Summary

Darcy doesn't understand why the Winter Soldier kidnapped her, or why he stares at her as if he knows her. She's never met him before in her life... right?

Notes

Extended Summary:

Hydra never explained to the Winter Soldier why they kept injecting drugs to wipe his memories... or why they began the electroshock torture to make him forget about simple things outside of the mission.

It's not until he meets Darcy Lewis ten years later that gives him the incentive to find out what's been taken from his mind.

Finally free of his captors, the Soldier will use whatever means necessary to gain his memories back and figure out why her eyes seem so familiar, even if that means kidnapping her and tracking down the Chitauri scepter to use on himself.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

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Present Day

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By around 10:30 pm, the Tanger Outlet center was vacated, giving them a perfect location to lie low for the night. The half lit lamp posts in the empty back lot were the only source of light. The only thing missing from the scene, Darcy noted through the increasing rain, was some fog to make this night a true horror story in the making.

To keep herself from passing out, she stared at the racing water droplets on the window, each drop hitting a different spot, creating new vague images through the faint street lamp’s light outside. The incessant rapping of metal fingers on the car’s peeling leather console was her background music. With no iPod to distract her and an angry coconspirator, too annoyed with her to speak to, she was royally fucked.

In the near silence of the idle Expedition, her friend lay reclined at the wheel. Darcy was breathing through her mouth now, the medical tape around her chest far too tight for her to properly take a much needed deep breath. The stolen painkillers haven’t kicked in yet, but she doubts they’d do anything more than rid her of her headache. She was bruised at every inch of her body and six of her ribs were possibly fractured. She can’t move the toes on her right foot-all broken too probably. Her badly tangled hair probably looks like a bird’s nest, and somewhere around her left butt cheek she’s got a bleeding gash that’s slowly seeping crimson red blood into the faded beige interior beneath her.

Yet, with all that hurt at her expanse right now… it’s his soft, nonstop tapping at the wheel that thrust cold shards of dread into her heart.

“I told-”

“-don’t fucking say it,” he grunted, using his last bit of patience to keep from using her as a verbal target for his obvious fury. “Don’t say it, because if you say it…”

Darcy glared as a drop of rain hit the glass, too close to another falling drop. Her eyebrows knit together as she watched the two beads of water slowly merging to create a bigger blob. Her eyes turned to glare daggers into the side of his face.

“You were captured!” She wheezed anyway, “what did you expect me to do, James-”

“-oh so now I’m James again.”

“-just stand around and wait for them to kill you?”

“I had it covered,” he growled, shoulders tense. The harsh tapping at the wheel signaled his increasing agitation.

Her left eye twitched with the repressed need to throttle his stupid, overly thick neck. “Dude! I told you you’re not invincible. Plus, did you forget my training? I did everything you taught me. And you just… Jesus, you almost died! Y-y-you almost had a bullet put right into that pea-sized nut you call a brain! So what if I ran into the crossfire? This?” she points at her naked chest covered only by the ratty, crusty gauze he found at the bottom of his Mary Poppins backpack. “It’s nothing. I only have a
few scrapes. You’re goddamn alive because of it!”

“Oh, you’re just the hero of the night then. Let’s call the Iowa City mayor and ring up a parade… Jesus, woman... you’re half broken and barely breathing—” he paused for half a second, “and we still failed in acquiring Strucker’s location!” he bit out, glaring through the rearview mirror. She felt two inches tall under his reprimanding glare, this was the most lively she’s ever seen him outside of a fight or in bed… but she held on to her obstinacy.

He huffed. “All of this could have all been prevented if you just listened to—”

“No, dude! Don’t pull that shit. I told you from the beginning of this deal that we were gonna need his—”

“Я не нуждаюсь в помощи Капитана Америки!” he screamed, his chest heaving.*

Darcy opened her mouth to shout right back the few Russian profanities she'd picked up from him, but with the six broken ribs and medical tape cutting at her circulation, her scream came out to a pained shriek.

Bucky turned swiftly in his seat, which would have been impressive with his nearly broken spine… if it weren’t for the fact that he could get trampled on by a herd of elephants and still hold that same attentive gleam in his eyes.

“Pain level?” the soldier asked, no, demanded lowly.

Darcy ignored him and stared back out at the window again. Too frustrated with the situation to notice the shuttered look on his face.

“Darce,” he barked.

“Barely a three,” she lied.

“Bullshit. Tell me the truth.”

Darcy stayed silent, but she felt his calculating gaze as anything but passive. He categorized every visible knick on her skin from the exploding shrapnel. He stared openly at her split lip, her taped up chest. It’s funny really. How caring the most feared and deadly ghost could act while holding such a closed off, hostile expression. She much preferred him when he wasn’t trying to act all RoboCop, but this newfound worry in the Winter Soldier was nice too.

She peeked at him from beneath her matted hair.

Somewhere in the back of her mind she compared how far along they’ve come together, how quickly she’s come to learn all his little tells. Through his Winter Soldier interrogation act, she noted the little twitching muscle in his jaw. He was scared for her. Dang it. She was really trying to stay mad at him this time.

“Fine,” she growled. “Fine!”

His face was a smudge of streaked dirt. The black kohl she applied for him the other night was smeared around his face and forehead, mixed with sweat and soot from the fire. His too-long, greasy hair looked more tangled than hers, and that beard was getting scruffier every day. Yet, in this exact state, he looked more put together than that first day she met him… it’s because his eyes were less wild.
He merely raised a brow at her assessment.

“My ass hurts and I can barely breathe. My toes are numb and I have the worst headache in the world… and I’m hungry! So there. Pain level: eight and a half. Ya’happy?” She bit out, staring down at the grime on her torn white shirt. Her unspoken apology was lost in translation to her babbling, but he understood, he always did.

From the corner of her eye she saw Bucky swallow nervously.

“Jus’… don’t. Not again, not for me. Okay? ’m not worth risking your life for, Darce,” he grumbled, uncomfortable with the sudden attack on their feels. She didn’t have to look at his stupid face to know he was giving her that sad, little half-assed crooked smirk.

With an upturned nose and fake spite, she quipped, “I’m not making any promises.”

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Three Months Earlier; One Week After S.H.I.E.L.D’s Compromise.

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The funeral was small in the sense that there was only a little less than fifty people in attendance, some of it was immediate or extended family, the rest give or take a few dozen news cameras and reporters, eager to share the story in the sudden death of S.H.I.E.L.D’s co-founder.

The day was dank, humid, a perfect backdrop to one of the most sad days of her life. The sky above them was black and cloudy, not because of the rain, but from the smoke and gasoline clouds still swirling in the air from the Hellicarrier detonations last week, only a few miles South of their current location.

Aunt Peggy, may she rest in peace, wasn’t related to Darcy in any sense other than in their uncanny similarities in character despite their huge age difference. Actually, come to think of it, Darcy wasn’t blood-related to a single person here except for her mother, Linda Lewis-Carter, sitting beside her. To her other side sat Scott Carter, her adoptive dad since the age of 5, Peggy’s nephew.

Darcy looked around her once more. She was seated in the second row, her chair was creaky and stiff and she wished she was sitting a little closer so she could better see the lowering casket.

The liquid slowly trickling down from the sky wasn’t rainwater. It was evaporated oil from the explosion, condensed in the smoggy sky and seeping out through the black clouds 3,000 ft above. The downpour was light enough that no one was too bothered by the light grey droplets, and falling softly enough that no one really needed an umbrella yet, but the humidity and thick smell fogged up her senses and caused the memorial to look like a blur of colors and swirls through the lenses of her glasses.

Aunt Peggy’s casket rested beneath a gauzy green tent. The casket itself was as white as her hair, the drapes and cushions where her cold body rested was smooth satin and pale blue.

Darcy glared stubbornly at the giant bouquets of yellow and white roses. Aunt Peggy liked red.

She knows that her aunt would have hated everything about this ceremony, right down to all the freeloaders standing behind her family, waiting around for a comment about her aunt’s life’s work for SHIELD.

Ever since the secrets leaked onto the freaking internet, the world wasn’t nearly satisfied with the
onslaught of previously classified information.

The press wanted insight into all agent’s opinions on their actions during missions. Politicians used the lies and deceit of SHIELD to vow that they were nothing like the liars of the organization. President Matthew Lewis was tight-lipped over whether he had any previous knowledge of SHIELD using European ex-assassins as allies— which he did but wouldn’t admit until he was sure it wouldn’t backfire on his current Presidency and the credit of all President’s before him.

Up until Natasha Romanov’s hearing two days ago, Congress had been looking for a way to make themselves look like the innocent ones by verbally attacking anyone associated with the organization.

Her aunt would have been one of the many, like Natasha, under scrutiny if it weren’t for her death. But that was Aunt Peggy for you, carrying her secrets to the grave.

Someone in the crowd of reporters behind her family gave a slight cough, interrupting the peaceful music the talented string quartet was currently playing. Her cousin in front of her turned around to glare at the offending person dumb enough to have allergies during their aunt’s funeral.

Sharon’s short blonde hair was pinned back in a low, tight bun, and Darcy resisted the urge to yank on it like she used to as a kid.

As if sensing Darcy’s thoughts, Sharon turned around again, her shoulders tensed under her black blazer. She eyed the crowd steadily, her gaze narrowed and calculating, searching for someone or something. Up until last week when all SHIELD files leaked, she hadn’t known her cousin had been working for those jack booted thugs she’d met in New Mexico almost a year ago.


“You’re off duty, Sher.” Darcy nudged her cousin’s chair lightly with the tip of her black boot. The entire perimeter of the gated graveyard was equipped with dozens of trustworthy guards. Darcy and her mom (and the reporters probably but they were too unsolicited to count for anything other than pests) were the only non-lethal people in attendance.

(No, Darcy doesn’t count her Taser as a weapon. Not anymore, especially with the new knowledge that her super girly cousin, the one that used to scream at the sight of a spider when they were kids, can probably kill her with her bare hands. Her stupid taser could never compare now.)

“I’m never off duty, Darce.” Sharon responded with a wry smile, turning forward again to watch the casket hit the ground six feet below. The high pitched note of the violin gave one last echo, and the crowd was once again bashed in somber silence.

“Good afternoon, everyone. Family, friends. Brothers in arms.” The priest nodded to the many unsmiling faces around her, then slightly bowed to the short line of dressed Army men standing vigil behind Aunt Peggy’s grave. “Let us commend Margaret Penelope Carter to the Mercy of God.”

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Darcy grew up in a little town near Quantico, Virginia. With an adoptive father like Scott Carter—whose family had a history of war heroes dating all the way back to the War of The Roses in 1455, England- came many privileges and advantages other kids never had. The Carter’s came from old money, with Aunt Peggy as the sole inheritor. In her death, all the money split between Sharon’s nephews: Darcy’s dad and Sharon’s dad, Eric.

The Carter’s had an estate to their name that was so grand, it housed Peggy, her parents, and Sharon’s comfortably. Darcy's mom jokingly called the home their English Rose.
Right between the two most powerful cities in the country, Darcy and Sharon grew up in the same three story, symmetrical red brick Georgian Revival. An almost 18,000 sq ft house on over twenty acres of land, and yet still the two cousins grew up to be closer than sisters.

The Carter estate in Virginia was like, less than an hour south of D.C. She’s been there millions of times in her lifetime, and every new moment spent as a kid in her Nation’s Capital amazed her a little more than the last. The magic that happened on Capitol Hill dazzled her, the power and secrets contained behind those closed doors lured her in like a moth to a flame. Political Science was her gateway into the Disneyland she thought the Congressional office buildings just might be.

That is, until certain superheroes and gods began to take root in her life and threw all her previous concept of magic and expectations for her life out of whack.

What exactly she was going to do with a poli-sci diploma now, she had no freakin’ clue. She was filled to the hilt with endless facts and historic dates, and not one ounce of motivation to actually do something with her shiny new degree.

The last time she visited the Capital, Darcy’s life had yet to be rocked by the drama that came with knowing an alien Norse god and psycho astrophysicists. She crawled out of her hole after her Finals week that year for Peggy’s 94th birthday.

She and Sharon weren’t dumb enough to throw a sick old woman a party at the nursing home located near Buchanan St (a street name that made Aunt Peggy frown, for whatever reason) but they enjoyed the stories of her wild youth, anyhow.

During that time, The Smithsonian was working on developing a new exhibit dedicated to Captain America in the National Air and Space Museum. Needless to say, she was not skipping town after the funeral without first checking that shit out.

It was Monday, three days after the funeral. Her parents already drove back home to Virginia last night with her aunt and uncle, leaving Darcy to crash on her cousin’s couch until her flight back to New York later that Monday night. Sharon was currently pledging for the CIA, so those few nights alone at Sharon’s were spent eagerly listening through the thin walls like a creepy fan girl for any sign of Captain America next door. She’d never met him, but Darcy was more than acquainted with all his Avenger friends, though.

Dr. Jane Foster, her previous employer and BFF, currently works for Stark Industries in his “stArk” tower in the city.

Ever since Jane finished her Bifrost project and created that magnetic gizmo that pretty much saved London from mortal peril, the hoedown throwdown with those dark elves gave Darcy, Dr. Selvig and Jane some much appreciated nods of approval and Thanks from several powerful British faces.

Before any European tech industry could think of it, Tony snatched Jane and Eric up and got them working directly under him.

And where did that leave Darcy?

It left her with a useless college degree. Free Stark prototypes in her purse. Habitual Tuesday lunch dates with her bro Tony Stark. A real (and paid, omfg) internship working as CEO, Pepper Potts’ personal assistant-

-and currently frozen at the grand entrance into the coolest World War II memorial she’s ever seen.
As soon as she gets inside the exhibit, she felt eyes on her. Judging by the people she hands out with, she should have never just brushed it off, choking up the feeling of being watched to the many people milling around.

For a Monday morning, the place was pretty packed. Dozens of bodies were crowded around the large rooms, each face more awed than the last.

The people watching was almost more entertaining than the exhibit itself. It was like walking into a portal to the past. The lights were all dimmed, making the open space look like it was in sepia. A soft song was playing through the ceiling’s speakers, Helen O’Connell’s “I Remember You” set a pretty somber mood with the overhead audio storytelling of Captain America’s sad and heroic life.

“Dad, dad!” a little boy’s voice cried out excitedly, breaking several people including Darcy out of their trance. “Look! The Captain’s naked!”

Darcy turned around to see what the kid’s fuss was all about. At the furthest corner of the large open room, was a tall pedestal. Spotlights from the floor lit the mannequins up to show off the six faceless men’s uniform. Like the kid said, the Captain America mannequin in the middle was naked, Darcy snickered and took out her cell to snatch a photo.

In the corner of her Stark phone’s screen, a bright shining surface lit up her phone, causing the picture to blur. Darcy looked up, halfheartedly searching the area ahead for any reflective surfaces her flash might have accidentally caught.

Her eyes snapped back to the right, a tall man in a navy green hoodie stood stoically in front of the James Barnes mural. But that wasn’t what stood out. No, the dude was full on glaring her way. His dark eyes were partially hidden under his long hair and hood, but his gaze was pinned in her direction. 

_The hell? Is he lookin’ at me?_ Sneakily, or well, what she hoped was sneakily, she checked around the rim of her low baseball cap toward the people around her. After a quick glance, the hair at the back of her neck stood on end when she realized there was no one around her for him to be looking at. Nope. He was definitely glaring at her.

She turned her head back around toward where the creep was standing but was met with empty space.

“So, kaay,” she mumbled, moving on with her life and shaking the guy’s creeptastic stare out of her mind.

Stiffly, she marched over to the pane of glass where the weirdo was standing. All of “James Buchanan Barnes”’ stats and history were etched into it. The black and white photo was one she vaguely remembered seeing from one of her many American History textbooks.

He was frustratingly handsome, in a he’s-probably-dead-or-as-old-as-my-grandpa-so-don’t-think-too-dirty kinda way. His clean shaven face was blank, staring off to the side, but his lip was quirked into a small smirk that had her instantly mirroring it on her own face.

“James Barnes.” She murmured, pressing her nose closer to the tiny letters to get a better read. Why do I feel like I’ve seen you before?

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“What the hell do you mean you don’t have any more rental cars?” Darcy barked at the frightened clerk inside the small auto rental shop next to the D.C. airport.
The shaking woman at the desk just gave a small squeak at Darcy’s outright fury.

“The idiots in the airport tell me they sold my goddamn plane ticket to some rich freaking asshole and now you’re telling me there aren’t any more cars?! All the fuckin’ flights are unavailable and I have a 6 a.m. meeting scheduled tomorrow morning for Pepper Potts in Manhattan! Do you understand who that is? Pepper friggin’ Potts! CEO of – oh, for the love of Christ.” Darcy growled, fumbling into her purse for her blaring cell phone.

In front of her, the clerk gave sigh of relief to be rid of Darcy, the long line of angry travelers grew louder in their annoyance with the situation after every second passed with no good news of more rental cars.

“I’m sorry Miss, but all East coast flights have been booked until next week until further notice. The cars are all rented out because of it,” she recited for the third time. “But you can go across town and try your luck at Jerry’s Auto Rental and be at your meeting in New York in no time-”

Darcy held up a finger to the woman’s face. Sandy, as her name tag read, leaned back. “I’m not done with you.” Darcy snatched the two bags of luggage she brought with her and left the line and stomped outside where it was quieter.

“Clint!” she growled after picking up the call, “what the hell is happening with the airlines today? You’re at Stark’s right? Tell ’em to pick me up!” A few people around her perked up in interest at her loud exclaim.

His voice was muffled by the too loud, frustrated travelers inside the shop behind her. “No can do, cupcake. All air traffic control is giving a No Fly Zone to any and all private jets, the helicarrier’s shit show last week made for a few terrorism scares. The TSA’s almost at level: 9-11 panic.”

“Are you shitting me? How does that even- Christ, do you know when this is going to blow over?”

“Sorry, kid. Still trying to figure that one out myself. Need me to send a car?”

Darcy snorted, and was about to respond when a large hand clamped over her mouth and dragged her to the side of the car rental shop.

“What the hell!” Darcy squealed, dropping the phone. It clattered onto the ground away from her, ending the call as the screen cracked. So much for Stark’s shatterproof prototype.

“You need to come with me. S’not much time.” The deep voice behind her demanded. Darcy whirled around, surprised that the man’s arms loosened enough to allow her the action. Beneath the Army green hoodie was the same hobo-looking creep from that morning at the museum. His eyes were quickly assessing the few people behind her, his gloved hands clamped tight on her shoulders.

“I don’t think so, dude! What, a-are you stalking me? Let me go-”

Suddenly, inside the rental store next door, Darcy heard the loud sound of shattering glass, and the chaotic roar of the mob of people screaming for their lives.

Booming gun shots rang through the air, rapid fire rained upon the people in the store just on the other side of the wall to them and just like that, she was pressing herself closer to the creep in the hoodie rather than away from him.

The guy harshly pushed her behind him and dragged her down behind a dumpster. Quickly, almost robotically, he lifted the freaking dumpster with one hand and pulled out a ratty black book bag from beneath with the other. He crouched down beside her and quickly whipped out a rifle she’s never
seen before outside a Sylvester Stallone film, and a large hunting knife. He handed her the knife and strapped the bookbag onto her back.

She stared wide eyed at the empty alley way where the shots were being fired, then back at her knife.

"What do you expect me to do with this?" she hissed, holding the sharp blade between loose fingers away from her as if diseased.

"Use it," the hobo guy grunted.

The gun shots next door rang louder and his hand snatched her purse from her hands and grabbed at her taser. Without a word he tied her satchel tightly around her shoulders over his bookbag and planted her taser into the pocket of her own hoodie.

“Dude, who are-”

“не время, девушка.”*

“Huh?! Is that even English?!’

At the sound of squealing tires, she almost considered stabbing the freak with the same knife he handed her and making a run for it.

"Stay silent."

A black truck sped toward the mouth of the alley way and stopped. Darcy thought it was weird she wasn’t a little bit more freaked out by being faced with a new and obvious threat, but her hands were steady as they gripped around the hilt of the black knife with new purpose.

Mr. Creepy Stare angled her away from the truck, the alleyway was silent in the weird little stare down between them and whomever was inside.

“S’a car waiting at the end of the alley. Run and wait for me there. If anyone nears you… attack.” He demanded lowly, this time definitely in English. His head turned to glare at her for added effect.

The men got out of the car in front of them, each one bigger than the other. The burly men with tree trunks for necks held guns that made the museum guy's rifle look like a Nerf gun.

“Вы провалили миссию, солдат. пора вернуться теперь.”*

The man in front of her tensed, his head hung low and shoulders hunched like a predator poised to attack. “Перейти трахать себя!,” he whispered.*

“The girl will die then.” One of the men at the forefront said. Simultaneously then, all five of the thugs aimed their guns straight at Darcy.

“Run, Darcy.” The museum guy ordered.

No need to tell me twice! Forgetting her luggage, she held her satchel tightly to her chest, she ran away at full speed into the dark alleyway and away from the shouting and loud gun shots echoing behind her. Concrete dust rained down on her as a few stray bullets missed her and lodged into the bricks and cement as she ran. She didn’t even pause to wonder how the guy knew her name.

Her sneakers splashed into a cold puddle of water, causing her shoes to squeak after every step. Every inhale of the dank, putrid smell of the alley made her lungs protest. She wasn’t in the best shape of her life, when she outgrew her Zombie Apocalypse Training phase as a teen she never
found a reason to continue keeping in shape. If she made it out of this alive, she thought to rethink that little notion.

This was the weirdest freaking hostage situation she’s ever been a part of, she decides as her thighs and calves begin to burn with her speed. Then again, she’s never been kidnapped and has nothing to compare this to. She briefly worried how freaked out Clint must be when her call dropped after her shout.

