being a really good person deep down. When he was kidnapped in Afghanistan, I did not stop until he was brought home. We've battled together – sometimes with each other. He saved the world numerous times. However, I think his greatest achievement was settling down with Pepper. Granted, they were like two seals fighting over a grape, but Pepper did a lot to calm him down. I saw what happens when you two are
apart and it doesn't lead to good things. I think the final turning point was after Morgan was born. He dotted on his daughter like she was the most precious metal. Tony was a flawed human, but he cared for the people he loved, and that is all that mattered."

Rhodes sniffed and took his seat back by Pepper. Pepper wrapped her arm around Morgan and whispered, "It's okay."

"Virginia?" the serviceman asked.

Pepper nodded and stood at the front. She bit her lip and flipped through the pages she had spent hours writing. She sighed and dropped them to the floor. "I had spent hours writing those papers until I realised that planning what I wanted to say would not do Tony much justice. I know he would do the same if it were me in that coffin. I could spend ages talking about how we met. How much he drove me insane with his antics. How desperate I was to get him back when he was taken a hostage in Afghanistan. How much he drove me insane from being Iron Man. Tony always was a performer. Even to you guys because he only showed his good side to Morgan and me. As Rhody said, Tony was flawed but he did care about the people he loved. He cared about everyone in the room. He was Iron Man, but he was more than that to everyone here. The Tony I liked to think about is the day Morgan was born. He held her like she was this glass doll that could shatter at any moment. It does surprise me how quickly he adapted to being a father. I had postpartum depression but he looked after me and Morgan until I felt like myself again. It's those moments that I want to remember. And yes, I am proud of him for saving the universe and everything he did as Iron Man. However, if I want Morgan to take away anything about her father, it would be the man she knew." Pepper turned for a moment and put her hand on the coffin. She pulled out a card that had Morgan's handprint on and placed it on the coffin. "I love you, Tony." Wanda twirled Milena's curled and pressed a teary kiss into her daughter's hair. Pepper sat in front of her and Wanda leaned over to hug her friend from behind. "We're going to be okay right?"

"Yeah. You will."

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After the cremation and the collection of Tony's ashes, everyone gathered back at the Stark house. Most people were sipping on Tony's prized whiskey aside from Wanda who was sticking with orange juice. Steve and Wanda were standing in the kitchen away from the rest of the party. Wanda needed some quiet for a moment. She felt tired and just wanted to rest her head.

"Long day huh," Steve commented as Wanda wrapped her arm around his waist.

"Very long," Wanda replied. "I have had this pounding headache all day."

"You okay? Not like you to get headaches."

"I know. I think it could be a menstrual migraine even though I can't even remember the last time I had a period." Wanda pondered for a moment. When they went for the artificial insemination, it had been when her womb lining was at its thickest to increase the chances of the eggs attaching to her uterine wall. Her last period was two weeks before that. "Oh..."

"Oh?"

"I haven't had a period since we did the insemination process."

Steve cottoned on to what Wanda had realised and looked around. He asked, "You think you're..."

"I think so."
"Is this a good thing?"

"Well, I could have realised this at a better time than Tony Stark's funeral but given everything that has happened in the last year or so... yes?" Steve smiled softly and pulled her into a hug. Wanda fell into the embrace and smiled as the warmth filled her. Wanda turned her head to see Morgan holding one of the Iron Man helmets. "Hi, Morgan. What do you have there?"

"Daddy's helmet. I saw him talk to it," Morgan replied. Steve frowned as he gently took the helmet from Morgan.

"Pepper, does this thing record things?" he asked.

Pepper nodded and walked over to touch the helmet. All of a sudden, it lit up. "There's a message on here."

Pepper placed the helmet on the coffee table and then the image of Tony was projected in front of everyone. Wanda recognised the clothing. It had been from the day before he died. Pepper sat down with Morgan beside her as Wanda took Milena's hand.