At the end of the alley, an old white car was parked idly. The ignition on and door open for her, as if he knew the gun fight was going to occur. She turned around, squinting into the alley for any sign of the hobo guy or any other creepy Russians with guns.

Suddenly, Darcy’s heart practically stopped at the feeling of cool metal against the back of her head.

“Got you.” A low, Russian accent grumbled into her hair. The guy reeked of cigarettes and she almost gagged at the smell of his breath. The butt of his gun pressed tight against her skull. “Ten years too late, girl, but we finally got you.”

“The fuck are you talking about,” she demanded, her voice high pitched and hysterical. She thanked the Lord the idiot didn’t see the knife held tightly against her chest yet. She still had a chance…

Quicker than she could anticipate, the gun slammed against her head. The skin at the back of her skull immediately split open, she felt the trickle of warm blood down her neck. Darcy fell to the ground in a heap, knife and taser falling away from her as her vision went in and out of focus, but she fought against the darkness that threatened to render her unconscious.

Darcy got back up onto her feet, searching blindly through her swimming vision for her weapon as she got up. Her hands touched the cool metal of the sharp knife.

“The bitch wants dance!” the brute exclaimed jovially in his thick accent. “Then dance we must do!”

With a loud grunt she swiped the knife at the rat-faced man. He rocked out of the way without even really trying, laughing as he lazily watched her blindly swing at the air and miss him each time.

“You’ve got chutzpa, but your aim! It is horrendous.” He giggled, catching the blade of the knife in his bare hand and pulling it out of her grip without even wincing. “Here, girl. Let Makmir show you proper aim with knife, yes?” Darcy’s eyes widened at the maniac gleam in the Rasputin wannabe’s eyes. The man leveled the blade along her throat. Darcy swallowed as she felt the first layer of her skin split against the metal, a thin line of warm blood pooled against the blade at her neck. “You point knife to artery and-”

Bang!

Almost in slow-motion, the guy in front of her dropped like a sack of potatoes. She stared down at the still smoking bullet hole at the back of his skull. In an out of body experience, Darcy looked up to greet the sight of the guy from the museum standing at the mouth of the alley way, bloodied and staring down at his knife in Makmir’s limp hand.

He looked back up at her, his demeanor as cold and unattached as before. “I told you to attack didn’t I?”

Darcy didn’t have the chance to scream or the pleasure in rebutting his sarcasm because she was a little too preoccupied with fainting.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone that's read. I hope this chapter exceeds expectations.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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April, 1991

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“Where’d the kid go?” the Winter Soldier’s barely used voice rasped angrily through the cold, black steel of his lower-face mask. The gash on his shoulder bled though his black tunic, the long cut drew erratically up his right ear. Sweat mixed out of his hairline and rolled into his eyes, blurring his vision. But he couldn’t remember where he got the cut, or why he was angry, or why he was sweating so much.

The only thing clearly whirring through his mind was the unfamiliar memory of a baby girl crying hysterically.

Where did the girl go.” His handler corrected, his thick and heavy Russian accent had no business correcting his English, but the soldier smartly stayed quiet, knowing better than to speak out of turn.

“What girl, soldier? Hmm? Who are you speaking of?” The soft droning voice belonging to one of the doctor’s was supposed to be soothing.

It was supposed to relax him enough to trust his keepers, far enough to allow them to go on with their procedure without throwing them one by one two feet into the nearest concrete wall. He had a faint recollection of doing that once, but he couldn’t remember when or what his punishment had been.

All he remembered was the distant feeling of cold.

There were hundreds of fading black cardboard boxes, overflowing with old and new files. They were lined along all four walls of the dark, restricted area. The smell around him was vaguely familiar, dust and old parchment. He thinks he’d been there earlier in the week, but he can’t be sure.

The crying rang louder in his ears the more he tried to remember.

Today must be different. Today was unlike the faint memories in his head, he was strapped into a chair as cold and metallic as his arm. He wasn’t in the records room for a check-up, or debriefing, or a useless motivational lecture he recalls stiffly listening to out of respect and loyalty to the speaker than actual need for guidance. No, the soldier was here, on this unfamiliar chair within the familiar room, for a new purpose.
The glass doors before the soldier slid open with a near silent woosh. Two men, both donning full black suits stepped in, surrounded by six armed guards. With a reflex that was beaten into him, he analyzed the men and the threat they posed to his makers. Each were armed at least three weapons, the soldier was outnumbered if it came down to a fight, as if that’s ever stopped him before.

The fingers of his metal hand flexed subconsciously, a movement that caused all eyes to warily flicker towards it.

His doctor from before gave a slight cough, shuffling out of his line of sight toward the men that walked in.

“Herr Strucker, he isn’t responding to the injections, sir,” the doctor supplied. “His body is resisting the memory represent virus you’ve supplied from—” he stopped, stuttering over his words as he glanced over to the man beside Strucker. “…well, it’s only a matter of time.”

The soldier took a moment to linger on the doctor’s comment. They’ve been giving him memory represents, and that’s why he couldn’t remember anything. He did not care that they were treating him here as if he were some brainless drone, unable to follow simple conversation. In the end, that slip will benefit him.

The Winter Soldier remained motionless in his chair. Somewhere to the left of him, another engineer stepped up to finish welding his arm.

He stared back at his handlers with false nonchalance, hyper-aware of all sound and movement around him as he forced his mind to remember anything that led him into this room.

Strucker remained silent, his beady black eyes boring right through the soldier’s. The soldier stared back in calm defiance, quiet hatred brewing in his eyes for this man obviously in charge of his false keep.

The soldier had to remember. Soft blue eyes swam in his vision as he stared back at Strucker. The little girl was important somehow. He had to fight. He had to-

“Soldier. I’d like to introduce you to Alexander Pierce. He will be introducing a new method of… recalibration, so to speak. From now on, he’s now in charge of… your care.” Strucker smiled softly, the sight almost feral as he stared down at the strapped in soldier.

The man stepped forward, he was possibly the oldest man in the room, in his mid-forties. He walked with an air of posh sophistication, as if everyone in the room including the soldier were there on his dime. With all the Soldier knew, or didn’t know, it was probably true.

“What’s your name, son? Do you know your name?” Alexander Pierce said, his American accent calm and unfamiliar as he stepped forward, bending down closer into the soldier’s personal space than anyone had ever dared before. His eyes flickered over the cut on the soldier’s neck, his sweat soaked skin, he leather bands strapping him down to the chair.

The soldier wasn’t exactly sure what his own name was, there had been so many different ones. He remained motionless, and nonresponsive.

“I’ll just call you Soldier then. How’s that sound?” Pierce waited a moment for the soldier to respond, but then eyed the black mask covering the lower half of his face. “Oh right! Sorry! Forgot about that thing! Must be uncomfortable, huh?”

Yes, it was uncomfortable. But he made no move to tell the man that seeing as how he wasn’t going to do anything about it.
Pierce removed a handkerchief from his suit pocket, holding it up for the soldier to take, like an offering of hope held up to a pitiful prisoner. “For your neck, it’s bleeding. Doesn’t that hurt?” he asked in almost kindness, the light in his eyes gleamed.

The soldier looked down infinitesimally to his strapped hands and back to the handkerchief dangling in the man’s hands, wanting more than anything to reach out and strangle him with it.

“Oh! I’m sorry, son! Here. Let me.” Pierce softly dabbed at the gash at the soldier’s neck, and wiped away at the sweat pooling on his lids. “There. Much better. All taken care of, boy.”

Pierce got up and folded the handkerchief up as if it was something contaminated, and tossed it into the waste basket directly in the soldier’s line of sight. He turned back to the soldier, eyes still alight with something wicked. “So, tell me, doctors. What do you know of the long-term effects of electrocution?”

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Darcy had never fainted before in her life. If she was ever prone to cliché’s, then she would wake up to the sunlight shining through her lids, bright rays streaming through the dirty car windows and waking her up as the light hit her right in the retinas. She’d stretch her arms inside the confines of the car and for a blissful moment forget all about the gun fight from before.

Her life never quite cut her any slack, and it seemed even after falling face first onto hard concrete, her bad luck still wouldn’t run out.

Because when Darcy woke up from passing out, she woke with a jolt, feeling like she’d been hit with a bag of bricks, her limbs tweaking out with a mind of their own. The tense muscles in her neck twisted awkwardly and gave her the worst whiplash ever.

Her friendly neighbor was at the wheel, stoic and expressionless, as he swerved dangerously fast around the few cars on the unmarked highway.

Hobo guy was tense, staring forward with a clenched jaw. She didn’t say a word to him. Darcy didn’t ask him why he saved her or why he’s obviously been following her since the museum that day. She didn’t ask whom those men were or why they so obviously knew who she was.

Darcy vowed to sit silently, quietly wincing over her aching neck, and wait patiently for him to praise her for being the perfect little abductee. He’d be so glad he snatched up such an open-minded and mature young woman, he’d practically be forced to tell her who he was and what he wanted with her.

Because if Darcy May Lewis was an expert at anything, it was at playing the waiting game.

-☆-

Okay, so maybe that was all a lie. Darcy was not patient nor quiet, and she’d never been called “mature” in her life. After almost fifteen whole minutes of aggravating silence after waking up from
her faint, she turned to the hobo and gave him the mightiest, harshest shove she could muster from her tiny little fists.

Hobo didn’t even flinch, in fact, as her fist made contact onto his arm, his mouth did a funny little thing where it smirked. She’s punching the fucking asshole and he has the gall to laugh!

“Who the hell are you?!” She explodes, her voice shrill and too loud in the small car. Her fists took a life of their own as she landed punch after pounding punch onto his right bicep, for all the world probably feeling like a gentle breeze with the way he’s reacting.

“Why were those people after me?” Punch, “Who were they?!” Smack, “Why were you following me, creep?” Punch, this time she aimed wrong and the jab landed her with a sharp pain in her wrist.

"Ow! Are you fuckin’ made of metal!? God!"

This time the guy goddamn smiled! He turned to face her, car still going a zillion miles per hour, which was now slightly more worrisome since his eyes were firmly planted on hers and not on the road. The near invisible upturn of his red lips wrinkled his steel blue eyes at the corners.

“Maybe.” He said in an almost unsure whisper, his voice no longer as demanding as before when he was acting all Soldier Boy.

Darcy sat back down, leaning into the car’s door and as far away from him as possible. Her hands covered her face, as if that could help her escape her current situation.

“At least tell me where we’re going. It’s the least you could do,” she spoke around her clenched fits.

"North.”

- ⭐ -

North, turned out to be his euphemism for “I don’t know.” Because some fuckton hours later when the sun began to rise along the East coast, they finally took an exit off i-95 somewhere in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Wordlessly, he pulled them up to the first motel he could spot right off the interstate highway.

“Portsmouth’s Motel. God, they couldn’t figure out a more unattractive name for a town? Really?” Darcy announced as he let her out of the car, it was the first thing she’d said to him the whole car ride over. She had found her iPod, tangled up somewhere along the bottom of her purse and plugged it in, promptly ignoring her captor the entire ride.

Her bladder was about to explode, and for all she cared, he could have pulled up to Rinky Dink’s Motel, so long as it got her to a toilet before she burst.

Her hobo just stared at the towering neon sign, as if wordlessly apologizing for the motel’s horrible title.

“We’re stopping here for the night.” He announced quietly, slugging his backpack over his shoulder and dragging her toward the front office. He reached his hand into her purse, because who gives a shit about respecting someone’s personal things when you’ve already lugged them across several states, and pulled out her wallet. “You have money right? I’ll double check the perimeter while you
check us out a room.”

Darcy looked up at him aghast. “You kidnap me and have me pay for the damn hotel room?! You’re officially the worst kidnapper in the world.”

The hobo glared down at her warningly, checking around them to make sure no one heard her loud comment. He gripped the top of her arm and dragged her upward, close enough that she could smell the dried blood on his face, until she was practically reaching on tip-toes. His pupils were pinpricks, glaring down at her wildly as his mouth formed an impatient snarl.

“This is not a kidnapping, девушка! получить свою голову из задницы!”*

"Oh, I'm sooo glad we got that cleared up then. But, let me also remind you, dude, I don't speak Russian.” she snarled right back.

The psycho pushed her away, hard enough that she took a few stumbling steps back when he released his hold. He squared his shoulders, turning away as if to physically keep himself from squeezing the pee out of her, before facing her again. His expression was a little less harsh this time as he glared down at her stubbornly.

Darcy held her ground and met his gaze, silently daring him to push her around like that again.

“I am your ally now, girl. The sooner you realize that we have a common enemy, the sooner we can get you back where you belong.”

He turned, and marched toward old motel and disappeared around the corner.

As soon as he was out of sight and around the building, Darcy ran back to the stolen car, pulling at the handle in desperation to get away while she had the chance.

She knew how to hotwire a car, it was one of those things she and Sharon learned to spite their goody-two shoes family. Not that it mattered in the end, considering all of them minus her mom were spies.

What Darcy never learned to do though, was pick a lock. That was Sharon’s specialty. So as she forced her fingers between the tiny crack in the car's doorjamb and struggled to force the door open, she realized the precarious situation she was in.

She eyed the dimly lit street. She could take her chances, hitchhike her way out of this guy’s radar until she could reach a phone and call Clint back for a rescue.

He was probably sick with worry, he tended to do that often these days.

Darcy huffed, giving up on trying to pry the car door open with her bare hands and turned around to march up to her hobo fiend and admit defeat.

He was right. They did have a common enemy here, whoever that might be. They could benefit help from each other.

She could tell him about the Avengers, tell the hobo all about Clint and Sharon and their spy-abilities. They’d be more than ready to help take down those Russian idiots from the alley.

Darcy didn’t need to hide in some dingy motel room with a murdering freak that smelled like piss and sweat.
And speaking of piss and sweat, as she went to enter the check-in office, Hobo-man rounded the corner and looked at her knowingly.

His expressionless face masked whatever superior emotion he was probably repressing at her expense.

“Did you get the car to unlock?” He asked, flashing the car's key and tightening it in his grip. Darcy was in silent awe of his nerve, having been convinced he wasn’t capable of anything other than angry brooding. She didn’t give him the satisfaction in answering.

- ☆ -

At 3 a.m. that next night, Darcy was sitting up in the bed, too afraid to touch the crusty bed covers to pull them up to her shoulders like she used to do when she was little and afraid of the dark.

The room smelled like old cigarettes and cheap perfume. The musty stank, and dusty cloud that rose up from the bed’s rock-hard mattress when she sat down had probably never been disturbed since 1979. The peeling moss green wallpaper had seen better days, and despite her overactive imagination, she managed to convince herself that the stain on the beige carpeting only looked like puke.

On the floor in front of the bed, several different types of firearm parts were scattered around, each one more lethal looking than the last. His backpack must have weighed a frickin’ ton— funny how she didn’t feel its weight during her adrenaline rush in the alley the night before.

Her companion had been motionlessly sitting at the fold-out table by the small window, staring out toward the street through a small crack between the ugly green curtains, making sure they were as safe as they could be while he mindlessly stripped and reassembled a small pistol.

When you spend an entire day watching another person in fear they might shoot you in your sleep, you tend to notice a few things.

Like the way he sat up ramrod straight, despite having a comfortable backrest on the arm chair. Or the way his hands glided expertly over the black steel of the glock without even looking at it, as if he’s taken it apart and put it back together million times before. That she knows of, his facial expressions only had two settings: brood and anger. She hadn’t seen that pesky little lip twitch since they entered the room almost 24 hours ago.

Now that the blood and sweat was washed away, he seemed less lethal.

If he’d take a few minutes to wash it properly, he’d have almost Pantene commercial worthy hair. And don’t get her started on his beard, it was deadly. Darcy was half convinced he was hiding a secret weapon within the pubey hairs.

Their day was spent in isolated quiet. Upon entering the shitty room (that she had to pay for with the only cash in her wallet, ’cause God forbid the murderer actually steal a room), she locked herself away in the bathroom, not wanting to talk or keep playing victim.

Bucky played with his guns all day, and only moved when she asked him for help when the outdated vending machine outside their room stole her money and kept the strawberry poptart she tried to buy. Let's just say, Darcy wasn't about to offer up to pay for repairs to broken glass from the machine.
Plus, they were also pretty well stocked up on snacks for a good week or two.

“What’s your name?” She asked finally after switching off the news, unable to take the suspense any more. Her whisper was too loud in the suffocating silence.

Hobo-dude didn’t even flinch or pause his meticulous cleaning. “Bucky,” he said finally. “I think.”

“You think?”

The man, Bucky, turned to look at her, his head swiveling slowly like an owl’s. The shadow of the room shrouded half his face, and he’d almost look sinister if it weren’t for the fact that he hadn’t done a single negative thing to her since they got there. If he wanted to hurt or rape her, he would have by now, and she didn’t think he was the type to play mental games.

Hopefully she wouldn’t come to regret her miniscule trust in him.

“I’ve been told my name is James. Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes, born March 10th, 1922. United States Army.”

“No fucking way,” Darcy whispered.

“Missing in action, presumed dead sometime in 1945 along the Russian Alps after a shit mission. That’s what the Smithsonian’s biography says anyway.”

Darcy remained uncharacteristically quiet. Her mind whirring, if what he was saying was true… this was Captain America’s best friend.

“I don’t remember what really happened… but-” he ruffled through his backpack beside him, producing a thick, falling apart file. “This is Hydra’s file on me.”

Where’d you get it?” Darcy asked, cautiously reaching for the file to take a peek.

Bucky picked up his wooden chair by the window and dragged it over to her bedside. He handed over the thick manila envelope without question. “I took this from the Triskelion after the big planes flew into it. There were a lot of lower level agents now without jobs cleaning up debris, I put on a janitors outfit and walked in without anyone the wiser. Alexander Pierce tucked it away deep in SHIELD’s paper archives where Hydra could keep it safe right under everyone’s noses. I replaced it with a fake a while back, if someone goes looking, they won’t tell the difference.”

“Why are you telling me all this?” Darcy whispered, staring at the faded black Russian letters on the falling apart file. First of all, if Hydra wanted their files kept secret under SHIELD’s noses, why did they have them in all Russian?

Second, this explained why her hobo-dude was on the run. Why he kept looking through the window, and over their shoulders during their car ride. But it still didn’t answer who he was to Hydra, or why she was brought into it to begin with. If James Bucky Barnes was born in 1922, shouldn’t he be a little… less young?

She flipped through his thick file, scrunching her nose up when she was met with the stale odor of old parchment. Her eyes landed on the picture at the top and she sucked in a breath. The picture was tinted blue, the edges of a metal ice box were frozen over. Through the frosted window in the photo, Darcy could clearly see her hobo, looking like he was sleeping inside the ice. His skin was tinted blue, his lips purple and frosted over.

“Is that-?”
“They kept me frozen in ‘suspended animation’ in a warehouse in Russia. I’m beginning to remember the who’s and why’s, but nothing substantial enough to get me anywhere. That is why I need your help.”

Wordlessly, he reached into his bag again. Retrieving another file, this one considerably less thick and newer than his.

She felt Bucky’s eyes on her, he was tense again in the darkness, his eyes boring into the side of her face. She ignored him and picked up the outstretched envelope, the letters were also in the same sloppy Russian handwriting as his.

“What’s this?”

“This, I found in the same hidden spot where my file was, I took it thinking it might be important, turns out it just might be.” He pointed to the words at the top of the file’s cover. “Says ‘Unknown Female, 1991/2004.’ Open it.”

Darcy cracked open the file and was met with a rough outlined sketch of a baby, with wide light eyes and puffy lips right at the top of the small stack of papers. Beneath the photo, contained a small little summary of the girl written in small Russian handwriting.

She looked up at Bucky, his eyes furrowing and he stared at the baby in the sketch in concentration. “Who’s this, your daughter or something?”

Bucky looked between her and the photo, and read the small description. “Неизвестный женский, возраст два. Найдено отсутствует месте преступления. Зимний Солдат подозреваю, что вмешался без прямых заказов.’ That means, Unknown female, age two. Found missing from scene of the crime. Winter Soldier suspect to have intervened without direct orders.” Bucky took the file back from her, staring down at the light eyes of the baby in the sketch. “I don’t know who she is, but I have a feeling that saving her life is what made them take my memories away.”

Darcy stayed silent, pieces of the puzzle beginning to click as she filled with remorse for the dude. “So, you’re this Winter Soldier guy? I’ve never heard of you.”

“No, you wouldn’t have.”

She peeked at him through her hair and was satisfied at the small little quirk of his lip.

“So, again I ask. What does this have to do with me? That guy, the one you shot through the brains, he said they’ve been waiting for me for ten years. Now, I don’t know about you, but if someone’s been searching for me almost half my life, then I think that’s cause for a little concern.” She gave him back the files.

Bucky stared down at the two folders in his hands, silent and contemplative.

“Hello? I’m talking to you dude.” She poked his black gloved arm, surprised to find that his forceps were as hard as stone. “What the hell’s the mission here, soldier?”

His previous mildly relaxed stance immediately stiffened at her words. That might have been the wrong thing to say to him, because Bucky’s head whipped toward hers so quick she almost felt the whiplash herself. Bucky’s eyes bore into hers, whatever he found there must have reaffirmed his plan because after a few seconds he was up, putting his weapons away with quick purpose.

“First we get you acquainted with basic weaponry, your training begins tomorrow. We’ll find a place, practice your shooting accuracy. We will work our way to hand-to-hand combat. You’re in
“—hoa! Whoa, whoa!” She got up, forgetting her previous aversion to the bed sheets as she sat up on her knees at the edge of the bed closest to him.

“Slow your roll, speed racer! I really don’t know what you want from me buddy, you haven’t answered a single question of mine. This adventure was nice and all but I’m just a civilian here! I’m grateful you took down those guys and handled it back there at the alley... but if you’re Bucky Barnes, then can’t you just call up Captain America for his help? I’m sure he’d be more than happy to—”

“I don’t need that man’s help.” Bucky growled, snapping together the metal pieces of his unassembled guns. “I need yours. You’re Darcy Day Lewis, niece to Peggy Carter. The woman that funded the organization I was created to take down. You were in New Mexico when the thunder god’s brother fell. His scepter—”

“I was adopted!” Darcy cried out, as he stuffed his armed militia into his Mary Poppins purse. She stepped closer to him, wishing to make him sit down and listen to her reasoning. “If you need a soldier to help you with your vendetta, then you’ve got the wrong person. I still watch cartoons for Christ’s sakes! And look, I feel you, I really do! But Loki’s mind stick isn’t the safest way to get your memories back, dude.”

Bucky picked up the thin file containing the picture of the little girl. “Darcy,” he smacked the file down onto the table and pointed at it with his gloved hand. His eyes were wild as he glared at her, “If whoever that is is the reason I lost my memories, I need to know and I need to know now. You are going to help me, girl, because you’re the only one that’s clued in, yet far enough away from the action no one will see it coming. Now either you help me, or I tie you up and offer you to whoever those people that were looking for you are. Do you understand me?”

“My help for your safety?” She cried out, gripping at her hair. “And how safe am I with you? You’re willing to steal a scepter that not only caused a thousand year old alien-god to go insane, by the way, but you wanna use it on yourself? You need a damn therapist! This plan isn’t safe for anyone!”

Hobo remained silent as he watched her. Darcy chest was heaving with her shouting, but he was as motionless as a hunting cat, poised and hunched over, ready to attack.

“Your training begins tomorrow.” He says slowly, “we head West after.”

With that, Bucky picked up his backpack and left, closing the door with a quiet click. Darcy thought it would have left just the same effect if he were to have had slammed it shut.
Translations:

1. "This is not a kidnapping, девушка! получить свою голову из задницы!" = "This is not a kidnapping, girl! get your head out of your ass!"

2. "You're in good enough shape, ваша грудь немного большие, но это не должно вас удержать. We can—"

= "You're in good enough shape, your breasts are a little big, but it should not hold you back. We can—"
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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Hydra Facility, January 1991

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“This will mute any fear we may have,” he spoke, his voice hushed and admiring as he gazed at the remote in his hand. Behind him, sat the Winter Soldier, strapped into his chair and shackled by the neck with a metal cuff connected to three thousand pounds of reinforced steel. Each small ridge of the metal clips latched to his shaved head released an electric impulse akin to that of a small lightning bolt, the power behind it potent enough to light an entire house for a year.

In the viewing room before him, protected by seven layers of bulletproof glass, the doctor bestowed his new invention proudly to the many crooked businessmen and dirty political figures, the remote held up like their personal Savior for all to admire.

The Winter Soldier was dry heaving in the isolated room behind the glass, sent off to the corner like a neglected dog and on display like a zoo animal. A black rubber mouth piece was stuffed into his mouth, drool seeping out though the corners of his lips and dribbling between the cold metal around his neck and bare chest. His head couldn’t move an inch, forced pressed between the hard back of his chair and the padded brace pressing into his temple and the left side of his face.

With one eye the soldier stared up at the ceiling unseeingly. He’d been given a reprieve from the shocks, a few minutes to cool off before the electricity went too far and actually killed him.

The Hydra scientists and partners worried very little over having their subject so close while discussing his fate in keeping him complacent and up their sleeve. He was restrained and could not move his head far enough to see anything other than the cracks in the ceiling, the reinforced glass not letting any sound into his “recalibration” room either.

“In the case that he… ever goes rogue, I have invented this device,” the American scientist goaded, “to give us a failsafe. It will give us time to slow him down so that we may find him and fix the error in our soldier’s... mind. With this click of a button the Winter Soldier’s arm will self-destruct and give an electrical impulse that can take down a small elephant, leaving him defenseless and no with no external help other than his own combative abilities. It won’t kill him, merely slow him down. He won’t be able to move, sleep, function as the shocks pulse through his system every several hours after it has been activated.”

The winter soldier released a tear, it trailed out of the corner of his eye without his awareness. He couldn’t hear the people in the other room discussing his fate. The warm bead mingled with his cold sweat before getting lost in the hairs of his short beard. The rubber in his mouth kept him from vomiting the rations of dehydrated meat and mashed potatoes they’d fed him.

The doctor set the remote down into a small box with a flourish, handing it over to another scientist to put away for the rainy day they all hoped would never come. “I have fused it into the metal crook of his elbow. It needs merely a click of a button when in close proximity to him.”
“Does have one of the tracking device? He’s highly trained assassin, if ever he pulls hood on Hydra, he has instinctual means to stay ghost and hidden from us. We don’t want that.” One of the Ukrainian Prime Ministers asked, greedily eyeing up the box now containing the device.

In the too warm room, the Winter Soldier slowed his breaths, swallowing his excess drool around the rubber piece in case he choked. His Adam’s apple bobbed against the tight steel around his neck.

“Yes, Volodmir, there is a tracking device,” Alexander Pierce spoke up. Everyone in the room turned to look to him. He was standing by the far edge of the reinforced glass wall, watching his toy soldier in the chamber, pitifully tied up and defenseless in his electric chair. “And, Doc Stessmayer, this is a nice invention and all, but let’s hope that we will never have to actually use it. For now… let’s put him back on ice. We won’t be needing his special skills any time soon.”

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“Oh my god, you smell like shit,” Darcy whined, leaning away from him so she could shuffle back a few feet away from his reek.

The forest around them was deserted as far as they knew, well as far as Darcy knew. She had the distinct feeling that Bucky might have some sort of super hearing she didn’t know about. She had noticed the way his head tilted as he listened in for some invisible attacker, and it might have been cool if the action didn’t completely remind her of a hunting dog.

The vibrant green foliage above the two were swaying with the afternoon breeze. They’ve been having their little target practice for hours, somewhere off the grid in the first forest he could find in upstate New York that didn’t have random hikers occupying every trail he sniffed up.

Darcy had never been more tired in her life. Sure, combat training- or whatever this was- was something any Wanted person on the run from bad guys should have in spades. But Darcy was not just any Wanted woman. She was a modern woman, bratty and snobby, and completely dependent on technology to get her through her problems.

She was open-minded and ready for any adventure life threw at her, she rolled with the punches and spoke the language of snark and grit with a fluency that rivaled Tony Stark’s. She loved the idea that this guy kept his word to try and train her to be a total badass. (Try being the operative word here.)

But, sitting in the cold mud like she currently was, staring at a water bottle filled with dirt and being told to shoot it, was a far cry from her usual laser tag training with Clint inside Tony’s ultra-modern gym. She didn’t have a nifty little AI here to whisper in her ear when to give her opponent an uppercut, or when to duck or dive.

Against all feminist ideals she thought he had over women not always having to be dainty little things, she kicked and cried through each minute of torture this guy disguised as “training.” She whined, loudly, over his disgusting smell and greasy hair and bad attitude.

There was just something about Bucky, this so called Winter Soldier, that Darcy couldn’t stand. Darcy did not understand the cut of this man’s jib, and it was showing in her attitude. Through every half-sentence and clipped orders to “reload” or “aim right!” or angry Russian cussing, she silently plotted a way to jump the crazy train and get herself back onto Clint’s or Tony’s radar.

Someone must have figured she’d be missing by now. Her best friend might have been a bird brain but he wasn’t an idiot. He must have heard her scream before the call dropped.
She was all for helping the poor dude out, seriously, don’t get her wrong, but… she didn’t exactly trust his half-assed plan to find Loki’s scepter to get his memory back, nor did she like going against her instinct on him being bad news.

Hanging around his guy’s shit show was straight out of a bad fanfiction and she didn’t wanna join in on that.

Since they parked the car around dusk, after four hours of nighttime driving from the rundown motel in Portsmouth, he dumped her ass in the forest and tossed a gun at her.

“Shoot.” He said again with a barbaric grunt. As if that word alone could give her all the direction she needed.

The wind was relentlessly blowing his stench into the side of her face. “You smell like old socks—,” she whispered again when he didn’t move his position beside her in the mud.

“Stay quiet.” He growled impatiently, of course Darcy didn’t listen to him.

“—and I swear if you graze my side boob again I will punch you in the balls, I don’t care if I’ll lose my arm.”

Beside her, her hobo sighed. She’s been stuck with him for about four days now and in all that time he hadn’t spoken about much of anything. She tried playing the game Questions to pass the time as he drove through the night, but he never responded with anything more than annoyed looks. She didn’t know his story since she couldn’t read the Russian words in his file. He didn’t offer up anything about his past or anything about himself. They could barely contain a real conversation, not unless his usual sighs or grunts toward her mindless babbling counted.

The guy was an awkward caveman wrapped up in ammo and she didn’t understand why he was so abnormal.

“Again.” He muttered, keeping his hands hovered over her elbows in case she buckled under the rifle’s weight… again. She squinted an eye, trying to focus on the water bottle he placed onto the tree stump a little ways downhill from them.

“Don’t know why I need this.” Darcy muttered under her breath, blowing her bangs from her eyes and keeping her eyes on the target. She propped the gun a bit higher against her chest, trying to keep it steady again.

“Quiet,” his low voice growled behind her. “Focus.”

He had informed her of wind direction and to shoot a little bit against the wind’s speed, so it can curve with the wind’s track and hit the mark or blah blah blah.

This was how people got hurt.

If someone was walking this trail, they’d be in for a surprise. The sheer loudness of the gun’s boom was enough to create awareness to their location if any hikers, or worse… Hydra agents, came sniffing around.

“Ready on three…” Bucky counted down from beside her. “1…”

“Wait!” Darcy whisper-cried. She lowered the gun, almost buckling under the weight now that her joints weren’t locked together. She nodded to the target, pointing out a cute little squirrel that had just popped up onto the tree stump. “There’s a squirrel in the way! I don’t wanna accidentally hurt him.
Let’s wait until the little guy—”

Beside her face something whizzed by at breakneck speed, the near invisible throw caused the fringe from her pony tail to brush against her eyes beneath her baseball cap. Bucky’s arm was still outstretched, fingers splayed as if he’d just flung something.

“What did— holy shit!” She shrieked, staring at the twitching baby squirrel thirty feet away. It was pinned onto the bottom of the tree trunk behind the stump by a small pocket knife protruding from its side. “Holy… dude, you just… you killed a squirrel!”

“Yes. Now you don’t have to worry about killing it. Not that you had much of a chance before. Now focus. Ready on three. 1…”

So snarky! Quickly, before he could think about snapping again, Darcy scrambled to get the gun back into the position he’d spent almost thirty minutes getting her to perfect. “2…”

She squinted, ignoring the little dying critter in the corner of her vision.

“3.” She shot. The sound was loud as it echoed through the trees and several birds flew out of their nests, squawking loudly as they flew for safety. The brutal kick back threw her into his hard chest, and his arms wrapped around her torso to instinctively steady her. If he were anyone else she’d try to pull the moves on him right there just for the sake of the cliché factor.

She lowered the gun, staring at it unseeing. The bottle was still erect on top of the stump in front of the dead animal.

“You missed.” Bucky grumbled and stood back, completely unaware of her inner turmoil. He snatched the gun from her and easily hoisted it over his shoulder. “We’ll try again tomorrow. Get you a smaller gun.”

“No,” said Darcy, glaring at the dead squirrel. If this was what combat training entailed with this man, if this was what being on the run with him was like, then forget it! She’ll contact Clint immediately and he can figure out this shit for her.

To an open minded girl like Darcy, going on the run with some guy that claimed to be a “Ghost Assassin” was called an adventure. To an innocent civilian like her, having someone get shot in the head in front of you was terrifying. Finding out you’ve been on someone’s ledger for over ten years was pretty unnerving.

But to Darcy, killing innocent animals, an innocent baby creature that was doing absolutely nothing wrong other than standing on a tree stump at the wrong moment in front of some psycho with a gun… that was the deal breaker. This right here said so much about his mental state, and she didn’t know if she wanted to figure the guy out anymore. She didn’t want any part in this.

“I’m done with you.” She walked away without looking back toward him. Bucky seemed like the type to have puppy-dog eyes and she didn’t feel like finding out. She listened to the leaves and twigs beneath her boots crunch. As far as she could tell, their clothes were the only similarities she and the winter soldier had. They both had nothing on their backs except the clothing they met one another in: black combat boots, old caps, jeans, and hoodies.

“ждать.”* Bucky called out, in Russian once again. Darcy swirled around, surprised to find him much closer than she’d anticipated. She’d hoped for at least a two minute head start to the car while he packed up the guns and ammo into his little wonder bag. God, he walked like a freaking shadow!

“Зха-дат,” she tried to repeat. “What does that even mean? I don’t speak Russian! It’s so rude, you
know. You are so rude when you start talking to me in another language, and I don’t even. You know what. Killers and violence I can handle. Aliens and superheroes? Easy! But pointless brutality? No.” Ignoring the tilt of his head and furrowed expression, she turned back around, unwilling to enter yet another one-sided argument.

Their stolen, rusted white Cadillac was coming up just ahead, parked between the break in the trees on the side of the dirt road.

“Zhdat, means ‘wait’.” He said beside her, matching her furious pace toward the car and gracefully ducking under the low branches Darcy couldn’t reach due to her short height.

“I don’t give a damn if it means ‘I’m a boob.’ You told me I wasn’t kidnaped by you? Well, then the next place we reach with a pay-phone I’ll be making a call back home. This joy ride’s over, man.” She was about to approach the end of the trail, but was stopped by a hard hand clamping down on her elbow.

“What are you saying?” Bucky frowned, expression as serious as it’s always been. This is what she’s talking about. She’s known the guy for four days. Four days is enough time for anyone to crack under the full power that is Darcy Lewis’ stubbornness and this guy gave nothing in return other than a frown.

Darcy stared at the week old scab on his cheek, trying hard to act unbothered by the tight, gloved hand confining her.

“I don’t want your help and I can’t help you. I understand you can protect me from those people from the alley in D.C, but honestly? I think you’re making this whole thing a bigger deal than it needs to be. Those Russian guys? They’re harmless compared to the shit I’ve seen. My friends all battled aliens, real life aliens, and lived to tell the tale. I think I’ll ask them for some protection by the Russian mobsters.”

Bucky remained silent, tense and stone faced. “Those were trained spies. And you said… you said you’d help me locate the scepter. For my… memories.”

Darcy internally winced. Guilt reared it’s ugly head as he looked down at her. His face was shuttered and she hoped it wasn’t to mask any let down feelings from her part.

“And I said thank you for saving my life right? Look, I don’t know how you found out about me or my place in Thor’s life, but I really can’t help you. I’m just a civilian.”

“Your file was unclassified.”

“Unclassi— those bitches.”

Bucky didn’t move his hand or step out of her personal space.

“Anyway,” Darcy patted his chest, over the dirt and sweat encrusted sweater, trying to offer up any sort of comfort. “Even if I did know how to help you find the scepter for your memories, I literally—”

Before she could try again to let the kidnapping creep down gently, his fingers clamped around her jaw, shutting her mouth before she could say anything else.

“’emmph,” she tried to speak around his filthy gloved hand.

“Quiet!” He whispered, tucking her closer to his chest. She almost gagged at the stench emanating
from him. Didn’t he shower last night at the motel? From her hiding spot between the Hell that was his armpit, she watched him survey the area like a hawk, analyzing the woods they had just stepped out from.

“Get to the car, Darcy.” Bucky murmured, pushing her toward the parked car as he calmly steadied the rifle she’d been practicing with only minutes ago.

Darcy paused, eyes widening as she noticed three men several yards away stumble through the foliage and closer toward them.

Bucky and Darcy remained motionless, against Bucky’s command she remained by his side, frozen. Bucky, posture stiff and ready to attack, jabbed his fingers toward the car’s direction. Go hide, the motion meant.

Darcy didn’t push her chances of getting out of another gun fight alive, so she slowly crept backwards, away from Bucky and the approaching rogues. She wished like hell it was night time, so that she could enforce the darkness into a security blanket like she had in the alley.

Here at the side of the abandoned road, at high noon, they were completely exposed to the gun fire.

“Men, he’s here!” a voice called in perfect English, with no hint of the Russian accent she’d learned to associate with bad guys.

Darcy slid behind the parked car, peeking through the dirty windows.

“Soldier.” The Englishman greeted, hands in front of him to show he meant no harm. “We only want to talk.”

“Your friends by the airport talked.” Bucky responded almost too quietly for her to catch. “I didn’t want to listen. Why should I now?”

“Because I have this,” the Englishman held up a small black remote with a flourish. “Do you know what this is?” Beside the Englishmen, the two other spies stepped out of the forest, armed each with AK-47’s. They stepped closer to Bucky.

“No. And if your friends step any closer… I’ll kill them.” Bucky warned, keeping his gun pointed at him.

The blonde Englishman waved the two men back. Both thugs lowered their weapons, but not enough to ease the tension between both parties. “This doesn’t have to come to a fight, mate. We just want you and the girl to come with us, no fuss and no fighting. We just want to talk.”

“Fuck you.” Bucky spat lowly. Darcy internally cheered for him from her hiding spot behind the car.

“Darcy Lewis.” The Englishman called out, she froze too afraid to look away beyond Bucky’s back toward the Englishman. “My name is John Gramer. I’m an old friend of Peggy’s. My condolences to your loss.”

Despite the fact that Bucky must have been internally demanding her to stay hidden behind the car, Darcy stood up furiously, pissed off and heartbroken that her aunt was brought into this old West styled show down.

“How do you know my aunt?” Darcy asked, eyes on the Englishman now and hoping his buddies wouldn’t get any ideas with those guns.
“Your aunt Peggy was my supervising officer while she was still working for Shield. She taught me everything I know. I met you once when you were just a kid, your family was visiting France.” In front of her, Bucky tensed, his head twitching to the side like she’d noticed it tended to do. “You were, what… ten, twelve? Cute as a button and stubborn as hell, I’m sure that hasn’t changed much, eh, darling?”

“So you met me ten years ago, big whoop.” She slowly walked around the car, the small rocks beneath her boots crunching with every step. “What do you want now?”

“To take you home… this guy isn’t who he says he is, Darcy. We want to help you before you get hurt.” They were the words she’d been dying to hear only moments before… but now that those two beefheads had their guns pointed in Bucky’s direction like that… she wasn’t so sure she wanted to go anywhere without him now.

“Who is he then? If he isn’t who he says he is.” She asked, hoping that her talking would ease them up enough to distract them from using those guns of theirs.

“He’s the Winter Soldier, love.” Gramer said seriously. “He’s got over thirty confirmed assassinations ranging from dirty politicians to children… and over a thousand more kills that have been kept secret and off record. He has no memory or recollection of his past. Without our help he’s unstable, Darcy.” John said with false worry. “Please, before he attacks you, let us take you somewhere safe and we can deal with him.”

Gramer had said that as if she didn’t already assume that about Bucky. The way he spoke and carried himself, he must have seen some shit throughout his life. But over a thousand kills? Yeah right, that was reaching Loki status in the murderer scale. Talk about big fat liaaaar.

She stepped closer to the group, in the Englishman’s direct line of sight and a little ways behind Bucky.

“And if I go with you—” she noticed Bucky twitch slightly in the corner of her vision, “what will happen to him?”

“We will deal with him as we see fit.” John warned, toying with the device in his hand, stoking it like a lover. “What do you say doll? I’ll get you back to your family as soon as I can.”

“Don’t listen to him, Darcy.” Bucky warned lowly, slowly inching his thumb closer forward to cock the chamber of the black pulse rifle he’d taught her to reload not too long ago.

“Darcy, why don’t we take a moment and—”

“Quit the yapping, we need to make a move on!” One of the goons hollered, hitching his gun higher and steadying to aim.

“Kenny—”

“To hell with this John!” Kenny aimed the gun toward Darcy. Her heart stopped, watching in almost slow motion as Kenny cocked the chamber back and put his finger on the trigger.

“No!” Bucky screamed, tackling her to the ground before the shot reached its target. Her cheek was pressed between the sharp rocks and Bucky’s back. Bucky fired the rifle, the kickback causing his shoulder to press into her temple, snapping her glasses in half.

The black plastic fell away from her face as he forced her up, snatching his bag and pushed her for cover behind the nearest tree. Half blind and having a total out of body experience, Darcy fisted her
hands into Bucky’s gloved arm. The fabric beneath gave way under her shaking hands, exposing a sliver of silver metal that she would have questioned any other time if they weren’t currently under fire.

Her breaths came too fast beside him, he was calm and composed and she tried to match her breaths to his. It only helped a little as she watched him arm himself with three guns, one for each hand and another at his pocket. A bit of an overkill for only three beefheads. Wordlessly he handed her a knife and small hand gun, this time she took it in her hands without question.

“I apologize, soldier! Darcy!” John pleaded urgently, “we were given direct orders not to attack! Kenny was… impatient!”

Through the break in the trees, they watched as a five more men, each dressed in black and loaded with weapons, revealed themselves from the trees behind the car.

“Oh shit.” She whispered, clinging closer to him.

“You’ll be okay.” He whispered, leaning down to reveal a small twitch of his lips. “When I tell you to, I want you to run away as fast as you can. Got it, doll?”

Doll? She questioned herself. Wherever his sudden earnestness emerged from, she was grateful, because at the sight of his infectious little smirk, she was at ease and replicating it almost instinctively… just like she did when she saw his picture on the glass mural in the Smithsonian.

Bucky untangled himself from her grip. “No, no!” Darcy cried desperately as he left her alone behind the large tree.

Bucky strutted into their view, exposing himself to the fray of armed men.

“Soldier.” John’s voice carried loudly, “Kenny was a poor example of the order and discipline we stand for. We do not want this to turn into a fight, mate.”