"Everybody wants a happy ending. Right?" Tony asked. "But it doesn't always roll that way. Maybe this time. I'm hoping if you play this back, it's in celebration. I hope families are reunited, I hope we get it back and something like a normal version of the planet has been restored - if there ever was such a thing. God, what a world. Universe. Now, if you told me ten years ago that we weren't alone, let alone, you know, to this extent, I mean, I wouldn't have been surprised, but come on, the epic forces of dark and light that have come in to play. And for better or worse, that's the reality Morgan's going to have to find a way to grow up in. So, I thought I better record a little greeting, in the case of an untimely death, on my part. I mean, not that death at any time isn't untimely. This time travel thing we're going to try and pull off tomorrow, it's got me scratching my head about the survivability of it all. Then again that's the hero gig. Part of the journey is the end. What am I even tripping for? Everything's going to work out exactly the way it's supposed to." The projection of Tony knelt at Morgan's eye level and finally said, "I love you three thousand."

Wanda sniffed and wiped her eyes. She saw how Pepper was keeping herself brave. She stood up and took Morgan's hand. It was time to scatter the ashes. Wanda had to laugh a little at the vessel he was going to be kept in. It was an arch reactor with 'Proof that Tony Stark has a Heart' engraved onto the metal. It was placed in the centre of a bouquet of flowers.

Everyone followed Pepper and Morgan out of the house and to the lakeside. Steve picked Milena up as they watched Pepper push the bouquet into the water. He wrapped his arm around Wanda and Wanda rested her head on his shoulder. He gently kissed the top of her head. Wanda looked around and saw everyone paying a moment of respect to Tony in silence.

She bowed her head and started whispering a Jewish prayer under her breath, "Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba. B'alma di v'ra chirutei, v'yamlich malchutei, b'chayeichon uv'yomeichon uv'chayei d'chol beit Yisrael, baagala uviz'man kariv. V'im'ru: Amen."

Wanda sighed as she tapped the pregnancy test in her hand. She was walking up and down the bedroom as she waited for the result to appear. Steve was sitting on the bed and watching his wife pace.

"It's going to be okay whatever the result Doll," he reassured.
"I know," Wanda said. "It's just after the last pregnancy and everything that happened in the last month. How long is left?"

"About thirty seconds."

"I can't look, Steve." Wanda handed him the test and he gave a small smile. "It's going to be okay right?"

"Yeah." Steve looked at his watch and then looked at Wanda. "You ready." Wanda nodded and Steve looked at the test. He looked back up at her and gave a broad smile. "It's positive."

Wanda finally smiled and straddled Steve's hips as he pulled her in for a hug. Wanda pressed her head against his and asked, "How long can we keep this a secret?"

"Until you feel ready."

"Deal." Wanda smiled softly as she pressed her lips against his. "A baby."

"I know. Seems almost like fate now." Steve pressed a kiss to her lips again and hummed softly against her lips.

Wanda hummed at the feeling of Steve's lips kissing the top off her bare shoulder. Steve worked his hands under her dress and pulled it over her head. Their bare chests met and Wanda started to grind her hips against Steve's erection in order to get some stimulation. She tilted her neck up and allowed Steve to cover it with tiny kisses, eventually sucking on the spot he knew drove his wife crazy. His hand dipped inside her knickers and stroked along her centre and Wanda's breaths became very heavy, especially when he gently rolled her clit.

"Oh god," she whispered. Steve smirked as he dared to slip a finger insider her walls. Wanda let out a soft moan and he added a second finger. They massaged her walls and Wanda really had to hold back the moan she wanted to make in fear of waking Milena, Sam and Bucky. Steve's fingers crooked and his lips lowered to her breasts. They had grown since they first started making love, and were covered with faded stretch marks, as were her stomach, hips and thighs. The battle scars of carrying a baby to term and the now more stretchmarks would join.

"God you look so beautiful," he commented. That was never a lie. Her body had changed so much but he would still say she was beautiful until she was old and covered in wrinkles.

Wanda could feel herself shaking with the emergence of her orgasm but unbeknownst to her, Steve had an evil smirk on his face. After counting to five in his head, he pulled his fingers out and Wanda moaned in frustration. "I was so close."

Steve laughed and pressed a kiss to her lips. He pulled her knickers and his sweat pants down and tossed them aside. With one simple thrust of the hips, he was inside her and it was like home. Wanda hiked her hips up as Steve began to move and their breaths mingled together. The thrusts were lazy but the power was not lacking behind them and they both moaned, groaned and gasped with each movement.