Darcy watched between the bushes, as Bucky aimed and fired, hitting Kenny's partner right in the brains. He wordlessly ran for cover behind the car, shooting blindly toward the men, but they still edged on. Gun fire shot through the small clearing, the glass of their stolen vehicle shattered as one of them men tried to hit Bucky while he was ducked.

“Forget him! Get the girl!” John screamed, on his hands and knees as he clutched at his chest, searching the ground for something he'd dropped. A small red patch in his white button-down bloomed into a larger blood stain, “We need the soldier alive! Just kill her!”

Darcy squeaked as two of the men turned and ran toward her direction. Bucky aimed, and fired, one of them going down with a wail.

“Run!” Bucky hollered, firing back to the dozen other remaining men running into the fight from their hiding place in the woods.

Darcy turned and ran, sprinting over upturned roots and ducking under low branches. She was not equipped to deal with this! Behind her she heard the shallow grunting of the man running after her. In her hand was the small pistol and the hunting knife, she hoped to God she didn’t trip and fall into it.

Without thinking she made a sharp turn, hoping if she ran in zig-zags like they did in movies then she’d lose the guys trail. The trees were becoming more dense, she had to squeeze her breasts together as she sprinted through the cracks between trees. Every tree and brush in the woods looked
the same as the other and it was mixing up her sense of direction.

“Come out, girly!” the man hollered, his voice too close for her liking. She swirled around, looking for a hiding place. Her hair fell loose from it's pony tail, and wisps of hair stuck to her sweaty face. She could still hear the echo of gun fire, and she hoped The Winter Soldier was as tough as John made him out to be. If he had hundreds of confirmed kills, then these thugs must be a breeze.

“Were are you sweet cheeks! Come out!” He growled, not far off behind her. Darcy worried if her breaths were coming up too harsh, her boots crunching into the earth too loudly. She’d never been more aware of her body and the area around her as she sprinted for her life.

In the cliché’s to end all cliché’s, Darcy ducked behind a tree, holding a thick branch back and praying to god this will work. The man’s footsteps sounded louder, he was approaching… only a few more seconds.

“Where are—oof!” he grunted, flying back several feet as the branch made contact with his chest. His gun clattered to the ground, and she picked it up before he could.

“Holy shit it worked!” Darcy whispered, silently whooping in victory. With what she’d later blame as her adrenaline rush and almost dying, Darcy lunged to her attacker, brutally pounding the butt of his own rifle into his temple to knock him out cold.

“That’s what you get, asshole!” she got up victoriously, before feeling the familiar sensation of cold metal against her neck.

“Drop the gun,” John’s voice commanded. Darcy squeezed her eyes shut, dropping the gun from her hands and raising them up.

“Walk. Back toward your boyfriend, love. Nice and steady.”

All previous hope vanished as Darcy shook under John’s hand fisted tightly in her hair, the barrel of his gun cold and pressing into her jaw as they walked through the trees. She had been running in circles, and she’d been far closer to the gun fight than her running alluded to.

Within moments there were back at the scene, dead bodies, much more than the five she’d originally counted, littered around Bucky as he stood tall like a bloodied sentinel, a beacon of destruction.

“Let her go.” He demanded shortly, the blasé attitude from before long gone and replaced once more with his guarded expression. His eyes were half hidden behind his long bangs, the old baseball cap of his tossed to the ground next to a man’s bloody, smashed in face.

“You didn’t want to listen to me, soldier.” John goaded, his shirt was ripped at the seams and the previous blood spot she’d noticed was dripping wet liquid to the ground. John looked pale, as if he was gonna bite the bullet any second now.

He tossed Darcy to the ground. She landed with a squeak, falling on her hands and knees. The small rocks sliced into her bare palms. Darcy turned and glared at John, stubbornly watching as he pointed the gun at her with one hand, and the small remote from before aimed toward Bucky with the other.

Bucky, with the swiftness and precision of a cobra, fired one last time toward John, the bullet embedding into the center of his bloodied shirt, making him stagger back and fall to his knees.

“I told you…” John gasped, “it was in your best interest to come… with me,” John panted as he fell forward. “Hail… Hydra…”
The small remote in his hand gave an innocuous little *beep* as John fell forward, gun and remote clattering away from his now dead body. The little light bulb at the end of it’s short antenna turned red and immediately Bucky dropped to the ground, his agonized wailing was desperate and pained as they echoed through the trees, his screams louder than the gun fire itself.

“No, no!” Darcy screeched, crawling over to Bucky’s twitching form on the ground despite the gun still shakily pointed at her.

He sounded like a wounded animal, keening and dry heaving through whatever attack John just made. He clawed at his left arm, the black leather glove gave way to reveal the metal she’d peeked at before.

Darcy gasped, the sound drowned out by his deep throated screams. The red star at his shoulder was scratched and faded, but she couldn’t help but feel like she’d seen that arm before, despite having no memory of the Winter Soldier at all.

“Bucky!” Darcy screamed, quickly folding him into her arms despite the danger of it. Bucky growled lowly, spittle and blood pooling out of his mouth as his eyes rolled into the back of his head. In the joint of his metal elbow, a small little tuft of smoke rose up, bringing with it the dizzying smell of burning metal.

“What did you do!” Darcy screamed at John’s dead body. Quickly thinking on her feet, she let go of Bucky and ran toward the little remote for some sort of Off switch. Bucky screamed beneath her, fueling her anger toward these dead men. His back hunched and craned toward the skies, his hands dug into the earth, looking for purchase as he gasped and cried like a dying bull.

“I’m here. You’re okay! You’re gonna be okay!” Darcy cried, trying to reassure him through her own fear. She fumbled with the remote, finding nothing that could turn off whatever it was that was torturing him.

“I don’t know what to do!” She cried, jerking back over to him, uncaring now of the pebbles embedded into the cuts in her palms. She leaned over him, helplessly watching him clench his eyes and convulse in pain. The loud incessant buzzing of electricity coming from that metal arm infuriated her. She fanned at the smoke from his joints, mindful of the metal. Darcy knew enough about metal vs electricity to know she would probably get shocked too if she wasn’t careful.

She wished she understood more about how the prosthetic works so she wouldn't hurt him in the process of ripping it off. She wanted to revive John Gramer and shove that little remote up his ass.

“I don’t know what to do, I don’t know what to do.” She chanted through her tears, guilt and fear and pain filled her heart as she helplessly watched the man that risked his life *twice* now to save hers. She’s been so selfish! So childish and stupid!

Bucky buckled on the ground, flopped around like a fish. His screams were slowly dying down, his body began to convulse less, but the pain in his expression didn’t lessen. The tears in his eyes didn't stop flowing.

He gave a low, keening howl that broke her already shattered heart. She wrapped her arms tightly around him, the vibrations from his body buzzing straight into her bones.

As desperate tears fell from her eyes, Darcy promised herself she’ll be less of a pain now. She’ll try to understand why he was the way he was, though after what John said about him killing almost thousands of people, she understood his mannerisms a lot more now.
With shaking hands, she stroked back Bucky’s sweat and blood soaked hair, and revealed his dirty face to her. She promised herself she would be good.

“I’ll help you. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.” She prayed, holding him through the last of his convulsions and whimpering, offering up whatever miniscule comfort she could. Dead bodies littered around them in the deserted dirt road, and she had no clue how she was going to hoist him up into the getaway car with all his dead weight.

But she promised, from this moment on, she was going to be good.

Chapter End Notes

Oh man, this chapter killed me. Hope everyone enjoys! Let me know what you think.
The winter soldier wasn’t completely debriefed on this mission. He was given a target and told to take them out whichever way he preferred. Each mission summary was vague and held no room for him to ask questions, not that he ever questioned those superior to him anyway. His handlers wanted a ghost job done and he was the only one with the right skills and precision to do so.

He was an eerily good shot, with his bare eye he could shoot a weapon straight into his mark nearly a football field away on the first try… with a ‘scope he was unstoppable. Tonight, Hydra needed a mark put down quietly. No witnesses, no mess. He will do it, simply because he has no other choice. Even now, cut off from communication and all alone, he knew they were watching him.

As he leaned against the glass window of his balcony, he quietly unclasped the silencer from his revolver so he could degrease the shallow pipe inside.

Shrouded by the building’s shadows, he watched the city of Paris with the cold, unattached watchful gaze of a broken man who could care less that he was smack in the middle of one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

That evening, the sounds of happy laughter from tourists rose from the streets below and to his alert ears. The scent of fresh pastries from the bakery beside his hotel swirled with the summer wind, mixing with the scent of roses from the potted bush beside him.

The winter soldier barely paid it a second glance, ignoring the Paris perfume in exchange for the biting stench of gun powder and oil grease at his fingertips.

He cocked his gun and aimed it in the vague direction his mark will be, eyes squinting against the setting sun in his vision. Room 2-2-1-4 of the Shangri-La Hotel, only three buildings down from him and in direct view of the Eiffel Tower, his mark was due to drink her habitual after-dinner wine on her Hotel terrace.

From this range he was in clear shot and could take his target out with the sniper rifle that had been pre-packed for him, hidden away inside the black backpack beneath the bed.

He had woken up only a few days prior in a posh hotel room, a suitcase full of weapons on his bed side and another, smaller bag with a single change of clothes. No phone or other form of communication from his people.

The soldier didn’t even know what year it was until he saw the file on the desk beside the rest of the laid out weapons he might need for this mission.

The red folder, sealed with Hydra’s black insignia, revealed a name, a face, and the location.
Codename: Winter Soldier

Mission: Carter, M.


It only took him four hours upon waking up to find her.

Like a typical tourist, she was snapping pictures of the Eiffel Tower with her family, security and disguised personnel following every movement she or her family members made. The woman was old, possibly mid-seventies with curling white hair and laugh lines along her mouth and eyes. She would be easy enough to take out when caught alone.

The winter soldier didn’t know whom the woman he was about to murder was or why Hydra wanted her dead. All he cared for was finishing the mission as quickly and efficiently as possible, without being seen. This file was his duty, and he was going to honor it out of respect for the men behind the red folder.

The soldier doesn’t remember much, a baby’s blue eyes and screaming are the two clearest things he can remember without even trying. Anything he’d done before he’d woken up was a blank. Other than the general knowledge of his handlers, who he is – the winter soldier, created to be the fist of Hydra – he could remember nothing else.

And if he did… the soldier only hoped they wouldn’t find out, because despite his memory loss, the sensation of sitting in a cold chair and being electrified always remained, even when the other memories did not.

Despite his obedience, he hated the men behind his arm and all the scientists in charge of keeping the machine he was hooked up to in working condition. He hated the spotty images in his memory, he hated the vague feeling of cold and the epileptic spasms of his muscles whenever he was trying to focus on a lost memory for too long.

He hated Alexander Pierce and the fact that his was the last voice he’d hear before he’d go under again. He hated that he could remember something like that, but the memory of what it feels like after a full night’s rest was forever lost to him. What his favorite food was, or if he’d ever felt the touch of a woman’s skin against his callused hands… those were blanks in his brain, and he hated he may never know anything other than the disdain in Pierce’s smirk.

He hated them all, but not enough to disobey. Not enough to question them. They’ve kept him alive all this time, despite whatever phantom torture they’ve done to him.

He was weak, mentally, and he couldn’t disobey if he wanted to survive.

The mission mattered… because his life mattered above anyone else’s.

Submission was his only option. Completed missions keep him alive to see another day.

His only constant is the insurance of waking up alive after a mission had been completed. No matter what year or decade he wakes up to… the only similarity he can remember is actually waking up. As long as they need The Winter Soldier, the mission matters… because the mission keeps him alive.

The soldier bought his high-powered binoculars up to his face, checking up on his mark’s balcony from his hideaway within his own.
Margaret was outside, sitting on the bench with her night cap, a young dark-haired girl with thick glasses and a tattered book at her side.

His mouth twisted, his throat burned with something he wasn’t sure was scorn or envy, as he watched his target laugh along to something the young girl said. She hadn’t been with the rest of the family on their visit to the tower, but as he watched through his binoculars, her blue eyes seemed familiar somehow.

He watched the young teenager, no older than fifteen, and the way her hands flailed as she regaled whatever story was making his target laugh so enthusiastically. Whoever she was, she meant a great deal to the future dead woman.

The winter soldier calculated the day’s findings and deduced that tomorrow Agent Carter will be alone again on her balcony like the previous nights. It wouldn’t take much for an old woman to slip and fall to her death from the twenty-second floor. Accidents can happen to anyone, after all.

- ✯ -

“Bucky? Bucky?” Darcy asked timidly. She had been watching Bucky restlessly fight with his subconscious for the past hour. She sat in the idle car, worriedly looking over her shoulder every few seconds. He’d been awake for a few minutes, long enough to order her to “drive, woman!” and promptly pass out again. But that was an hour ago, and the holed-up death trap she was driving had just given its last wheeze.

“Dude?” she tried one last time before giving up. He’d been struggling through whatever nightmare was in his head for a while now and she’s been trying to work out a method to wake him up without having him snap her neck in the process. If it were anyone else in the middle of a nightmare, she’d just shake them awake… but if he karate chopped her arm off, she didn’t think she’d be cool enough to quality for one like his to replace it.

Not that she wanted one anyways, the thing was pretty much attacking the poor man.

His arm had stopped smoking up a while ago. While she recklessly drove away from the carnage he’d created, she threw her cargo jacket over the metal arm and it had helped stop the cloud of burning metal and plastic from burning their airways.

Every twitch that arm of his made had her tensed and curled up at the driver’s seat with bated breath. She observed in fear and fascination as the metal plates along the arm shifted and reshaped itself to form his every unconscious movement.

If it wasn’t obviously causing him so much pain, Darcy would think that the constant flowing movements of the metal would be the single most interesting thing she’s ever seen. But right now she wasn’t capable of thinking of the magic behind the arm with anything more than fear and helplessness.

Every movement Bucky made, she watched with the alert attentiveness of a mouse watching a cat sleep. Every time Bucky so much as made a twitch of his fingers, she tensed and prepared herself to call upon some inner strength to not projectile vomit at the horrific sight of him going through another seizure like that last time at the clearing.

She was terrified whatever it was Gramer had done to Bucky would end up killing him and leave her defenseless. One crappy training lesson in the woods with the dude didn’t make her very capable of holding her own if a showdown like that were to happen again.
It was only four pm now, almost four hours after their battle in the forest’s clearing. He’d gone through four seizure episodes since, but none had been as long or as terrifying as that first one. Bucky had been withering in the dirt for over twenty minutes until he was stable enough for her to pull him into the car.

It took her almost twenty minutes to toss him into the backseat, her upper body strength was shit and Darcy swore she most likely displaced a vertebrae in her spine trying to pull him up and into the car.

Every hour, to almost the exact second, Bucky would wake up from his self-induced coma with a howl… his body would rise up on the car’s bench like that chick’s from The Exorcist and he’d pass out again. His body was too large for the cab of the old clunker. His legs would kick at the metal doors, busting them up even more.

But then it was over and his eyes would snap open, with an alertness of a paranoid schizophrenic who’d chugged six mugs of espresso, and he’d bark at her to drive faster.

“We need to get away,” was all he said. It said a lot about someone’s mental strength when undergoing constant torture and you still have the mindset to be proactive. Every time Bucky opened his eyes through the seizures she felt a growing block of respect for her hobo, and a new seed of hatred for Hydra grow.

She had to pull up into an abandoned gas station eventually though. After three hours of just blindly driving whichever direction the road took her, his quaking began to make her worry.

After an episode a few hours ago, Bucky’s voice had gone hoarse. His throat must have been scraped so raw from his closed-lip screaming, no sound would come out anymore except his loud panting. His body quivered as if he had been holding on to a live wire, his eyes had snapped open to stare at her once or twice as he slept but his gaze stopped being lucid hours ago.

Her only warning before an attack would begin again was his arm. At first she thought it was spontaneous, the fits occurring because of the remote and getting triggered through some external satellite GPS. (Working for Tony Stark made Darcy a little more sensitive to hardware and technology to know that something like that was actually possible.)

But as the seizures influx in their power, the times it happened remained steady. Every hour on the hour, he’d go through a mini-attack like the one in the clearing.

When she wasn’t staring down at the digital clock on the dashboard, she’d glue her eyes to his creepy arm as if her life depended on it. Hoping that this time she would be brave enough to not cry along with him.

The metal arm, surprisingly, was warm. Each individual plate had razor sharp edges that sliced away at her fingertips when she’d desperately tried disassembling it from his body with her bare hands.

When she had peeled the car into the dirt driveway of the old garage station, she had tried to claw at the prosthetic arm, attempting to pry it away from him by force. But the thing must have been bionic or some shit because the metal plates of his bicep cinched right on her fingertips, pinching her skin together and leaving shallow cuts when she ripped her hands away.

Every hour since Gramer pressed that button, his arm would erect its embedded plates, the metal slots would align themselves mechanically until his arm was as straight as an arrow. Without any conscious effort on his part, his arm would shoot out toward the ceiling of the car and swipe at the air erratically, as if it were trying to attack something beyond its reach, leaving Bucky to look like an immobile puppet.
Darcy remembers reading somewhere that if someone was having a seizure, the very last thing you should do is hold them down. So she’d wait for the arm to plop back down onto his chest, she’d crawl into the space between the backseat and passenger’s seat, and turn him sideways until the fits stopped. Darcy wasn’t a very touchy person, but when Bucky clenched his eyes, she immediately sought out to smooth over the wrinkles of his forehead.

She’d helplessly, and a little awkwardly, pat him… trying to offer up whatever miniscule comfort and kindness she could to the stranger that stormed into her life with no explanation.

Gramer’s sudden appearance only confused her more. He said he’d met her ten years ago… those Russian beef heads Bucky killed in the alley said they had been looking for her for ten years. Was that coincidence in her head or was it connected somehow?

Plus, Darcy couldn’t help but feel like maybe she’d seen that arm of his somewhere, but she wasn’t sure if even that had anything to do with all the other questions roaming around in her head.

As she regarded Bucky, passed out in his own sweat and the blood of his enemies, she tried to remember what Gramer said about France.

Darcy could vaguely remember her aunt introducing her to the agent before getting distracted by a necklace in a shop’s window— the same necklace Darcy wore around her neck to this day. Typical Darcy, getting distracted by something shiny. Story of her life, right?

“Aunt Pegs.” Darcy prayed, closing her eyes and pushing Bucky’s erratic breathing to the background. “You were always a know it all. What the hell do I do?” She whispered, folding her hands beneath her chin. She looked at the clock. Ten more minutes until the next scheduled attack.

 “…the arm.” She heard Bucky grunt. Darcy jumped in fright, and whirled around in her seat, her sweaty hair matting to her forehead with the motion.

“You’re alive!” Oh my god, Darcy, obviously he’s alive! You’ve been staring at him breathing for the past ten minutes.

“We need… to take the arm off.” Bucky stated. He was as pale as a ghost, but at least he wasn’t twitching anymore. Sweat pooled in the dip of his exposed collar bones and she assumed that torn up jacket of his must have been suffocating him.

“I tried.” She admitted sheepishly, holding up her sliced up hands with chagrin. “That arm’s pretty deadly, dude. It’s like made out of Valerian Steel.” She joked but was met with a blank look. She wouldn’t blame Bucky for not understanding her Game of Thrones reference when it was so obvious he could barely remember how deodorant works.

“Crowbar in the trunk. Get it.” He said, heaving himself up with his arm, the metal one hanging limp by his side like a real prosthetic would.

“Hey! Don’t move, you could hurt yourself! What are you—”

“We have less than ten minutes. Rip this arm off me, or call a mechanic.” He deadpanned, shoving the car door and nearly falling out of the car. Where the heck was that stamina of his when she nearly burst a kidney trying to pull him into the seat?

Darcy ran around to the trunk of the car, popping it open and pushing aside the sounds of his harsh breathing as he leaned against the side of the car. The crowbar was buried beneath a paint smeared nylon cloth.
“What do I do with it?” She rushed to his side, holding it up like a baseball bat.

“Shove it into my arm.” Bucky gritted, holding the metal arm up with his flesh one. His body was tilted to the left, as if the metal’s weight was too much to bear.

“Okay.” She gulped, pointing the crow bar to the metal bicep. “For the record,” she said quickly before she lost her nerve. “I’m sorry about all the crappy things I was thinking about you earlier. You’re not a hobo. You’re kind of my hero.”

Bucky simply stared at her, she wasn’t expecting any sudden bashfulness on his part, but his unsympathetic glare was a little bit hurtful. On the list of things she needed to teach Bucky, “thank you” was now #1 priority.

“Just shove it in, Darcy.”

“That’s what she said,” she muttered, staring at the spot where she was going to pry the metal prod into his metal arm. She didn’t see Bucky’s small smirk at her immature jibe.

She stared at his arm and glanced at the metal crow bar. Will this hurt him? Was there any flesh underneath that metal? Would this make whatever Gramer did worse?

“…less than five minutes, woman.”

“I’m going!” She snapped. Bucky let go of the arm and it plopped onto the hood of the car with a loud clang of metal against metal.

She lifted the crowbar high, and with all her might she forced it down as hard as she could. The crowbar barely made a dent, not even a scratch on his arm.

“It didn’t work,” she frowned.

“Try harder.”

Darcy braced herself again, tensed her arms and heaved… all she achieved was further denting the hood of the car.

Bucky sighed, the sound coming out much more exasperated and tired than strictly necessary.

“Give me that.” He snatched the crowbar out of her hands and took it into his right one. She watched with wide eyes as he took a deep breath and smashed it into his arm unceremoniously.

Bucky twisted his mouth in contempt as he yanked the crowbar out with a growl. The sound of twisting metal gyrated loudly in her ears as she fought a wince. Again and again, Bucky stabbed his arm with the rod, sparks and different colored wires revealing themselves from inside the arm as the metal twisted and opened up to reveal small and slow moving clogs and gears within it.

In the crook of his elbow, she noticed a small black box that didn’t look like the rest of the parts connected to him.

“What’s that thing?” she pointed. Bucky peered at the little plastic gizmo, squinting hard at it as if he was trying to remember what it was inside of that sci-fi orgasm he called a prosthetic arm.

“Don’t know.” He twisted his fingers and tugged at the box, after some resistance, the small box gave way. The little silver wires coming out from its sides were twisted and coiled, a small spark released from where it had emerged. Bucky crushed the small box with his bare hand and it clattered
onto the ground unceremoniously.

“It’s like it’s all connected to you.” She stated unnecessarily, gaping at the criss-cross of wires leading into the scarred and mangled flesh of his shoulder. At the base of his shoulder was a large, faded scar. Green, red, and blue wires disappeared into the mangled and twisted skin.

Bucky continued twisting the bar between the hinges of the metal plate tectonics, until all that remained attached to his shoulder was the metal plates with the faded red star across it. The rest of the arm was unattached and nothing but coiled scrap metal from his quick handy work.

Darcy looked into the car’s dash toward the clock, only three minutes left until the next lapse. She hoped beyond all hope that his stupid idea would work.

Because if they managed to get rid of the electric shocks… then they still have the pesky little problem of fifty pounds of scrap metal dangling from three wires spiraling out of his shoulder.

“Rip the arm off me or call a mechanic,” she reiterated, “and what happens if this doesn’t work in two minutes? What mechanic is going to fix this scrap—oh my god!”

Bucky tensed at her outburst. He watched her with wary eyes as she excitedly hopped in place, eyes wildly searching for a payphone of some sort.

“A mechanic!” Darcy exclaimed. “You so lucked out in randomly kidnapping me, dude,” she scoffed at the indignant glint in his eyes. “Yeah, yeah, fine. You didn’t kidnap me, whatever. But dude. Seriously. You could not have scored a better Bonnie to your Clyde. Tony Stark is like my bro, dude! I don’t want to hear any bullshit excuse, we’re calling him and he’s going to take this crap off your arm and help us. He’s Iron Man, man!”

“Shut up.”

“I can finally get back to Clint, because oh my God the poor guy is going to flip a tit. And you can call up your old pal Captain USA, and we can totally… wait, did you say ‘shut up’? What the hell is wrong with—?”

Bucky stayed silent, his eyes on the clock and Darcy shut up, back in the mindset of her previous fear that he’d fall over any second now. The clock struck 4:17…

“Do you feel anything?” Darcy whispered, too afraid to speak above a mumble.

“Why do you talk so much?” Bucky growled in frustration.

“It’s a gift.” Darcy responded without missing a beat. “Is the seizure back?”

Bucky shook his head. “No. But it’s slowed us down enough.” He picked up the crushed metal hand connected by a twist of wires all connected to his shoulder. “Hold this.”

Darcy opened her arms to pick up the broken piece of his arm and hand. Immediately, her arms were coated in oil, and she almost buckled under the weight of the razor sharp remains. Bucky turned to frown at her, careful not to move too far from the pieces still attached to him.

“Follow me.”

“Do you need to sit? I think you should sit first. You’ve been roleplaying a jelly fish for hours now, you need rest.” Darcy asked, careful not to jostle the pieces in her arm as she tried her best to move
in sync with him toward the old gas station. Tandem walking with Bucky wasn’t as difficult as she expected, she thought, as she walked alongside him, holding his arm pieces. Bucky used his free arm to punch through the dirty glass of the station’s front door and opened it.

“Those seizures were meant to slow me down. They didn’t anticipate me having a someone with me to help before the second group could get me. We need to keep moving before they close in.”

Darcy nodded, agreeing with her reluctant partner and ready to jump at his command.

They entered the dirty station, and the scene inside reminded her of that one episode in Supernatural. The gas station store was abandoned and it looked like no one had been inside for years. The windows were dirty and dusty, and whatever foods they did find on the shelves were way past their expiration dates. Bucky took his metal hand from her grip. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she mused that she’d just “held hands” with him.

“Grab a plastic bag.” Bucky commanded, nodding over to the counter where there was a small pile of white Thank You bags. “Grab as much duct tape you can find.” He walked around toward the register and plopped his hand on the countertop.

“Tape? What a weird wish list, man.” She joked, but silently she watched Bucky, feeling sorry that he lived in a world where he needed to reach for supplies before any comforts like pop-tarts or a magazine.

As Darcy ran up and down the aisles, thrusting in anything edible she could find along with seven rolls of silver duct tape, she heard the innocent little “cha-ching” sound of the register open.

“Oh god, we’re real thieves now.” She grouched, listening as Bucky pulled the crumpled bills out of the register without any guilt.

“We ain’t gonna bust rocks over abandoned goods, doll face.” He replied without missing a beat.

Darcy peered up at Bucky over the white shelves in the center of the small store.

“Why do you talk like that?” she asked after a while of silence. “Back in the woods earlier, you called me ‘doll’ too. What’s up with that?”

“So?” He grouched, his voice low and detached like it usually has been the past few days before any of the drama caught up to him and lowered his defenses around her. His eyes were downcast, and she couldn’t see his expression from where she was standing… especially since her glasses were broken and tossed away back at the scene of their previous crime.

“So?” She scoffed, tying a knot in her plastic bag and marching over to him again. “So, it’s weird. Sometimes you sound like you’ve never spoken to another human in like decades… but then you randomly start sounding like my great-uncle Wesley when he’s yammering on about the ‘good ole’ days’.”

Bucky remained silent, counting the cash and setting the coins aside.

“Are we calling your mechanic friend or not?”

Darcy dropped the subject, suddenly feeling less stressed now that she knew they were going back to her home to people she knew would be more equipped to help Bucky on his runaway mission.

New York City was a long time coming and she hoped Tony would help her out. She was never a very fussy employee, she’d never asked Stark for much in her life… he wouldn’t mind fixing this ex-
assassin’s arm up at all.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for any errors in grammar or punctuation! I have no beta and I only write as a hobby. Let me know what you think! Some of you are very good at guessing what might happen next! ;)
Chapter 5

- ✰ -

Paris, June 2004

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The asset sat inside his dark hotel room, the comfortable overstuffed chair at the corner of the room was ignored. Instead, he sat on the ground, back against the wall, as he waited for the inevitable visit from one of his higher ups.

He’d heard the engine almost a mile away. The quiet purrs of Hydra’s standard sedans were hard to mistake against the rickety, creaking of old Vespa’s and antique sports cars. He’d been expecting one of them to come back and ask for a face-to-face update on the mission.

It’s been one week since he’d been dumped in France with nothing to go on but the vague file on whom he needed to kill. One week with nothing but watching his target and her infuriatingly happy family. One week of the brunette girl’s saccharine laughter, flooding his conscious and mucking his judgments.

From inside his room, the asset listened with hypersonic hearing as the soft soles of Italian leather shoes gave quiet pit-pats, each step bringing someone closer toward his door.

In his cold, silver hand was his gun, loaded and off safety. With every deep pull of breath, every sharp inhale of the dusty oxygen inside the lonely bedroom, the asset wished he could be given the order to put the cold, unyielding weapon into his own mouth… and shoot.

Death, the soldier imagines, would be much less cold than Life.

The unlocked door twisted, and the loud grinding of the knob’s internal gears dug its sharp teeth into his temples.

His headaches had been coming back, too long off cryonic sleep was always tough on him. He wondered if this time they had made his mission thirteen days longer than usual to remind him of the pain. To remind him he can only be alive and healthy in their eternally ceaseless grasp.

The door opened.

That’s not Pierce, the asset thought to himself before the man’s face was even revealed. Torturous months of conditioning him to speak when spoken to, and even then to stay quiet, stuck with him even through the void in his brain.

He flexed his silver hand, letting the moonlight from the open balcony shine and reflect onto the blonde man’s gaunt face.

Over the noise of the streets below, he can nearly hear the irritatingly captivating laugh he’d been scowling at all week.

With shuttered satisfaction, the soldier listened as the man nervously swallowed. “H-hello. My name is John. John Gramer. I’m a new Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.—”

At near hypersonic speed, the soldier moved across the room with the lethal accuracy of a ninja, the
butt of the loaded gun already digging into John’s Adam’s apple before he could even think to take a step away from the danger.

“H-h-hail Hydra!” John wheezed through the gun, his small eyes nearly squeezed shut as he shook like a leaf under the soldier’s soulless glare.

Hail Hydra. As if those words held any meaning to the asset. This idiot could Hail Fuck for all he cared. The ghost only hailed his orders. He hailed his missions. He hailed survival. Hydra was nothing. This wimp – nearly pissing himself as the expensive silk tore away from the seams like wet tissue paper under the asset’s fist – was nothing.

“Ты здесь для миссии??” The soldier finally responded.

The man’s face twisted in confusion and the soldier forced himself to lock away the phantom instinct to roll his eyes at the double agent’s inability to speak the language for the very country he claims he serves.

“Y’here... For the mission?” The soldier repeated, his English nearly broken, voice rusty and accented with disuse as he fought against the piercing storm of memories and the electric clawing of old, unknown voices, fighting their way to the surface.

“Y’here to get that mug kicked in, punk?”

The blonde man squared his shoulders and attempted to match his height. “Yes. Agent Carter is my Supervising Officer until she retires next year. She and I have a meeting tomorrow morning at the Carrousel du Louvre where she will hand me a floppy disk to deliver back to the United Nations Headquarters in Manhattan, New York. I will provide the true disk to you, and deliver the copy to the headquarters. You’re to take it back to command when your mission is complete.”

The soldier did not know what a floppy disk was, but he kept silent all the same.

“The information?”

“Classified, I’m afraid. Not even I know what’s inside. I’ve been given orders to make a copy and stay silent, whispers are though... whatever’s on this disk... it can bring back the dead.”

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After wrangling with the ancient payphone and managing to get Tony’s voicemail three separate times, (can you believe him? Not even weekly lunch dates are enough to get him to answer the damn phone) she and Bucky were down to their last round of coins, so she decided to try Clint’s cell.

Bucky was currently standing beside her, body unmoving as his eyes gauged everything around them, his ever present gun in hand, and the metal links to what used to be his arm was duct taped together into a sinister looking ball, stuffed into the backpack strapped on his back. Darcy watched from the corner of her eye as Bucky’s shoulders pinched just a little tighter after every loud ring of the dial tone in her ear.

“Yeah?” Her friend’s gruff voice finally responded into the telephone.

“Clint!” Darcy cried out happily, “oh god, it’s so good to hear your voice! Listen, I don’t have much time—”

“—Darce? What the hell happened?!” Clint shouted in outrage, Darcy winced and took the phone away from her ear a little. The black plastic phone’s ear piece visibly vibrated with Clint’s tenor.
“You dropped off the face of the earth! Your cousin called worried sick! She said your luggage was found by the police in the middle of some crime scene… she said you weren’t in the apartment… dude, Tony’s in California trying to track your GPS from all the way over there. What the hell happened to your phone anyway?”

“—will you shut the hell up for one second! Listen!” But Clint continued to ramble, pissed off and worried. Beside her, Bucky was uncharacteristically fidgety. Glaring at something unseeingly as his fingers tapped on the butt of the gun in his only hand. His hard eyes drifting from something beyond his vision to the phone in her grip every few seconds.

“Tony almost sent out a search party for you all the way from Malibu! It’s been three days since the call dropped! What’s going—”

Bucky released an inaudible growl and yanked the rusty phone from her hand before Clint could chew her out any further. Bucky smashed the plastic phone back into the receiver, hanging up the call and practically breaking the booth’s box in two.

“Dude! What the hell!”

“I change my mind…” Bucky mumbled, walking away back toward their broken down getaway car. If it were any other time, Darcy would have acknowledged the way his strangely feminine strut of his hips made her stomach knot itself.

“Change your…? About what?” She cried out, struggling to catch up with his power walk. The gravel shifted beneath her feet, her toes dug into the dirt as she clutched at his shoulder to turn him around.

Bucky turned abruptly, getting a little too close into her personal space than called for. Her eyes barely reached his shoulder and she had to squint up against the setting sun behind him to look into his eyes, what she found there almost twisted her heart.

His gaze was wild, mistrustful, searching the area around them for something to look at other than her. Bucky’s breathing was accelerated, his nostrils flared with every inhale. He clenched and unclenched his jaw and the muscles twitched beneath his messy beard.

The road behind and before them was deserted for several miles each way. They were so far off the maps that Gramer’s thugs, or Hydra’s agents, or whoever it was that Bucky was worried about, wouldn’t be able to find them even with a GPS and hunting dogs. They were literally in the middle of nowhere and she had no clue how she’d even gotten them there.

“I’m low on ammo.” Bucky said, staring down at her over the flaked blood on his nose. His gun-hand falling to the side. The ripped sleeve of his bomber displayed the scarred pink skin around the metallic, five-pointed star on his shoulder.

The red paint was scuffed and dented from missed bullets.

The universal symbol for Communism was forever fused onto his body, soiled and defaced for all to see.

Blue and green wires tangled and disappeared beneath the sinister star, into the half-closed zipper of his bag where the rest of his metal arm was contained.

Low on ammo? Was that a euphemism for something? He must have been tired. The guy hadn’t slept in the three days since he rescued her from the alley. He hadn’t eaten anything, not even the strawberry pop tarts she’d wafted under his nose to entice him into eating. (He didn’t, and neither did
she. Turns out the vending machine he’d busted open for her was full of expired shit. Not even Darcy was that desperate.)

Then again, Darcy wasn’t the happiest camper with the situation either. She wasn’t athletic and she didn’t have Jane’s waif-like build. Darcy liked food and she functioned best on a full stomach. She was low on ammo too, if she had to put it into those words.

“Then let me call Clint back, we’ll explain the situation and they’ll come for us. He’ll take us to Tony’s tower. The city can’t be too far from here. We’re still in New York… I think.”

Bucky stayed silent in front of her. She’d gotten used to him not understanding the basic rules of personal space. “Pick your battles, dove,” as her aunt would have said. And anyway, when someone smells as bad as he, the stench tends to stick, so she doesn’t think making him stand a few feet away will help her forget how god-awful she now smells because of him.

She supposes, when you’re about to kill someone, being in such close proximity to them is kinda necessary. Why wouldn’t Bucky enforce that body language into regular conversation as well?

Odd to think, with that train of thought she’s having, that she wasn’t more worried over the fact she was so close to an admitted assassin. They were chest to chest, only inches away from their noses touching but the way they were standing was anything but romantic.

In fact, with the way his feet were planted shoulder width apart, Darcy thought he was trying to intimidate her into backing out from calling Clint back.

Really, dude? After everything they’ve gone through?

I’ll be good. She reassured herself, reorienting her train of thought. No more jokes. Time for a real conversation, (this time for real) without any growling or frustration or sarcasm. It was long overdue.

She looked at Bucky now, really looked at him.

She didn’t cringe away at his smell, or flinch at the fearsome crisscross of cuts on his face, old and new, or frown at the black circles under his eyes… even though he did smell like vomit and onions, and those cuts were worrisome… but she didn’t imagine she looked too peachy either, and the crusted mud on her back and knees kinda made her look like a vagrant too. She imagines tending to those particular things will have to wait until they get their Rescue situation settled.

She looked into his sad, confused gaze and all she saw were the tears leaking from his eyes when Gamer pushed that button earlier.

Her eyes dropped down to his coarse beard and her brain pinched with the effort it took not to remember the tears that disappeared into the long bristles.

She looked down at his grim frown and her chest and ears burned with the echo of the tortured cries that spilled from his mouth and into her soul. This man scarred her.

He’s scarred her for life.

His hands have killed… murdered and maimed on behalf of her name. She didn’t ask for any of this, but she wasn’t going to bitch about it anymore.

Whatever happened to Bucky that Gamer had alluded to, whatever post-traumatic stress Bucky was suffering from… there was still a ghost of a man that shone through.
“You’ll be okay… got it, doll?” he had said.

“What’s up, hobo?” She asked, as nicely and as quietly as her slightly nasal voice could offer. Based on the amount of times she’s called him a hobo, she figured she might as well twist the derogatory term into a form of endearment. She owes the guy at least that amount of familiarity.

Bucky held up the gun with his only free hand as if that was enough explanation itself.

“Down to the last gun with bullets? That what you mean?” She asked, filling in the gaps of his silence.

He nodded. “…couldn’t raid the bodies.”

Darcy swallowed around a hard lump in her throat. Couldn’t raid the bodies because he was on the ground, convulsing in her lap, howling in pain and begging for help while she struggled to carry him into the backseat as if he was a sack of screaming, defenseless meat. God, she wanted to punch something. How could he just… how was he even walking and talking right now? The mental strength this guy must have.

She might not know about his past, or what it means that he was a Winter Soldier or whatever, or why he doesn’t have memories, or why he’s so adamant that she can help him... but despite the anomalies Bucky was the strongest guy she’s ever met.

“You’re so brave. You know that?” She said, word vomit churning in her gut and bubbling up and out before she could stop it. The stress of the day catching up to her in a rare show of affection for the stranger whose tears have stained her hands and soul forever.

“You’re like… unstoppable. I don’t know how you do it. These... these guys tried to take you down and you just... you gave them the middle finger even when you were outnumbered! And you’ve saved my life. And even though you can probably kill me with your pinky fingers, you won’t. Y-y-you look at me like with those sad eyes… like I have the answer for your life’s purpose. You know? It’s... I don’t know. It’s crazy. You’re crazy.”

Bucky frowned. Jaw ticking as his nose brushed away from hers to glare out into the distance. Oh shit, I offended him, Darcy worried.

She reached up, the coarse facial hair scratching at the soft, dirt caked pads of her fingertips and turned his head back to look down at her. “Crazy means good, man. Crazy… right now, is great. You’re my new hero. I told you that already. But it’s my turn now to try and help you. Okay?”

She gently tried to pry the gun from his hand. He didn’t budge at first, his fingers remained gripped on the hilt of the small weapon. Her eyes remained locked on his.

Since they were so close together and she’d lost her glasses, his clear blue-green eyes were the only thing in her focus.

They’re very pretty, she thought nonchalantly, as she watched the way his dark lashes framed his stormy eyes. His near-bushy eyebrows pinched together as he wordlessly watched her ogle.

Her stilted speech must have gotten through to him, because finger by finger, Bucky released the gun and put it in her waiting hand. Something that, she understood, must have been a tremendous feat for him… giving her the power to the only remaining weapon when there was still a threat lurking out there.
Darcy held the gun in her hand, unaccustomed to the light weight of it after spending an entire morning holding up a twenty-pound rifle for target practice. She took a small step back out of Bucky’s space, immediately feeling the chill in the cooling evening as the little rift between them grew.

“I’m defenseless.” He admitted, almost angrily. Well, the words were as quipped and emotionless as they’ve ever been in the few days she’s been stuck with him, but Darcy liked to think she understood him just a little better already. He was scared, and it showed through what he didn’t say.

“You mean your arm?”

Bucky nodded, his head tilting down to the empty space where his arm would be attached to the metal shoulder pad. Nothing but exposed, pink flesh and twisted wires now.

“My friend can help. You have to trust me on that.” She said, handing the gun back, hilt first, as she stepped closer again, their dirty boots rooted between one another in their close proximity.

She squinted up at him until her face was as close as before and she could clearly see his dirty, ragged features again through her fuzzy vision. “Tony is the smartest man I know. I know he’ll help you. He’s a bit of an oddball but he’s very nice. His girlfriend, her name is Pepper, she’s my boss. She’s like an older sister to me, you’ll love her. And Clint—”

She didn’t get to finish her sentence, because something in Bucky’s eyes seemed to detach as he stepped away again.

“If… it comes down to a fight… I won’t be able to…”

Because of his arm. He’s scared he won’t be able to protect her because his greatest asset was currently being held together with duct tape, in a knotted metal heap on his back.

“Then you’ll just have to trust me, huh?” Darcy smiled encouragingly, wide and toothily over the idea she was finally going home.

When she smiled up at him, so close to his face yet strangely relaxed at the proximity, she wasn’t self-conscious about the little gap between her two front teeth… because when Bucky gave her a smile, slow and timid and barely even a smile but more of a wild baring of white teeth, she noticed his front teeth were almost as crooked as hers.

And if that wasn’t a symbol to how imperfect the two of them were… well, then she didn’t know what was.

- ✡️ -

It only took an hour after their second call to Clint for the rescue helicopter to find them.

As she giddily watched the small chopper land in the center of the empty road, Bucky remained in front of her, gun cocked and ready, feet planted firmly like a guard dog ready to leap with one wrong move.

She didn’t mind, it was nothing new really and at this point she’d be more concerned if he wasn’t trying to protect her in the face of an unknown.

He’d done so much already, she was finally about to give some back.

The promise of what this rescue entailed… a shower, a warm bed that wasn’t covered by weird
stains, food… she almost wanted to kiss Clint right on his cocky mouth for finding them with nothing to go by but their vague description of the area and the old gas station's dilapidated sign.

“Clint!” Darcy squealed once her friend stepped off the chopper. She sprinted around Bucky and bounded toward her best friend. Clint tossed her up into a crushing hug, mud stains and all. Her face was studded between his warm neck and collar as her trembling arms held onto him like a lifeline. Three days’ worth of trauma and stress finally caught up to her as she melted into his shoulder.

“Thank, God.”

“What’s going on, Darce? Who’s he?” Clint whispered as he held on tightly. She could almost feel him glaring Bucky down. She already knew Bucky was glaring as well.

“It’s a long story, but we gotta go.” She said after stepping back from the hug. She walked back over to Bucky, a bit of hesitance in her step when she noted his defensive stance and the way the gun was still half-pointed toward the ground where Clint was standing.

“Darcy…” Clint warned behind her, his hand twitching for his own gun as Darcy walked closer toward Bucky.

She ignored the warning in Clint’s voice. She understood and saw what Clint didn’t.