"I love you," she moaned.

"I love you too," he replied with a tremor in his throat.

The familiar feeling began to bubble in her belly and Wanda's toes curled and her heels pressed against Steve's lower back. Her nails began to dig into Steve's shoulders and with one energetic thrust, Wanda shook as her orgasm travelled up her spine and shattered her nerve endings. Steve
groaned as Wanda's walls tightened around him and he rested her forehead against his.

Steve's fingers gently stroked around her belly button while Wanda's eyes became hooded. They had been through hell and back in the last couple of months, but now they had more hope for the future.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, only two more chapters left.
Chapter Four

A week later, Wanda had her eight-week check-up. She had been holding her breath in case it was bad news. However, they got more than they bargained for. Wanda leaned back as she waited to hear the baby's heartbeat, only it sounded very fast and very irregular compared to what she remembered about Milena's heartbeat.

"The baby sounds strong," Steve commented as he took Wanda's hand.

Wanda took up the courage to look at her doctor and asked, "Is everything okay?"

"Well, I think you should consider getting a bigger car," Doctor Kwon commented. She turned the screen towards them and pointed to two little specs in the yolk sacs. "It's twins."

"Oh," Wanda responded in shock. She did not know why she was shocked. She was a twin herself, so she had an increased chance of having twins. In addition, they had used IVF to conceive them, so the likelihood of two of their embryos attaching increased their chances. "Are they both okay though?"

"Strong heartbeats. Okay, we do need to talk about the fact that pregnancy with multiples has more complications than a regular pregnancy, but considering the complications you had with Milena…"

"Bed rest from now on?"

"I think you need to really increase your calorie intake to make sure you're okay, and just take it easy. No need to save the world again."

"Don't worry, we've handed in our notice."

As Wanda and Steve walked through the hospital corridor, Wanda smiled at the little specs on her ultrasound picture. It was some happy news to celebrate for once.

"Do you reckon we can start telling people?" Wanda asked. "We're past the point we were in the last pregnancy?"

"I think it might be a good idea. You tell Pepper and Clint and I tell Sam and Bucky?"

"Deal."

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"Okay, Milena, just be careful when throwing that ball about. Uncle Rhodey was not happy when you broke his car window that one time," Wanda instructed as she pulled up outside Pepper's house. However, she frowned when she noticed Pepper's car was not there. "Okay, that's weird. I said I would come around." Wanda undid her seatbelt and told her daughter, "Stay here a minute." Wanda got out of the car and walked towards the door. She knocked on it and waited to hear some movement. No noise. She found the key under the plant pot and opened the door. "Pepper? Morgan?"

"Mommy?" Milena asked.

Wanda turned around and sighed. "I said wait in the car, Milena."
"Don't like it on my own. Where's Morgan?"

"That would be my question." Wanda walked into the house. It looked the same as it had done the previous day. Only cleaner. Wanda walked into the kitchen and that was when she found a folded-up sheet of paper. She picked it up and read aloud, "I've taken Morgan to my mother's in California. We're okay, I just need some time to be alone with Morgan."

"Where's Morgan?" Milena asked again.

"She's with Aunty Pepper. She's okay." Wanda breathed a sigh of relief. At least they were safe. In fact, Pepper going to spend time with her mother and daughter would be the best option for Pepper to make sense of everything. "They've just on a very long vacation to see Morgan's grandmother."

"Oh. Do I have a grandmother?"

Wanda gave a small sad smiled and knelt to her daughter's height. "I'll explain when you're old enough to understand." Wanda's phone rang and saw Thor's number appear. "Hey, Thor, what's up?"

In the meantime, Steve had brought Bucky and Sam to a diner in Manhattan so that he could explain the news to them himself. Since they were living under the same roof, the two were bound to find out sooner or later.

"Breakfast on Steve," Sam commented as he was looking through the menu deciding what he wanted to eat. "What calls for this occasion?"

"We came back from the dead?" Bucky responded.

"That calls for six bottles of champagne. Breakfast means something more serious."

"It's not that serious," Steve explained. "It's important but not serious."

"So… what's up?" Bucky asked.