To Clint, Bucky looked unstable and ready to snap, the gun in his hand was steady on his target. She knew the dried blood on his hand, neck and face alarmed the former Shield Agent. The wild eyes in his emotionless face was distressing, anyone with half a brain could see Bucky was a man that has seen and done too much to ever function normally again. He was shattered and barely knew how to hold a normal conversation without stiffening up and shutting down. Darcy knew Clint could catalogue everything she came to learn about her hobo in only five seconds due to his training.

Somewhere in the back of her mind, she understood Clint will never trust Bucky.

But Clint couldn’t see what Darcy saw as she walked over to him confidently.

Clint didn’t see the slight twitching of his eye, or the subtle shift toward her as she closed the gap between them until you couldn’t discern one gross smell from the other.

Clint couldn’t see beyond the empty void shining from Bucky’s gaze, but Darcy understood the desperation for help in the way his brow furrowed. She saw the plea and all the words he physically could not say in the wrinkles on his forehead and the tick of that pesky muscle in his jaw… and she understood his inability to ask for it, his masking of his with grunts and snippy comments.

She might not understand Russian, but she promised herself, instead of cat videos and fanfiction, she was going to dedicate any free time to learn so she could read those files in his bag and finally know the demons behind his hollow eyes.

It took Clint’s hostile reaction and Bucky’s fearful one to understand it. This was a man that had to snatch her off the street, instead of asking her like a normal person for help. She got it now, even though it was three days late and a bit too much whining later. She might not know why Bucky chose her to help him – she didn’t believe that he stumbled upon her “Unclassified” file and judged her (Tumblr addict and an assistant to a CEO that only hired her because she happened to know her boss rather than actually quality for the position), out of everyone on the planet, to help him pick up his broken memories.

But she got it now, and she accepted him. Accepted whatever this was. To Darcy, Bucky didn’t look like a threat… he looked scared and small, no matter how big she imagined his muscles might be.
under that jacket. She wanted to help him.

She wanted to be good. She'll be a good little soldier for him.

An unknown was in front of Bucky, ready to take them away to a place he had zero knowledge of, all from the word-of-mouth from the woman he’d been lugging around for three days for who knows what reason.

“Bucky?” Darcy said, after standing in his personal space for a bit too long. He gave no acknowledgement, not even a grumpy grunt like he usually does. His eyes were still trained behind her, arm unyielding beside her and pointed toward Clint threateningly.

“Yo, hobo? Remember what I said? He’s my friend.” She reminded, shuffling closer into his space like before, until her vision cleared and she could see his features again. That finally brought some life into him as he looked down at her, a bit more trust in his eyes than when he looked at Clint.

“He’s here to take us to the tower I told you about, where Tony can fix your arm.” She watched Bucky search her eyes, his jaw clenched and shoulders stretched back in his defensive stance.

But he finally lowered the gun, he didn’t pocket it or put the safety on. But he did lower it away from her bestie.

Baby steps.

Bucky gave her a small nod, barely a movement of his chin, but she got it anyway.

*Let’s get this over with.* He meant to say.

She grinned, latching onto his bicep and tugging him alongside her toward where Clint was pretending not to gape.

“This is Clint Barton. He likes sleeping, watching sad, romantic movies, and taking long walks on the beach.” She joked.

Clint, finally relaxing a little bit when he realized Bucky wasn’t going to shoot him in the balls, laughed loudly, and jumped onto the open door of the helicopter and strapped into the pilot’s seat. “Like *you* don’t. You cried for like twenty minutes after *One Day* was over.”

“That was a sad ending,” she defended.

Darcy was about to climb into the helicopter herself, when she felt a warm hand wrap around her midriff. She squeaked, Bucky’s fingers digging into her ticklish side, as he hoisted her up without even really trying.

“Thanks.” She smiled, giddy she was going back home and to the safest place in New York City, no doubt. Whoever was after them won’t be able to enter the Avengers’ Tower even if they tried.

Bucky grunted in acknowledgement, getting in after her and sitting in the only other seat beside her.

“Strap yourselves in, guys!” Clint instructed though the headset he handed over to them. His voice came static-y through speakers within. “We’ll be home- *God!* What the fuck’s that smell?”
Endurance is one of the first lessons the Soldier learned. No matter what torture, what form of lobotomy his handlers partake with his mind, his lessons in endurance never faded away.

Some nights- when he sits on the floor with his Glock clutched in his unfeeling hand, trying to breath space into the pressure creeping from the base of his spine to the back of his eyes, the black sludge of fatigue swirls behind his drooping lids- the soldier has no other choice but to endure sleep.

The dreams come forward and march forth from his faulty subconscious, just like he anticipates it would. The nightmares dig their poisoned talons into the flesh of his brain with his same pinpointed accuracy he inspires after his finger’s lifted off a gun’s trigger.

With the dreams comes a darkness of which he assumes normal people will never experience.

The cold is incapacitating. The heaviness and inescapable numbness of his limbs set him into an immobile panic. In his sleep he can open his eyes and see nothing but a shallow puff of white-blue breath, produced from the five-ton pressure against his chest, and released through frozen and shattered blue lips.

In his dreams, amid the sea of black, the only thing he can see is his own frosty reflection. Tinged in blue and silver, his own eyes, as unfamiliar as the metal arm attached to him, stares back with a focus nearly a thousand yards away.

His face is gaunt. Fine bristles of hair on his cheeks pull in every which way from of the biting cold. The roots in his scalp pull taught against the ice blocks molding around him until he feels the cold burning through even the smallest of pores.

The black ice digs its way into every available crevice of his body, every uncovered pore of his skin, until he begins to crack like an abused China doll. As the ghostly fingers of ice pull until his skin is taught, small layers of his flesh- on his right knuckle, at the very tip of his button nose, the corner of his left eye brow- begins to unfurl and peel away from his flesh… and the ice freezes even that too.

In the blue and silver frost coated window, he’s forced to watch his frozen torture happen within the span of merely two seconds.

He knows this part. He’s familiar with this scene.

With every lingering second more and more lost memories begin to surface… the ice, the window, and an unflinching pain so cold it burns. They call him The Winter Soldier and he believes with all his might that it’s because of this: the glacial security box they keep him in.

He knows he’s dreaming, once he steps into his nightmare he remembers every time he’s been in it. When he wakes up he won’t remember, whatever the electricity’s done it’s erased his ability to
remember his past, but in his nightmares it’s revealed with the most excruciating detail. When his eyes open he won’t remember the screaming rage in his gut, the maniac fear at his heart. A small mercy.

On some basic subconscious level, he understands that he’s experienced this ice. He’s seen this window. He’s felt the claustrophobia of this shadowed box.

This is how he learned it. Within the tight metal walls and pitch black darkness, this is how he mastered endurance.

His mind runs rampant with terror but in his Paris hotel room his body is motionless, slumped over in sedated exhaustion. Even half-comatose, he keeps his Glock secure in his hand and ready to fire. The faint hum, the low mechanical whirring of gears locking and unlocking together along his left arm even in immobility, lulls him into a mandatory self-sustained mode of rest. It is not sleep, he is recharging.

In the dream he’s suspended in the cold for hours until he begins to see the flickers of movement beyond the small window.

The images are distorted from the spider-web of ice flakes. The ghosts in his nightmares are always unfamiliar, but he has the severe insight that the rotting flesh of the bodies outside of his window are long dead by his own hand.

He sees the fires licking at the small gap. He watches the bodies rise up and stand among the flames. Men, women, and children- each and every one as unfamiliar and ghostly as the last, yet they all bare some slight resemblance to him.

A man stands proudly within the fires, yet it does not burn him. His skull is bashed in, as if taken a beating with a baseball bat. His army green military uniform is soiled with blood and torn to shred from ballistics. He’s unfamiliar yet his eyes look identical to the asset’s own. Haunted, crazed, and staring straight through him, his gaze is far away from reality.

Beside him stands a small little boy, skinny with scraped hands and knees. His elbows are cracked in the wrong direction, bent and broken. His small bird-like chest is bleeding, shotgun wounds line up the center of his skinny adolescent frame. His hair is greasy and wavy, with the same brown-black shade as the Winter Soldier’s own neglected hair.

Behind them a woman stood with her throat slit, her nose crooked nearly identically to his own. Next to them an old man, his guts spilling blood and flesh all over the flaming ground, but his chin was upturned and proud. Next to him a teenage boy, missing an eye but his smirk was as mischievous as the asset distantly remembers his own to be.

Dozens of people, bloody and lifeless, stare at him through the glass.

The asset wishes, and almost forgets all his self-taught tolerance, that he was part of the flames too. He’d willingly step into the Hell he created to get away from the ice’s greedy clutch.

He accepts the fate of his nightmares. He accepts the dozens of soulless eyes, all looking like replicas of his very own. He accepts the trauma and memories into his forefront until it consumes him, knowing all the while he won’t remember it when he awakes.

A prisoner trapped in his subconscious, watching and living through the eyes of a man-made machine: The Asset. The Winter Soldier.

At the very last moment, just as he feels he’s about to wake up and get pulled away from his Hell,
two bright blue eyes appear at the center of the window, pressed up so close to the cold glass he can no longer see the flames or his long dead conquests.

Her small cherubic face was shining wet from her tears. A small jagged cut was exposed on her forehead, spilling a long thick line of crimson blood against the pale white porcelain of her skin. Her brown curly hair was pushed back, tangled and snarled. With every slight movement, the soldier noticed bright, translucent rainbows reflect off of small glass shards, tangled and embedded into the mess of short hair atop her head.

Small glistening tears streaked down her chubby cheeks and mixed with the blood, leaving wet pink trails along the blushing apples of her cheeks. The baby girl, barely four or five, pressed her face into the window until her soft shallow breath fogged it up.

Her tears stop immediately as she peeks inside. Her tiny little fingers caress the glass of his entrapment. Big eyes, full of child-like wonder and confusion, land on the frozen metal arm outstretched toward the glass as if reaching for her.

At the corner of the cool glass, closest to where his hand remained solidly frozen against the window, a nimble finger absentmindedly drew a small heart through the frost. The ice immediately melts away at her slow, soft caressing.

Baby blue eyes innocently blink back up at him and she squints as if trying to focus her vision. And then she smiles... exposing two crooked front teeth with a small gap in between.

Despite the thick, frozen glass between them, the little girl's wondrous voice is loud and clear.

“Are you an angel?”

- ★ -

In his Paris hotel room, just a building away from his current target, the Winter Soldier wakes up from his necessary rest. His back is ramrod straight in an instant, his gun still in hand, and the nightmares of his night are once again lost to the sieve of his faulty mind.

The memory slips away. The ice box dissolves to smoke, the bodies and flames pull back and retreat into his subconscious. The person he used to be, full of dignity and fear and regret, is once more forced to take a back seat.

Like sand spilling through his fingers, he forgets most of it. He forgets himself and his pain. Until all he remembers is numbing cold, a little girl's baby blue eyes, and The Mission.

- ★ -

An hour after they finally landed on the rooftop of Stark’s tower, Darcy and Bucky found themselves in the center of Tony’s outlandishly modern penthouse living room. She's been living in the Tower for nearly half a year now, and still she'll never get used to the cold and museum like feel of the home. With Tony around to make a mess and blare music for the entire penthouse to hear, it's much more lively... but all alone, with only two other occupants, the tower's mansion was cold and bleak.

A Magpie would be more at home inside Tony's sea of reflective polished surfaces and reinforced steel rafters. Everything around them was clean and sharp angles, the exact opposite to the owner's personality.

The two dirty runaways stood out like sore thumbs.
Bucky reeked and Darcy’s hair was snarled enough to make the exotic ficus in the corner of the room look tamed. She combed her hair with her fingers to the best of her ability, and tried not to wince at the knots her fingers got caught in.

Clint sat Indian-style on the arm of the couch in front of her, his hands clasped tightly in his lap. Through the corner of his eye, Darcy watched him watch Bucky as he mapped out the open living room, gun in his hand, and ever present backpack slung around his neck.

Behind Clint, Tony’s giant Plasma screen television was switched on to CNN, Darcy stared unseeingly as Shepard Smith spoke. The TV was muted but it wasn't difficult to guess what he was talking about. Beside the anchorman was a blurry, low-quality cell phone video of Captain America being forced to surrender down to his knees at gun-point by SHIELD agents.

"Aw, by the way… sorry about your aunt.” Clint said, breaking the silence without breaking contact from his surveillance. She didn't look away from the looping video, nor did she notice Bucky pause his ministrations for a second or two before continuing on to the next room.

Darcy breathed deeply through the pang of guilt. Through the excitement of her Bonnie and Clyde role play the past few days she had barely remembered the death of her aunt, the woman that practically raised her while hers and Sharon’s parents worked away from home most weeks out of every month.

“Thanks. Sorry about your face. The heck happened to it?” Darcy replied, finally tearing her eyes away from Shep Smith and his obnoxious, overly botoxed face. She didn't have to squint past her blurry vision to see the bold words “Where is Captain America now?” blared across the screen.

Clint’s face was burnt to the point that she almost felt bad pointing it out to him. Through her relief of him picking them up out of New York’s unknown wilderness, she hadn't even noticed the horrible near third-degree burns along Clint’s face and neck.

“When D.C went to shit I was still on one of their missions. Coulson sent me out—“

“Holy shit, Phil’s alive?!” She perked up in her seat, heart speeding. Bucky was silent as a cat, his heavy boots barely made a sound on the white marble floor, yet she still managed to instinctively follow his presence without needing to turn around.

Clint scratched at a burnt scab on his chin, trying and failing to discreetly eye the bookbag at Bucky’s back. A faint hum and sound of bent clogs filled the sudden silence, the sound emanating from the bookbag.

“Long story. I don't know all the details but I'm pretty sure it has to do with the mission I was sent out on... I was... uh...” He drifted off as he regarded Bucky.

"You can trust him." Darcy piped up confidently, knowing still that her judgment against a high trained Agent's meant jack shit.

He pursed his lips, gave a low "mhmhm" but when Bucky didn't react or speak up of Clint's obvious mistrust, Clint decided to ignore the problem. For now.

"I was guarding a safe house in some unaddressed shack in the middle of nowhere, pretty standard shit. A Level One could do it easy. There wasn't much to it other than sittin' around and guarding some weird lookin' vials. But then again, I don't know.” He said, pointing up to the redness on his face, “dang safe house was attacked around the same time those Helicarriers blew up last week. Think it was-"
“Hydra?”

Darcy startled, shocked to hear Bucky’s quiet rasp pipe up from behind her for the first time since they got into the helicopter. She turned around slightly on the couch, the black leather squeaking beneath her weight as she gave him a wide eyed look, expressing her silent fear of the dark society that seemed to be haunting their every move. He’d been so quiet since they entered the helicopter and even more distant since they’d landed. Bucky had wandered off, left to his own devices as Clint and Darcy played their version of Chicken on the living room couches, waiting for the other to speak up and explain first.

Clint nodded. “It seemed like a planned attack... distract everyone with all the noise Pierce made as one of their teams extracted whatever those vials were. Plus, their prints have been staining a lot of shit lately, it’s totally not unlikely,” he replied matter of fact, now full on staring unabashedly to Bucky’s shoulder, red star unmistakable.

“You’re him.” Clint said after a few seconds of delayed silence. Behind him, in high definition, the blurry form of the unmasked Winter Soldier opened fire onto Captain America and company on an empty Washington, D.C. causeway, the scene recorded via the news channel’s helicopter.

“Yes.” Bucky responded honestly, his hand curling into a fist beside him, twitching to reach for the gun with only a few bullets left in it.

In a blur of motion Clint jumped off the couch and took a defensive stance behind it.

Honestly, Darcy thought Clint had connected the pieces a little sooner. The TV was on right there and everything.

She remained seated, legs crossed delicately in an act to preserve any femininity she could keep through the torn and mud encrusted clothing she wore.

"Clint, relax.” Darcy said with a sigh. If she was less exhausted she would have had the capacity to find a spark of humor in the situation. But she wasn’t smiling right now, and she knew for a fact that Bucky must be feeling tense and on high-alert.

Her hobo-hero hadn't slept or eaten the entire time they've been tangled together, possibly even longer. Hydra doesn’t seem like the type of company that regularly feeds and waters their plants. She needed to give Bucky a moment of peace and Clint's newfound hostility was depleting Bucky's trust in Darcy's word every moment he stood rigidly behind her with his fists clenched against that nearly empty gun.

But Clint didn't relax against her word. His shoulder remained tense and his posture hunched over the couch like a wild panther waiting to attack. But he didn't, thankfully.

"I hope you know what you're doing.” Clint spoke to her but his narrowed, serious eyes remained on Bucky. "I needa go make some calls."

"Can you do me a favor and call Tony? Tell him he needs to get here as soon as possible. He has to help us.”

Clint's eyes flickered to the wires disappearing into the backpack. "Yeah. I'm calling Tony."

It sounded like a threat, and Clint stiffly walked away without ever moving his eyes from Bucky- the way he protectively hunched over Darcy's sitting form, the way he kept her entire body hidden from any view of the floor to ceiling windows beside them.
Stark's penthouse contains four master bedrooms, one of which he had gifted to her upon accepting the job offer to work directly under Pepper Potts.

When she first stepped into the already furnished room, it was practically screaming *Tony Stark*. Everything was industrial and sleek, over the top and pricey: the exact opposite to who she was. Darcy had the nagging feeling that Tony knew exactly how she'd feel about the shiny reflective surfaces. But in Tony Stark flair and fashion, he did it anyways just to see her squirm.

She had dragged Bucky by the sleeve and tugged him into her room with no second thought, her only goal to finally get them cleaned up and shining new again was on her mind.

When she opened the tall double doors leading into her domain, Bucky entered behind her like a deadly shadow, lurking just a step behind her heel. He took in everything about her room in the same way she noticed he regards an enemy threat: calculatingly and quietly.

Honestly, she had expected him to inspect the room before letting her into it first. She imagined him pushing her back and scoping every nook and cranny, checking under her bed and inside her closet for any danger or planted bugs, but he surprisingly did the opposite.

“Not gonna scope out the joint?” She asked cheekily, closing the heavy white doors behind. The locks clicked, the soft noise echoed ominously and she was reminded of the fact that this is the first time they can actually relax with one another, finally have a moment’s reprieve from the tenseness of having to watch their backs, of having to keep one hand on a weapon and the other on each other.

He shrugged the bag higher onto his back. It must have been heavy. The metal wasn’t light when she helped him hold it in the gas station and his back must be aching.

Her mind flashed to the video of the very same soldier, raining bullets, decked out in a suffocating black leather uniform under the heat and humidity of the D.C. afternoon summer.

“I trust you.” He rasped, hair falling over his eyes and Darcy smiled. His quiet and honest statement warming her heart where it had been hardened by John Gramer and the faceless junkies sent out to kill them these last few days.

As she turned around to give him a tour, she was painfully reminded of the fact that the only places to sit in her room was either her bed or her desk, both of which were a pristine white that will stain at the slightest touch from either of their mucky skin. Neither of them have showered in days, Bucky longer perhaps, and she needed to rectify that before they started stinking up the place.

“Let me show you to the bathroom.” She smiled, an almost shy expression as his gaze flickered down her body, analyzing her messy clothing and unkempt hair. It wasn’t a sexual gaze, God, he wasn’t being even remotely suggestive, but it still sent those unfamiliar sparks of newfound heat up her belly. She owes her life to this man more times than she can count, and if that doesn’t send some sort of warmth up her spine, then she doesn’t know what will.

Behind the long dirty beard, the black week old khol smudges around his eyes, and the sweaty, matted hair, his expressive and sad eyes made a fire lick up her body from the soles of her feet to the crown of her head so fast she almost felt sick. To be attracted to his lonely, desperate eyes, it said a lot about her mental state.

A minute passed and she was still standing there looking like a doof, in the center of her room with the broken and haggard man that took root in her life as her honorary guardian angel.
“You gonna show me to the wash, doll?” Bucky smirked, the quiet analytical mask falling away to reveal a small, mischievous and playful grin tugging at his chapped and cut up lips.

She gave a slight cough, jumping out of her stupor and led him to the other side of her room toward the master bathroom. Bucky followed behind obediently.

The bathroom was nearly half the size of the bedroom. Large and ostentatious, never let it be said that Tony Stark ever does things half assed. White tiled marble shone and glittered on the bathroom’s floors and walls. Glittery blue and gold features ornated the rest of the room. The modern slate bathroom counter tops were the only things she’d left behind from Tony’s original room plan.

Three white crystal chandeliers glittered to life as she switched the light on, illuminating the entire bathroom and sending up rainbows every which way as it reflected off the floor and walls.

Darcy led Bucky into the adjoining room, where the shower, claw-footed bathtub, and toilet reigned.

“You can shower first,” she supplied, opening up the glass door for him and quickly explaining every knob below the touch screen panel of the six-function spa shower. “I’ll just be in the closet,” she notified, pointing to the sliding frosted glass door off on the other side of her double sink and vanity table. “I think I might have some ex-boyfriend’s sweat pants in there somewhere. Ian might be your height, but they’re definitely gonna be a little snug.”

Bucky nodded, but turned away before she could catch the twisted frown on his features.

“Help yourself to any soap or shower gel. And please, don’t be embarrassed to use the razor. Or the shaving cream. Or the shampoo... Or the conditioner. Actually, for god’s sake, use up all of the bottles if you need to.” She joked, pointing out the hidden alcove in the far side of the shower wall containing shelves upon shelves of beauty products, soaps, and shower equipment. “The towels are there,” she pointed at the low coffee table decorating the space between the shower and the tub, a short pyramid of soft, rolled-up towels of all different patterns, beside a small collection of candles of all shapes, colors, and sizes, adorned the top.

He turned around, before she could point out anything else he might need for the evident field day he’s gonna have in that shower, and began to remove the book bag off his shoulder.

“Oh shit. I forgot about that, here... let me help you.” She pressed her hand against his shoulder blade and he tensed up. But like with every prospective dangerous situation Darcy’s faced with, she turned a blind eye to the awkwardness and pushed through his defenses anyways.

She helped him out of the tangle of his book bag straps and held the canvas bag up as he scooped the duct taped remains of the silver, shining plates. When the pieces of his arm were gently cradled to his chest, she dropped the bag by her laundry bag in the corner of the room. She carefully placed his Glock beside a crystal tray lined with perfume bottles on her vanity. The expensive perfumes and tray were gifts from her Aunt Peggy for her 20th birthday.

The sight of the gun resting beside it made her smile.

His blue jacket was destroyed beyond repair. Sprays of black tainted the front and back- blood splatters most likely. The wires coming from his exposed shoulder made it impossible for him to remove the sweater completely without tugging at one of them.

“I hope you’re not very fond of that jacket, caus we’re gonna have to cut you out of it.”

Bucky let out a dry chuckle. “S’okay. Smells like shit anyways.”
She barked a short laugh, more out of surprise at the small-talk than it actually being funny. She began to rifle through the many drawers by her sinks for a pair of scissors. She found her spare pair of glasses and put them on, grateful to finally see clearly again.

She came back, holding the possible weapon away from him unless he got uncomfortable with the scissors being in her hand. Something which she noticed he appreciated judging by the small upturn of his lip.

Bucky stood seemingly relaxed, if it wasn’t for the way he kept eyeing the scissors, the room, and his Glock perched so far away.

The neon pink and green Crayola scissors did a hell of a shitty job cutting away at his jacket. She hacked away at the wrinkled and caked fabric for nearly fifteen minutes until she finally reached the edge of his left sleeve, where he was finally able to shrug out of it.

Darcy had a feeling, if that metal arm of his would have still been intact, that jacket would have been shredded like tissue paper in seconds.

She helped him out of the jacket wordlessly, trying with all her friggin might not to get too excited over the fact she was about to see what wonders lay hidden beneath the heavy clothing. Now was not the time!

The t-shirt was a lot easier to cut through, and she almost wished she didn’t have to. The old Ramones shirt looked like it was a vintage, though she was positive Bucky had no idea who the Ramones were… and his idea of vintage was probably a lot different than hers.

When the shirt peeled away, Bucky tensed as he watched for her reaction. She didn’t have it in her to muster up any ounce of lust for his incredible torso, though to be honest you’d have to be blind not to notice the muscles.

But every inch of his skin was criss-crossed with old scars, faded silvery from age, but they were there none the less.

Along his right nipple was a deep crooked gash, making the skin pucker into a heart-shape. She was no forensic but it looked like the long line was cut though with a dull, rusty knife almost.

Tears welled up in her eyes as she looked past his dirt and sweat encrusted skin to the wounds long forgotten. On his left shoulder revealed a bruise so dark and blossoming, it almost reminded her of the Aether that had diseased Jane not too long ago... His abs are littered in tiny cuts and-

"Oh God!"

She surprises herself and Bucky by her loud, sharp cry of anguish at the sight of a fresh bullet wound on his hip, slowly bleeding a trail of bright red, still-warm blood down the ‘V’ of his naval and into the denim of his jeans.

All of a sudden, the day feels too long.

Her afternoon feels like a lifetime and she grows white as a sheet at the reminder that not even a few hours ago she had held Bucky together in the cage of her small arms as he shook and seized with no one to lean onto for help but her.

He put up an act, a bravado for her at the gas station. He played the team leader and led them forward into motion, to find a way for her to contact help. He threw himself into the melee once
again so she could have a fighting chance to run away from the danger zone.

Her lip trembled, tears welled up in her eyes and his body became blurry in her vision as the events from the last few days finally registered into her slow-to-react brain. They’ve known each other for less than a handful of days, but she’s endured so much in such a short time with him than she ever has in her entire life.

“You—you got…” she trembled, her whole body shook with her distress. Her hands suddenly felt frozen numb as her blood flushed to the soles of her feet. She was white as a ghost as she stared at the bullet wound in shock, hand reaching out of their own accord as if to remove the bleeding hole with a mere swipe of her hands.

She was too absorbed with her inner turmoil to notice the shocked expression on Bucky’s face at her near-hysterical reaction to his wounds.

Darcy began to weep, unable to hold it at bay. A sob bubbled up and she couldn’t contain it as she choked on her despair, the cries catching in her throat. Stress and fear and guilt bubbled up and spilled through her scrunched lids four days too late as she wept in front of her savior like a lost and scared child.

Bucky shifted his arm and the action reminded her that he was shot!

“Oh, God! What am I doing crying!” she shrilled, frantically reaching for a towel from the low table beside her with shaking hands.

She unfolded the soft pink towel and pressed it to his muscled abdomen without asking, dabbing up the free flowing blood and capturing it in the fabric as if that alone would make it go away.

“Pepper put an emergency medical kit in my closet. I—I think I have something that will disinfect it. Maybe tape it up until we get you to a medic.” She muttered, not actually speaking to him but to herself over her jittery nerves.

She was about to turn around run into her closet for the kit, when she was stopped by a broad naked chest swiftly cutting into view.

She looked up, shocked that he could move so fast, and expected his mask to be up and firmly in place again, but she was stunned into subjection at the sight of tears welling up in his own eyes.

“Bucky—”

“Thank you... No one's ever...” he whispered the words, rushed them out with a quick exhale with such quiet passion she almost wanted to tear at her clothing and scream her rage to the monsters that abused him.

Her lower lip trembled, her eyes searched his in desperation and she willed herself to grow a backbone and stop crying for his health’s sake.

“No. Don’t thank me. You don't ever have to thank me for caring.” She responded, equally as serious as her small hands clutched at his shoulders for emphasis, her left hand meeting flesh, her right meeting metal unflinchingly. Any decorum of shyness was gone the minute he fell to the ground in his seizures a mere five hours ago.

He must be exhausted.

Bucky gave her a slight smile. His body was bent and bowed over her. He wasn’t frighteningly tall,
but he was tall enough (and she was short enough) that this position made it much more personal than he probably realized it seemed.

"Are you an angel?" He whispered, forehead nearly falling onto hers. He breathed it so quietly she almost didn't catch it, and judging by his unwavering look he probably thought she didn't hear it. It was such a strange display of gratitude, such an honest and random question, that Darcy thought nothing of it.

His eyes blazed as she tapped the towel to the wound again, wordlessly tucking the fabric into his jeans and underwear to keep it propped and steady against the blood flow.

She walked across the large bathroom to fetch the emergency kit and felt his eyes blaze holes into her back the whole way. As she turned the corner into her closet, she hoped the blazing beat of her vengeful, rage filled heart, wouldn't scare him away.

*I'll be good for him*, she repeated for the third time that day.

Chapter End Notes

All due respect to every hardcore Iron Man fan, I have only seen the first movie. Therefore, every idea I have of who Tony Stark is as a character comes from other fics and the Avengers. So I profusely apologize if I make a mistake in chronology or in his persona.

Also, I am SO sorry for the long wait everyone! I try to post once a week or at most every two weeks. It's been nearly a month! I went on vacation for two weeks and recently got back home. All the way in our Las Vegas hotel room I sat up until 3 AM, writing down notes for chapter six onto my iPad, tonight I finally have a moment of rest to actually post.

I have a sexy little oneshot starring our favorite hobo and Darcy. It's been completed for a while and I just might post it onto the series earlier than expected to make up for my lack in updating! (And to give you all a sneak preview into their still-budding relationship, because so far they're not quite THERE yet. If you catch my meaning. And if you're like me and you like to get to the hot and juicy quick, then it's all for you!)

Thank you for your patience and your empowering faith in me. Be loud and bold. Criticize my writing. Tell me you hate it, tell me you love it. Tell me things you liked or disliked. I read all your comments and even the bad ones make me happy! Let me know what you all think of the way I'm spinning this fic!

Love you guys!
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

- ☆ -

Paris, June 2004

- ☆ -

The Winter Soldier sat against the stone building as he watched Gramer speak with his target two hundred yards away. Around him, shops and couture boutiques were just beginning to come to life in the early morning. Paris’ upper class milled around him, paying no mind to the dirty homeless man of no worth to them.

If only they knew.

The disk he was required to get, upon further digging, didn’t contain anything that could bring the dead back to life. It held coordinates to a location rumored to hold a serum that could genetically enhance a normal human and keep them from dying. He knew his handlers would be pleased with his findings, if they didn’t know of it already.

The asset was currently sitting on a street corner. He had knocked out a homeless man nearby, leaving him face down in an alley and had taken his clothing. It reeked and the tattered wool pants were damp at the hems. The soot ridden jacket barely concealed his weapons holster attached to his back. In front of him was a simple, rusted tin can, resting on the cobblestone sidewalk. Gramer will drop the disk into it and they will go their separate ways. This was the simplest, most effective way to get the data without getting his hands dirty within the few days he had left to kill the woman.

The asset turned his head to the left but his gaze stayed firmly in front of him as Gramer and Agent Carter walked his way, beside him was the entrance of Carter’s favorite winery where she had an appointment to meet with a famous local winemaker. Carter was due to walk right past him with Gramer falling only two feet behind to drop the disk into his can.

He’d be nothing but a ghost before the door is even closed.

“Sortir d’ici, bon à rien! Ce n’est pas un endroit pour vous!” A man yelled down at him, capturing the attention of several passersby. The soldier looked up, settling his features into feigned shock at the French police officer fucking up his operation.

He was about to open his mouth, tell the man to fuck off and lead him into an alleyway to keep him quiet until the drop had been completed, when a small little girl, no older than thirteen, walked toward them from the concession stand of handmade jewelry where she’d perusing the same necklace for nearly fifteen minutes.

“Monsignor!” She said sweetly in botched French. “He’s not bothering anyone! Let him rest.”

The police smiled in contempt to the little girl, and turned his back to her to face down at the asset once more.

“I will not tell you again, rat.” The officer snarled, holding out a black baton as a warning. “Scurry back into your sewer where you belong.”
The soldier’s eye twitched in righteous fury as a sudden ire began to trigger deep within him. But before he could get up and spit fire back at the officer, the little girl began her attack.

She kicked the police officer in the shin repeatedly, using her small fists to mash at the man’s abdomen. Her hat fell off with the quick, jerky movements, and her hair fizzed up and sprung every which way with a life of its own.

“Say you’re sorry!” The girl began shouting, her face finally revealed from the wall of her hair.

The soldier tried to contain the hardened shock brimming around his features at the small girl. This was the niece, his target’s family member, trying to defend him against the police.

He almost reached to snap her neck or put a bullet through her skull right there out of sheer anger because if the little girl was causing drama then her aunt will no doubt...

“Darcy, what are you doing, child? What’s going on here?” His target asked briskly, sweeping the short, dark haired girl behind her coat as she stood up to the officer. The asset cursed internally.

“Apologies, madame. I am simply trying to get the rats off the streets. Your child… she…”

“Rats off the streets?!” Agent Carter shrilled. “I’m so sorry, sir.” His target smiled demurely down at him, a dirty faced assassin acting in place of a homeless man. “This man won’t be bothering you again. John, see to it that the officials know exactly what kind of people they have working here!” Gramer, finally caught up to what was going on and white as a sheet, nodded as he dragged the confused officer away from them.

“I’m so sorry. That man won’t soon find a job as an Officer in this city.” Carter smiled kindly, lowering down as far as she could for an elder woman. A shiny flash of something small and metallic was brought to his attention as she tucked it away into her purse.

Gramer hadn’t gotten the disk yet. The soldier will have to come up with a new plan to get it and kill her all within the span of five days. It was more than enough time but he knew his handlers won’t be too happy about it.

“What’s your name, darling?” her faintly British voice asked kindly, behind her the girl, Darcy, peeked at him curiously through thick glasses.

What’s his name? What should he tell her? Soldier? Asset? A name wasn’t given to him in the mission’s brief folder.

“Steve.” The soldier said finally, the first name that came to him. He tried to ignore the strange electrocuting pangs in his mind as the simple name continued to echo around in his brain.

His target gave a small smile, something in her eyes drifting back into a haunted sadness as Darcy crept closer.

“Well then, Steve. I don’t have much money on me. But this might be able to cover all your needs. See to it you find yourself someplace warm? It may be summer but the temperature will drop a few degrees tonight.” She smiled, getting up to hand him a short wad of French bills.

He didn’t need the money, the place he was staying at – where he kept every prospective weapon that would eventually cause her demise – was nearly as nice as her own hotel room. He would know, he’s taken surveillance.

The streets were almost empty. No one would notice it if he put his arms around her neck into a
choke hold, drag her into the alley. It’ll look like a mugging. A few sloppy gun shots beside some major arteries and she’ll be put down before the afternoon.

He almost did it. The soldier, as he took the paper bills from her clean, manicured and wrinkled hand, he almost threw it into her face as a quick diversion, already imagining the slowing of her heartbeat beneath his hands, metal and flesh, tight around her neck. But the moment was gone, and his Target was beginning to step back and walk into the store.

“I don’t like bullies.” The little girl’s voice said suddenly, breaking through the hypnotic haze clouding his mind and begging him to spring to action and finish The Mission.

But that innocent comment swirled through his mind and spun, digging through a closed door and prying it open without his or his handler’s approval.

(I don’t like bullies, jerk.)

A ratty, dark purple hat filled his view. The scent of honeyed almonds overwhelmed his senses as it was practically thrust into his face.

“It’s not much. I just learned how to knit so it’s a little ugly and it has a few holes. But it will keep you warm and safe. I wear it all the time, but I can make another one.” She smiled, big and toothy and still holding out the hat for him to take.

(I had ’em on the ropes, jerk.)

He didn’t have to think twice to take it from her tiny hands. With no ulterior motives and no murder clouding his senses, he gave her the most heartfelt smile he could muster, but even that, he was sure, lacked real emotion.

“Thank you.” He said, the rasped statement was accent a bit too Central European for the streets of Paris, France.

(‘Till the end of the line, punk.)

The girl smiled and hopped away into the winery after her aunt.

The soldier got up, kicked the empty can away, and began his long walk back to his hotel.

He could have just scaled the side of the building inside the alleyway where no one would see. He’d been back at the Hotel in a moments time by taking the rooftops, and he was about to do just that...until the concession stand she’d been lingering by caught his attention.

The asset looked upon the rows of handmade jewelry, each one more shiny and expensive than the last. Until he got to the very end, a simple silver chain dangled a tiny star, shining brightly under the sun caught his attention. The girl had been staring at this one, he was nearly sure.

"Get away from here!" An old man, with a protruding belly and a breath of whisky yelled, shooing the Asset away as if he were nothing but a stray dog.

Before he could change his mind, the soldier sneered and tossed the entire wad of French paper money to the man, almost one hundred euros worth, took the silver starred necklace, and disappeared into the darkness of the alley.
Darcy was standing in the center of her bathroom, fiddling with her necklace, after she returned with the clothes from her closet for Bucky. And as she noticed him already standing in the shower with nothing on but his underwear, she accidentally tugged silver chain tight enough to nearly cut through her skin.

She averted her eyes, keeping sure not to let her gaze linger on the tracks of mud and dirt streaking down his body and swirling around the marble beneath him. The bathroom was big enough that if she stayed standing where she was then it wasn’t really imposing on his personal space… kinda.

“You might wanna close the glass door, the steam will let out and you’d just end up taking a cold shower,” she informed. “I’ll just be outside in the room. Yell if you need anything, okay?” She said, making sure to keep her eyes anywhere but him.

He cleared his throat and from the corner of her vision she watched a large wet body angle closer to the shower stall’s entrance.

Darcy padded over to the bedroom, about to close the door-

“ждать.” He said, the grunted, almost hesitant request came out muffled by the falling water.

Zh-dat. She knew that one, he had ordered her to ‘zh-dat’ in the forest right before Gramer attacked them. It meant “wait,” she was almost positive.

“Yeah?”

He didn’t reply at first and she almost thought she’d imagined his request for her not to leave.

“I’m not exactly a genius…” he began, the strong pour of water muffling his voice. He cleared his throat again, more sure now that she wasn’t going to beat him down for speaking up. “But how exactly am I going to shower with no hands?” he asked.

Darcy chewed on her lip to muffle the bark of laughter begging to bubble up from his unpredicted sarcasm.

Tramping down her embarrassment, Darcy crept over to the shower.

Now, Darcy has seen her fair share of naked men. Tumblr after 2 AM was a wondrous world of sex appeal and curiosity. But her only real life comparison was Ian. Tall, skinny, innocent little Ian that, try as he might, may never gain more than three pounds of muscle mass on a good week.

If Darcy could choose to only look at one half-naked man for the rest of her life, well, from the quick appraisal she gave Bucky, she knew exactly who to choose.

As she stripped of her jacket and boots, she stepped into the shower and closed the stall, willing to let the dim lighting hide her flushed cheeks. Bucky was angling his body slightly out of the water’s stream to keep from touching the mess of wires and bent metal at his shoulders. He was wearing semi-high waisted, ratty, white boxer-briefs with various holes and frays along the seams and elastic, it looked straight out of the 60’s.

“When was the last time you showered?” She asked, looking into his eyes rather than anywhere else. She'd asked him the very same question over a dozen times in the span of two days and she was dying for the answer. Knowing him, his memory loss, and situation, it might have been decades ago.

Bucky shook his head. His lips thinning and just a shadow of anger touching his eyes. Anger over
himself, Hydra, or over having to have her- a perfect stranger assist him with showering- she wasn’t sure.

His eyes seemed to lose focus at her question, his gaze a million years away as the hot water pounded against his back and shoulders. He furrowed his eyebrows in concentration, leveling his eyes somewhere around her shoulders. Below him the water still swirled a ghastly rusty brown

"There was a hotel, I remember their towels. The stitching on it was a Bulgarian title. But the- in the warehouse, where they kept me in the ice… I don’t think- I’m not sure."

Darcy nodded, but her lips pressed together in grief as she put two and two together. His ancient boxers, the grime on his skin that seemed to be fused into his pores. It must have been a while and she mourned the fact that he couldn't even experience and enjoy it alone.

Ignoring her mortification she held her hands out for the heap of metal attached to him. She tried to reason over the screaming, blood-thirsty voice in her head, screaming at her to never let him in those evil people's grips again.

"But wait... didn't you shower at the motel in Portsmouth?"

Bucky shook his head. "I ran the water, snuck out the window and ran another perimeter to make sure we were safe."

Darcy's hands shook with that knowledge.

"Hydra doesn't believe in showering?" Darcy quipped, but something in the look on his face made her think her joke was a little too close to home.

"I don't remember much. Just the instinct on how they instilled me to act. A full shower, good food- anything other than boiled potatoes and dehydrated steak, a night's rest out of the box... those were rewards for a job well done. If the Mission is to be completed on time, there's no room for leisure."

"Leisure. " She scoffed, fists curling around his metal and toeing angrily at the shower floor. Showers should never be leisure. They're basic human necessity.

"Didn't Gramer pretty much say you were the best? Why weren't you allowed those things more?"

Bucky looked down, his mouth twisting into a self-depreciating frown. "I completed the Mission, but I have a feeling I wasn't always so respectful about it."

He had a feeling because he couldn't even remember most of his life. Darcy wondered what it was like, having to rely on those feelings, instincts, to tell her who to trust, what to do and say, without having any back up or solid proof that it's what's the right thing to do.

Being a victim of Hydra must not have been easy for Bucky. If they kept erasing and wiping his memories every time he woke up, like he said his file states they did, then he was a blind horse, forced to the water and held up by gunpoint to drink.

She angled herself away from the showers spray and clutched the immobile clumps of metal tightly to her chest, its weight held securely to her damply clothed breasts.

The floor below her bare feet was grainy from the wet dirt accumulating from his body, and she tried to not think about the years upon years of dirt and sweat pooling around her bare toes.

Bucky turned slightly to analyze the racks upon racks of shampoo bottles, conditioners, scented body
oils and moisturizing creams, soaps and bath salts. He quirked a brow at her, mouth still set firmly but the confusion in his eyes gave way to amusement.

She raised a brow. “But you do know how soap works, right?”

Bucky huffed and popped open the first bottle his hand came into contact with— one of her cheaper body washes, and took a cautionary sniff. The scent of Japanese Cherry Blossoms immediately swirled around the steamed shower.

Darcy averted her eyes and tried to pretend she was anywhere but a foot away from a soapy, wet, ex-Hydra assassin as he took a dollop of the light pink soap and began to infuse it into the soft matting of his chest hair with jerky, unsure and awkward movements.

He wasn’t as bulky as she imagined an assassin would be.

He was thin. His muscles were powerfully sinewy, the definition and tone of each were individually cut so deep he looked as if he’d been carved out from marble by Michelangelo himself.

But beyond his beauty, Bucky had a gauntness to him that made her wonder how anyone on earth could be so cruel, so power hungry and socialist enough to forget about the needs of the man beyond the arm.

His abdomen… with every inhale he took she could distinctly see each and every ridge of his protruding ribs. His stomach was nearly concave, and his hipbones were so sharply jutted they could have been weapons themselves.

He’s a fighting dog: starved and beaten into submission with no promise of a reward until after he’s won the fight... and then sent to the corner when he doesn't 'sit' on command.

His traps, the column of muscles along the body where shoulder met neck, on his left side was bulky and defined. Everywhere along the wine red burns and webbing of scarred ridges on his left shoulder plate stemmed a bulk of muscle mass that overflowed out of his metal shoulder, as if he’d outgrown the metal plate fused into him and the muscles simply grew up and around it.

She was standing so close to the shoulder, she could see each and every individual scrape along the tarnished metal. Burns, scuff marks, dents deep and shallow alike rimmed along the interlocking metal pieces until it gave way to nothing but the short wires and dented scrap metal in her arms. A slight sheen on condensation broke through the few streaks of dirt along the scarlet star.