"Well, about a year ago, Wanda and I made a decision to try for another baby. However, Wanda had a miscarriage at the end of last year. We started trying when she was ready again but we struggled and used IVF…" Steve left it open for his friends to work out the rest.

It took Sam and Bucky ten seconds to fill in the rest and when it dawned on them, they smiled broadly. "You serious?" Bucky asked.

"Found out last night," Steve replied. "It's very early days yet so no one else needs to know."

"Cross our hearts," Sam replied. "This is awesome."

"It is."

"How's Wanda feeling?" Bucky asked.

"Nervous given the last pregnancy, but we're confident everything will be okay this time." Steve heard his phone ring and saw it was Thor. "Hey buddy. What's up?"

"You're going into space?" Wanda asked as she saw the spaceship in the middle of Central Park. Rocket was helping his friends load it up while Thor stood in front of them with Valkyrie.
"I have a ride," Thor replied. "It sounds too soon after Stark and Natasha, but he would not want us to sit and ponder everything."

"True," Steve replied. "We're going to miss having you around."

"When can we expect you back?" Valkyrie asked.

"Um… about that," Thor replied.

"Thor, your people need a king."

"No, they already have one."

Valkyrie scoffed, "That's funny." She still laughed until it dawned on her that Thor was not joking around. "You're serious?"

"It's time for me to be who I am and not who I'm supposed to be. But you – you're a leader. That's who you are."

Valkyrie looked taken about until she nodded in acceptance. "You know I am going to make a lot of changes around New Asgard?"

"I'm counting on it, your majesty." The two shook hands and Thor turned to Wanda, Milena, Steve, Sam and Bucky. "So, do you reckon you'll miss me around here?"

"Very much," Wanda replied as she pressed a kiss to his cheek. She looked over at the ship behind them as Rocket was preparing the ship for take-off."You take care of him Rocket."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Rocket replied. "Listen, you lot take care of yourselves."

"You too Rocket," Steve replied as he lifted Milena up. They watched as Rocket and Thor board the ship. Thor gave one last wave before the door shut. Steve wrapped his arm around Wanda and watched as the ship blasted into the atmosphere. "Maybe that can snap him back into shape."

"Nah, he's quite cuddly," Wanda replied. "Well, that's Clint, Thor and Pepper."

"Maybe it's good that they're taking time for themselves. I think that's what we need to do."

Wanda nodded and put her hand on her stomach and took Milena's hand. "Yeah, I think that's doable."

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Later that afternoon, Wanda switched on Skype and made a video call to Clint. While she did want to tell Pepper, she wanted to give Pepper some time alone with Morgan. In addition, Clint had done so much for her that she wanted him to be in the know as well.

"Hey, how's it going?" Clint asked.

"Not too bad. Still feels strange to have Sam and Bucky back but they've settled in well. Milena acts as though they've always been here," Wanda replied. "You?"

"Good. It's strange because of the kids... Cooper should be in high school, but he's had to start middle school again."

"I thought that when I saw Nathaniel with Morgan and Milena. He's older than them, yet he's only
"I know. It's just strange."

There was an awkward pause before Wanda said, "I have something to tell you: I am pregnant."

Clint blinked a few moments and tried to count on his fingers, "Wait so when you went through time-"

"I'm only about seven weeks. We found out just after the funeral. We probably should not be telling people but Sam and Bucky were bound to find out sooner or later. I wanted to tell you and Pepper."

"Congratulations. How are you feeling?"

"It feels odd given everything but maybe everything happens for a reason. Steve is over the moon. Though we need to sit Milena down to explain."

"When we told Cooper that Lila was coming, we bought him a McDonalds."

Wanda snorted, "She prefers KFC. She's not a burger fan believe it or not, but she can eat fried chicken like there's no tomorrow."

"She'll be a good big sister."

"I think five years will be a good gap. She'll have lost a lot of her possessive nature that she had when Morgan was born."

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The next day, Wanda and Steve decided to take Milena to KFC. They usually did not feed her fast food, but they needed a way to butter her up before dropping the bombshell that she was not going to be an only child anymore.

"Okay Munchkin," Steve said. "Mommy and I have something important to tell you."

"So, you are going to be a big sister," Wanda added. Milena blinked and wondered what her parents meant. "So, Daddy and I are having a baby."

"How?" Milena asked. Steve nearly choked on his coke at the question.

"Well, the baby is in my tummy, and when the baby is ready, I will go to the hospital and come home with a baby." Steve could not believe how Wanda instantly knew how to explain to their daughter where babies came from. "You okay with that Milena?"

"I think so. How does the baby get into your tummy?"

Again, Steve picked the wrong moment to take a sip of coke. However, Wanda seemed stumped. She had asked this question to her father when she was six and he only had one response.

"Mummy and I made a wish one night and that wish came true. Twice because we got you and your brother out of it."

The explanation was so hilarious now she knew where babies came from and how tricky it had been for her parents to have children. Yet she could not work out how else to explain to a four-year-old how babies get inside the mother.
"Daddy and I made a wish one night and that wish came true. Twice because we got you and your baby brother or sister out of it."

"Oh. Okay." Steve had to snort at how unfazed Milena was at the idea of becoming a big sister. She returned to her mini chicken fillet meal but asked, "Can I have a baby sister though?"

"I can't decide that Milena, but a baby brother will be just as good. I had a brother and we had loads of fun."

Milena pondered it for a moment and then shrugged before starting on her yoghurt. Steve and Wanda turned to one another and laughed softly. They could take that as a positive response.

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As the summer started to roll into fall, there was a little chill in the air and everyone settled back into their routine after the Time Heist and The Battle of Earth. Milena settled into kindergarten like a duck to water and every afternoon Wanda was inundated with playdates.

However, there was one job that Steve had to do before it was all over: return the Infinity Stones. Scott, Bruce and Hope had patched up the technology so that he was able to go back to the moment they took the stones and keep the timeline intact. On one sunny afternoon in a secluded part of their local park, Steve, Wanda, Milena, Bruce, Sam and Bucky gathered to finish this mission.

"Now remember, we have to return the stones to the exact moment we got them," Bruce reminded as he opened the case where they had stored the stones. "Or else, you're going to open up a bunch of nasty alternative realities."

"Don't worry Bruce," Steve replied as he closed the case. He turned to Wanda and pressed a kiss to her head. "I'll be fine Doll. I'll be back before you know it."

"I don't dispute it," Wanda replied softly. "Granted, I don't know about that Soul Stone."

"Surely, if you bring it back, it should bring Nat back," Sam said. "It's worth a shot."

"It's impossible."

"Bringing us back was impossible too," Bucky pointed out.

"I did try to bring her back," Bruce interrupted. "When I snapped my fingers."

"We know," Wanda replied. She watched Steve climb onto the portal and he gave a small smile to her. "Ten seconds?"

"Before you can even blink," Steve replied.

Bruce started the machine up and Steve put on his Quantum Suit. He gave a small wave to Milena and in a flash he disappeared.

"That suit is ugly," Sam commented. Wanda laughed.

"Okay bringing him back in five, four, three, two and one," Bruce announced. The machine opened again and Wanda's heart pounded. Steve had not come up yet. Bruce started pushing some buttons and he muttered, "Come on Steve."

Suddenly, Steve appeared with a gasp. Wanda ran to him and hugged him. "I thought we'd lost you."
"Sorry Doll," he chuckled. "Punching Red Skull in the face took some time."

"I take it you couldn't get her back."

Steve shook his head. "It's not as simple as an exchange. Once the soul has been taken, there is no taking it back."

Wanda nodded. "At least you tried." Steve gave a small smile as he went to pick Milena up. Wanda whispered, "I guess I am making peace with this better than I thought. Does that mean she didn't matter to me as much?"

"Of course not," Steve said. Steve kissed Milena's head and said, "Wanda, you've grown so much."

"You have," Sam added. "I haven't been around to see but where you were when Pietro died to now is a massive difference. For one you're letting people help you."

Wanda gave a faint smile and said, "I guess I just have really good people helping me." They found a picnic bench to sit at. Bucky sat Milena on his lap and played with her curls. "So, what do we do now?"

"No itching to be the Scarlet Witch again?" Bruce asked.

"I am officially retiring."

"And me," Steve announced. "I know I said I was putting Captain America into retirement about five years ago, but this time it's for good."

"I guess I should join you," Sam said. "I mean being dead for five years gives some perspective that I shouldn't spend all my time working."

"Me too," Bucky added. "I haven't had much peace in the last eighty years. I think that it's time."

"We've got a lot of time to make up for," Sam said playing with Milena's curls. "I think we should start by preparing Milena to join the soccer team."

Bucky and Milena jogged to a little section of the park while Sam grabbed a soccer ball. Wanda, Steve and Bruce watched the three attempt to pass the ball around and Wanda leaned into Steve. "Did you ever think we'd get here?" she asked.

"We've had to fight for it, but I always thought we would."

He pressed a kiss to her lips, and she said, "I love you."

"I love you too."

End of Part Ten
Epilogue: Hymn for the Weekend

Oh, angel sent from up above,
you know you make my world light up,
when I was down, when I was hurt.
you came to lift me up.

Seven months later

"So, all we have to do is read this prayer?" Sam asked as he and Bucky stood outside the synagogue.

"Yep," Bucky replied. "At least it won't be in Hebrew."

At that point, Wanda and Steve approached holding onto the two small bundles. Steve was bouncing his son, who was dressed in a white t-shirt and blue overalls while Wanda held their daughter, who was wearing the same white dress Milena wore for her naming ceremony. Milena was running around with Morgan, not caring that she was going to get her dress dirty.

Wanda did have a smile on her face despite the obvious bags under her eyes. "Good morning for it."

"You look as though you could sleep for a few hours," Sam commented as he stroked his goddaughter's cheek.

"It would be helpful if they were both in sync," Steve replied.

"It would help if your son did not have a bottomless stomach," Wanda replied.

"We ready?"

Wanda nodded as she walked into the building. The synagogue was no different from what it was five years previously, only there were more guests. In addition to Pepper, Rhodes, Bruce, Carol, and the Khans, Clint, Laura and the kids, Scott, Hope and Cassie, Peter and his Aunt May, and Strange. Most importantly, they had Sam and Bucky. She still felt the emptiness for having Natasha missing from the service, but she was picturing Natasha sitting with Milena, trying to keep her goddaughter from being the centre of attention. She never thought she would say it, but she missed Tony being there. It did not seem natural to see Pepper and Morgan without him. After spending time with her mother, Pepper had moved to Long Island where it was quieter and had a better school district for Morgan to attend. It was for the best and there wasn't a long drive away from Brooklyn.

They were going to announce the name of their son first. He had been born first so it made sense that he would have his b'rit shalom first. This meant that they had to stand in a separate room as they had to bring people in one by one. Rabbi Moszkowski, then Steve, then Wanda, then Bucky, then Pepper who would be holding onto the baby as they walked into the room. Pepper passed the baby boy to Bucky, who then passed him to Steve again. His son was not too happy about being passed around during his nap and whined.

Everyone stood up and Rabbi Moszkowski began, "Ba-ruch Ha-bah! Blessed is the one who has
come for the Covenant on the eighth day! Blessed are You the Lord, our God, Creator of the Universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments. We assemble now to welcome this newborn into Your Covenant and into the community of Israel."

There were loads of prayers that were different from the ones said at Milena's naming ceremony. Granted the customs for a boy were very different to girls and Steve was still wrapping his head around it. In fact, it had to be Bucky and Pepper who announced his name.

They both said in unison, "May this child thrive with his mother and with his father. Let his name be known among us as James Samuel Anthony, son of Steven Grant and Wanda Tzipporah."

Wanda and Pepper shared a small smile. While Wanda and Tony were never really friends, he did save the universe and Steve wanted to honour his friend in the best way he knew how. James and Samuel were no brainers, and in fact they were both looking smug – though Bucky more so since it was his name that came first.

James was welcomed into the Covenant and now it was their younger daughter's turn. Wanda was surprised at how well Milena was behaving with her little sister on her lap. She had adjusted to being a big sister quicker than both Steve and Wanda could imagine. She was being legitimately helpful as she would often hand her parents wipes and burp the babies. As much as she had been disappointed to find out she had a brother, she had doted on James as much as her baby sister. Once Wanda's belly had started growing, Milena seemed to be able to process that there were babies growing inside her mother.

Steve gently handed James to Bucky and took their daughter to the front. Wanda got to announce the name this time, "Now in the presence of loved ones, we give to you the name Natalia Marya. Let it become a name honoured and respected for wisdom and good deeds. Natalia Marya, we commit ourselves to the unfolding of your promise, may you walk the path of goodness, beauty, and truth. Do justly and love mercy and be humble before the mystery of life and the grandeur of the universe into which you have been born. May God's blessing rest on you now and always."

"Okay, so many of you will know the origin of Natalia: she was named for our dear friend Natasha Romanoff. Natasha was more than a friend. She was a sister. She looked out for both of us and supported us from the beginning. She was brave, loving, loyal, and funny. She's everything that I would want my daughters to be," Steve added.

"Marya was my mother. She was loving and protective; she only wanted Pietro and myself to be happy and healthy. She was so smart as well, which I guess she got from my grandmother since she did have some really good advice. She once told me that love is where you find it, and I did find it with someone I did not expect to, and he turned out to be the love of my life."

Wanda and Steve shared a smile with each other, and Steve pressed a kiss to her lips. After Sam read the prayer, the service concluded, and everyone returned to the house in Brooklyn.

"Natalia is a great name," Clint commented as he and Wanda watched Milena hold onto James like he was the most fragile doll in the world. Wanda was holding Natalia, who was sound asleep. "She'd love it."

"Well, I think she'd haunt me if I didn't," Wanda replied. "She kind of reminds me of Natasha in a way."

"Stubborn?"

"Well, she is my daughter so no surprises there. I don't know what it is, but she has those eyes that
look as though they are trying to reassure me that I am okay."

Wanda gave a smile and found Steve in the midst of the crowd of people. Wanda wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed a kiss to his lips. "Almost seems perfect."

Steve pressed a kiss to Natalia's forehead and rubbed Wanda's arm. "You okay?"

"I'm okay. Exhausted but okay." Steve raised his eyebrow and Wanda relented. "I just miss them."

"Me too, but we'll always have them with us and we will think about them every day."

"Mommy," Milena said. "They want to take a picture."

"Okay Milena. Give James to Daddy and I'll get everyone together."

Steve leaned down and gently took James from Milena as everyone started arranging themselves around the sofa. Wanda and Steve sat in the middle of the couch with the twins. Milena sat between them with Sam and Bucky beside them and everyone else surrounding them. Once the large group photograph was taken, Wanda wanted one with just the children. It would be a good reminder of the future they had created.

Cassie and Kamala took one of the twins while Cooper, Lila, Nathaniel, Milena and Morgan found positions on the couch. Peter was somewhat forced to join in on the account that he was under eighteen but he actually did not mind, especially when Morgan asked him to sit on his lap. The photographer asked them to smile brightly. Wanda leaned into Steve as they watched the kids smile and pose for the photograph.

"Did we build this?" Wanda asked.

"It was a long time coming, but we did," Steve replied.

The End

Chapter End Notes

And that is the end. Thank you to everyone who has left a comment or kudos. It's been a long road. I had the idea before I had even seen Avengers: Infinity War and this has been my baby for the best part of eighteen months so I really appreciate all the support.

Below I have listed some of the stuff that helped shape this story through the writing process.


Movies: IT! (2017), Star Wars: The Last Jedi (2017), and Mamma Mia: Here We Go Again (2018)

Television shows: Sharp Objects (2018), and Sorry for Your Loss (2018)


Music influences: 'Gasoline' by Halsey, 'Delicate' by Taylor Swift, 'Alright' by Kendrick Lamar, 'breathin' by Ariana Grande, 'you should see me in a crown' by Billie Eilish, and 'Sober' by Demi Lovato.

Fiction books that were read during the writing process: Sharp Object by Gillian Flynn, What I Lost by Alexandra Ballard, All We Have Left by Wendy Mills, Jakob's Colours by Lindsay Hawdon, and Paper Weight by Meg Haston.

Non-fiction books that were read during the writing process: Shockaholic by Carrie Fisher, and Four Sisters: The Lost Lives of the Romanov Grand Duchesses by Helen Rappaport.


Poetry: Ariel by Sylvia Plath (both the original and the restored editions).

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