“It hurts sometimes.”

She jumped at the sudden echo of Bucky’s voice bouncing in her bathroom stall. He was looking down at her, his hand still fiddling with the slowly-dissolving body wash on his chest. The grime streaked down, collecting along the old streaks of crimson blood from his bullet wound, and over his boxers. It swirled around both their feet and she didn’t have it in her to be disgusted anymore that she was coming into contact with his soil.

“What does?” she asked, ignoring his look and shifting the bent and broken arm into one hand so she could hand him a loofa. It was neon pink and lime green, completely out of place in his giant, murder capable, hand.

He poured more soap than he needed onto the spongy scrub, nearly emptying out the contents and graciously placing it back onto its place on the shelf. He began to hack away at the skin of his neck and arm pit, legs and abdomen, as if trying to erase the skin off his very bones.
“When I get a new memory. It hurts. Almost two weeks ago, when I met the man on the bridge-Captain America…”

“You mean when you almost killed him in front of the whole damn world to see? Yeah. All over the news, buddy,” she snarked and leveled his hard look with one of her own.

“He triggered something in my programming.” Bucky continued, and her brow furrowed at the word programming. “I don’t get many memories, but when I do, they hurt. Sting as if I’m being tasered right in the skull.”

“But that’s good through, right?” She interrupted excitedly, “you’re getting memories. You don’t need any help from Loki’s spear to get them all back ‘cause-”

“Doll face,” he began, brows furrowing and eyes squinting down at her as he gave her a faint echo of a self-deprecating smirk, “what part of ‘they sting as if I’m being tasered right in the skull’ did you not hear?”

Darcy gave a slight cough, her cheeks reddening at his attractive and unamused look. Her heart rate sped up in giddiness at the oblivious ease in which he dished out sarcasm without tensing or clamming up.

“After I walked away from Hydra, one of my first recollections was of the day I got this arm.” He continued finally.

“What was it?” she asked, trying to ignore the straining of her sore muscles as she held his arm together against herself.

Bucky swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing as he scrubbed at his neck, beard and face until the cuts on his lips and cheek reopened and began to bleed again. He didn’t answer for a good minute and she spent the time watching the soap roll off every bump and ridge of muscle. She tightened her belly, suddenly feeling self conscious over her own softness in comparison to him.

“I was on a mission with Captain America and the Howling Commandos. I fell from a train... but I don’t remember any of that. I only know that happened ‘cause the memoir in the museum connected to what the man on the bridge said.” His face was stripped of emotion but his eyes were distant. “But the memory… what happened to me after I fell… it’s the first thing I remember about myself.”

He stepped into the shower’s spray, handed her the loofa and reached for another bottle- her favorite shampoo this time. The familiar scent of honeyed almonds filled the air and Darcy was amazed at the way Bucky’s tense shoulders nearly relaxed as he took in a deep inhale through his nose.

“Smell good?” She asked, only the barest hint of sarcasm seeping through. Bucky looked down at her with a small quirk of his lips, but on him, it was pretty much the same as a full blown grin.

“I lost part of my arm after the fall.” He continued, smirk vanishing as he handed her the shampoo to pour onto his head. She drizzled it, adding more than she was sure was the recommended amount, onto his wet and still stinky hair. “They used a power saw to amputate the rest off up to my elbow. I was awake… I felt it…”

Darcy tried to swallow around the rising bile and the images he was creating. She shifted from foot to foot, her toes curled into the grainy suds melting off his body, as he quickly and efficiently scrubbed at the long strands of dark hair on his head.

“It wasn’t…” Bucky’s upper lip curled. “It wasn’t enough though. When they put the metal arm into place, something went wrong. The wires didn’t cross right, my body was rebelling against their
programing… I had no control over it. They couldn’t shut me down and I couldn’t stop…” He bent over, tangling his long soapy hair around his fits as he beat his scalp clean, as if what he’d just said was of no importance. “I attacked them and killed the doctor… and when the handlers came in, that’s when I was put into suspended sleep.”

“Why are you telling me this?” She asked before she could help herself, riveted by the fact that this is the most he’s ever spoken to her of himself at once.

Bucky unintentionally tugged her closer as he stepped into the spray, too quickly to have actually allowed the shampoo to get any work done. Long strands of wet hair stuck to his face and eyes and when he opened them under the spray, Darcy was rocked by the pinning stare in his dark blue eyes.

“Because I remember you.”

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“What did you mean you remember me? We’ve met before?” Darcy finally asked, exiting the shower stall fifteen minutes after Bucky had left it. She was clean and finally feeling fresh and smelling good, a small miracle from the horror that’s been her days since the funeral.

Bucky was now fully clothed in Ian’s old sweatpants and a black, oversized wife-beater she found hidden in the depths of her closet that might have belonged to Thor at one point. His shower took all but ten minutes and the second he’d walked through the glass doors and back into her bathroom, he was instantly every bit the post-traumatically stressed soldier she’d met before.

He was sitting stiffly at the chair by her vanity. The bulk of his metal arm was placed onto the counter behind him and his free arm tugged at the too-tight sweatpants slung around his waist. She had handed him a comb for his hair, but he held it limply in his hands as if he’d never used one before.

Darcy left a wet trail in the shape of her footprints toward her closet as she dashed from her shower to the safety of her closet before Bucky could see too much of her in her towel. She changed into the first thing her hands touched: pale blue sweatpants and a loose fitting black v-neck, underwear and bra. She ignored her shoe rack and padded back into the bathroom.

“I was on a mission in Paris. Ten years ago.” He began as she approached, reaching for the unused comb and using it on herself. Bucky got up from the chair, picking up the duct taped metal arm, and leaned against the wall, body angled towards the door. She sat down and began to comb through the tangled wet knots on her head.

“I remember waking up into a dark hotel room. The mission file was on the desk… That man, John Gramer, he was there one day. He was in on the mission too. I should have killed him right there,” he growled in newfound anger, his eyes locked on a now clean, shallow cut at her temple.

“Do you remember what the mission was?” she asked quietly once he settled down, unable to meet her eyes in the mirror.

His eyes crossed, as if drunk, when he tried to refocus his vision back onto her. She reached up and gently tapped his shoulder with the comb.

“This woman had information. Hydra wanted it. I was meant to kill her.” He furrowed his brows, and his hair fell forward over his eyes almost sinisterly.

“Meant to kill her? So you didn’t do it then? ‘Complete the mission’ or whatever.”
Bucky shook his head, water droplets from his clean hair splattering against her and the mirror. “I don’t remember.” He ground his teeth.

Darcy smiled bitterly, her remorse still ebbing away at her. “Don’t be sorry, dude. I obviously don’t remember. And I think it’s pretty cool that you’ve met me before, even if you don’t remember it either. You think that’s what that Russian dude from the alley was talking about? You know, the one that said ‘ten years too late, girl, but we got you.’” She mocked in a horribly faked Russian accent.

Bucky sniffed, which she assumed was his version of a laugh. “Maybe. When I remember you’ll be the first to know. Once we get the scepter, I’ll tell you everything I remember about Paris.” He smiled, tiny and unsure. She decided to go along with his plan for a while.

“Try not to make that sound too charming. I was only 13 when I was in Paris, you know. Perv.”

Bucky simply smirked.

Satisfied that her hair was as tangle-free as it was gonna get, she got up and pulled Bucky back into the seat.

“We’ll talk about that later when Tony gets here. I’m sure he has some contacts that know where to help us start. And I know Phil Coulson, if anyone knows anything it’s him. The guy’s a ninja.”

Bucky nodded and sat up straight in the chair and she combed through his long hair, taking a small handful at a time to work though the knots and tangles.

Bucky stared at his reflection, he was a million miles away yet not.

Darcy wasn’t a stranger to post-traumatic stress. When she was a little girl, her mom lost her husband and almost lost her only daughter. Although Darcy wasn’t nearly old enough to remember the car accident, since the age of 2 she had to grow up with the all too familiar look of helpless devastation in her mother’s eyes.

And right now, they were in Bucky’s eyes.

“Why do you wanna know so bad?” she asked quietly, intent on her focus to tame his mess of hair. “Don’t you wanna just… I don’t know. Start over? Nothing is holding you back. There’s people here that are willing to help you close down Hydra for good and start fresh. Even Clint has his own reasons to help you take down the assholes that kept you all these years.”

Bucky swallowed and watched her fingers trail along his scalp and ease his fringe out of his face.

“I don’t sleep-”

“Duh, you’re a super-secret spy, hobo-man.” She rolled her eyes, her joke meant to ease the sudden seriousness of the conversation.

“No… well, yes.” He gifted her with a hint of a smile. Crooked, white teeth peaking through before he trampled the twitch of muscles until he was carefully blank again. “But I don’t sleep because I can’t,” he stressed. “The day that building and those helicarriers in Washington blew up… I had a broken arm so I ducked into the first abandoned farm house I could find. I fixed myself up and when I laid down on a real bed for the first time… I don’t know. When I closed my eyes… I saw things, Darcy… things that I don’t remember happening but they’ve been warped into this… nightmare. Every time I close my eyes and try to sleep, I know I’m going there. I’m going into a place I once lived through and have no memory of.”
“Sometimes the nightmares are worse than the reality.” She summarized sadly. Trying to blink back the tears when his desperate and tired, dark rimmed eyes slowly met hers in the mirror.

“I need to know. I’ve met you before but I don’t know how and I need to know.”

Bucky stood up, ending their conversation when a flash of bright red alerted her to another problem.

“We need to fix your bullet wound. I can’t believe you haven’t said anything about it either. Medical is only fifteen floors down, I’m sure I can- holyfuck! What the fuck are you doing!” Bucky plunged his pinky finger into the bullet hole on his hip and Darcy screamed, the chair flying back and crashing with her halfway across the bathroom as she flew away from him in horror.

Bucky grimaced, his eyes squeezed shut and teeth ground together over his bared lips as he twisted and turned, digging until he was nearly knuckle deep. Blood pooled around the wound and down his arm and into Ian’s sweatpants, thick streams guzzled out fast and splashed noiselessly onto her previously clean floors.

He flicked his wrist and a small, tiny brass bullet the size of her pinky nail fell out of his red, soaked hand.

“Holy shit! Holy shit!” Darcy gasped, dry heaving at the soft tink, tink, tinktinktink as the bullet bounced and rolled away, leaving a tiny, thin trail behind it.

“Oh my God!” Darcy screamed again, rushing toward Bucky and pounding at his chest in utter rage. “You fucking scared the shit out of me! Who the hell does that!” She screamed, dashing back to the low table to grab yet another towel to mop up the bleeding wound at his hip.

Bucky gave no answer except taking the towel from her hands and mopping up the ground by her feet with it until her white floor was sparkling again.

“Who does…” her question trailed off as the previous wound now seemed to fizzle and seam together until it was just a puckered, wine red mark. He wiped away at the blood on his hip with water from her sink, until that too was once again clean.

“Super-secret spy.” Bucky said as way of explanation. “It’ll be completely closed in about twelve hours.”

Darcy blinked up at him, holding up her bloodied hands away from her body.

“For your sake… never get shot again.” She warned, stiffly walking over to her sink. “Because I am so not digging for any bullets if you do.”

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When they arrived into the kitchen Clint was already there. Like the dodo bird he was, Darcy found him sitting in his usual perch inside the little alcove between the ceiling and the top of the fridge.

Bucky, once registering that they weren’t alone anymore, lingered by the entryway to the hall where her room was.

“Get down from there, you idiot! You’re gonna break the damn fridge!” she admonished, jumping high to swat at Clint’s socked feet as they dangled down.

Clint kicked at her hands, not even sparing her a glance as he continued texting on one of Tony’s prototype glass phones.
Through the clear piece of glass she could see what looked like an iMessage screen light up.

“Are you texting Tony? Did you call him?” she inquired, walking back over to Bucky and tugging him into the kitchen the rest of the way until he was seated on the kitchen chair furthest from the windows.

“No and yes.” He grunted, offering no more answer.

“And?” she stressed. Clint held up a finger and continued typing his message. Talking to him sometimes was like pulling teeth, and when he was sitting in one of his bird nests, it was like talking to a wall.

She ignored the matter for the moment and attended to her grumbling stomach. Toast and butter would have served well but what Bucky deserved was a six-course meal and enough options to entice him to eat until his stomach wasn’t akin to Nicole Richie’s.

However, her talents in the kitchen were limited to lasagna and pie, so she’d have to go with the help of Jarvis and a few of Tony’s robotic creations for the job to get done.

Tony’s kitchen, as if it needed to be described, was overbearingly modern with the minimalist touch of any life other than a potted plant, much like the ficus in the living room, by the floor to ceiling windows. The dark mahogany wooden floors were warm under her bare feet as she opened and closed each frosted glass pantry door to look for where the dry and boxed food was held.

“Making lasagna?” Clint asked, still at his phone. Bucky was silent, keeping vigilance on Clint and the rest of the room through unblinking eyes.

“Mhm. Hey, where’d you put the-”

“Glass door to your left. Third shelf. Can you make it with the-”

"The gluten-free pasta? God, you’re such a bird. We still got the mozzarella?"

“From the farmer’s market? Nah, finished that yesterday.”

“Fuckin’ fatass. We’re in the forest getting shot at and you’re eating goddamn cheese.”

Bucky’s lips twisted into a slow grimace, and Darcy thought it might have been because of the easy way Darcy and Clint communicated. She watched through narrowed eyes as he ducked his head down stared at the slowly darkening sky outside.

“Bucky, how good are you with a knife?” she asked him. His turned to look at her, surprise nearly coloring his features as he looked between Clint, Darcy, and the cutting board in front of her.

“I’m okay.” Bucky responded and she tried to ignore, for both their sakes, at the soft snort of derision Clint made.

“Well come here and help, the lasagna’s not gonna make itself.” She smiled, as open and gentle as she could to include him with something before he hurt his back sitting on Tony’s backless stool like that.

They worked together quietly, Darcy hummed along to a long forgotten tune in her head and Bucky obediently cut and mashed the garlic, onions, tomatoes, and garnishes with the ease of a samurai.

“Good evening, Miss Lewis.” A voice greeted from the variously hidden speakers inside the kitchen.
Bucky stiffened beside her and held the kitchen knife in a death grip, his eyes scanning for where the voice came from.

“Jarvis, my man!” Darcy smiled up to where she vaguely remembered one of Jarvis’ sensors was located above her. “Wuddup!”

“It appears Master Stark has arrived… he is-”

“Darcy!” A familiar voice yelled through the penthouse. “Let me get my hands on that degenerate assassin, kidnapping piece of- you.” Tony appeared through the sliding glass doors of the kitchen from the living room, wearing an Iron Man suit she’d never seen before, mask lifted up to reveal his face twisted into a sneer as he stood at the entryway, making no further move to enter.

Wordlessly, Bucky held the knife tighter and pushed Darcy behind him with his free shoulder, making sure not to drop the taped up arm from the table.

“Kid, you might wanna step out for a sec.” Tony whipped, the palm of his suit charging up and lighting bright blue. “I’m gonna kill ’em.”

Behind her, Clint dropped from the refrigerator and gently tried to pry her away from her latch against Bucky’s back. “Darcy you might want to come with me…”

Darcy, confused and afraid, snapped. “What the hell is going on! Tony, what the hell is wrong with-”

“I remember you.” Bucky whispered suddenly, lowering the knife as if it’s burned him.

“Well that’s the least you can do,” Tony muttered, his suit still whirring as it prepared for action, “seeing as how you’re the one that killed my parents and Darcy’s father.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh my gosh, this part in the chapter:

“Doll face,” he began, brows furrowing and eyes squinting down at her as he gave her a faint echo of a self-depreciating smirk, “what part of ‘they sting as if I’m being tasered right in the skull’ did you not hear?”

I think we all know what self-depreciating smirk I’m talking about. (His line: "But I knew him." from CA:TWS.) Gah.

French translations:
1. “Sortir d’ici, bon à rien! Ce n’est pas un endroit pour vous” = Get out of here, bum! This isn’t a place for you!

P.S. Someone let me know if I made Bucky too out of character? I was feeling like it was time in his trust with Darcy to get out of the "grunting acknowledgment / empty stare" phase. But I'm scared I pushed it too fast.
Thanks for reading everyone! Love you all!
My bad, guys! College just started up again last week and this chapter was a doozy for me. I decided to spice it up a little... It's mostly Bucky/Soldier point of view and we finally get a backstory. Let's see how these wheels spin.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

- ⭐ -

“...you’re the one that killed my parents and Darcy's father.”

The words echo but didn’t really register. All he could focus on was the way She tensed against the man’s chest. Her wide eyes snapped to his and every movement in the room froze to center on the look of blatant denial on Her face.

She was three feet and two inches away from him... and the space, to him, seemed out of place. She shook against the man, against Clint. Fear, desperation, confusion on Her face from the man in iron’s words.

He calculated the man’s hands on Her elbows, confiscating Her. Keeping Her away. In less than a second he could have the bones of his fingers broken, torn at the fissures, and away from Her.

He didn’t remember killing them- Her father and the man in iron’s parents. If he did, he was sorry. If he did, he didn’t mean to. If he was the one that killed Her father... He didn’t mean to. He was programmed. The file said he was an asset.

He didn’t mean to.

She reached forward, as if reading his very mind, and Clint followed, hands digging into Her to restrain Her. Restrain Her from going to him.

Because he doesn’t remember much, but She- her face, those eyes- was always following him.

And the man was restraining her. The man with the burns on his face, the man that had been protecting the safe house. Her best friend. The one keeping her away, three feet, seven inches away.

Too far.

Safe house. That was important, he knows that but he can’t really remember, but he locks it away and thinks how to get Her away.

The man in the suit was coming closer. Seven yards, two feet, eleven inches away and She was in the cross fire. The one with his hands at her arms is keeping her too close. Too close to the danger, too far from him.

The knife was at his fingertips, he could throw it. Stab the iron man in the neck, take Darcy and run. These people had power and he was weak. His ammo was finished. His arm was done for, his guns
were useless. The kitchen knife was still in his hand. There was a hairpin in Her hair.

He calculated the amount of time to take the pin out of her hair and stab through Clint’s eye.

5.7 seconds.

Too long.

He needed to take Her before they take Her. Away from him. Away from the Soldier. The Danger.

*Keep her from the Danger. She's safe with the Danger- me.*

He knows that, but doesn’t know why. He doesn’t understand how someone could be so interlocked and wound into the very cloud of dust in his mind, but he trusts The Instinct. His Asset’s Instinct. They programmed him that way.

Fighting against the push and pull in his mind, against the other… Bucky lowered the knife, the weapon, in his hands when she gave a solid shake of her head, knowing where his thoughts were treading and begging him not to act.

Slowly, he placed it onto the counter in front of him. In easy, accessible reach if necessary, but the action relayed his attempt of goodwill, his show of “trust.”

This happens in the span of 3.9 seconds.

“This,” he began, fumbling for any words that would release from the trap door of his mouth. His attempt at some sort of fucked up repentance caused the man, Clint, to dig his fingers into Darcy’s elbows.

Without moving his head, his eyes scanned between her, Clint, and the hard, unrelenting look of loathing on the man in the metal suit’s face, still coming closer-

He tried again. “*Darcy-*”

“-that’s it.” The man in the suit muttered, the palm of the arm lit up bright blue. “I’m killing ’em.”

“No!” She screamed, and with the sudden shout he threw himself over Her in newfound instinct. Bucky fell forward, covering Darcy’s body on the ground with his own as Clint was beamed away, taking the brunt of the blue laser’s loud attack. Plaster fell over them and he scrambled over his own arm to cover Darcy's face from the falling pieces. The left arm-

With the sudden jump, the wires in his left shoulders had *snapped*, dropping the twenty pound metal arm onto the marble floor by his feet causing the suddenly empty space on his left side to-

*Bang!*

The room grew quiet...

A low whistle, like an overheated tea kettle, emanated from somewhere behind the red star in his shoulder. The noise reached its crescendo and a trickle of invisible flames erupted, slowly licking a path up into his chest.

"What is that? ...what's going on- what's he doing?” The man in metal shouted over the whistling noise.

The phantom feeling of a long lost left arm twitched and burned as the snapped live wires began to
flail. Small sparks lit up along the copper and red wires like a wick in a grenade, fizzling closer and closer into the only patch of skin left exposed in his left shoulder.

He kept still above Darcy, tried not to hurt her as he kept himself tense, kept himself from withering as the feeling of hot acid poured into three separate points inside of his left pectoral. He kept his right hand hovered over her face, sheltering her from the still falling plaster from where Clint had been lodged into the wall. He watched her shake, taking in her eyes full of disbelief that quickly morphed to confusion and fear.

The pain increased. It wasn’t like before. It wasn’t a shock, it wasn’t the high electric voltage he’d grown to associate with his Handlers. It was fire.

He was being burned alive as the wires that had been holding it all together, holding the Winter Soldier and Bucky together, began to sizzle and burn into his nervous system.

Hot lava filtered into his body, heat and fire melted its way through his tissue, burning at every fiber until the back of his brain began to pulse and the phantom left arm grew heavy and unbearable.

“Bucky?” he watched her whisper, read the purse of her pretty lips. He wished he could hear her usually nasal and feminine tenor when she said his name. His name, not Asset. Not Soldier.

He didn’t like those names. Those titles.

*I haven’t had a Name in seventy three years, six months and twelve days,* he thinks.

The lights in the room faded until nearly all he could see where the blue and whites of her eyes. He remembers those. They’ve haunted him. He knows that now.

All light shut in on him, and the dull roaring in his ears gave way to dismal silence.

The heat licked up the back of his neck, the flaming wires tickled his sides. His heart tore through his chest. The used and broken pieces of the Ghost’s arm tore through the air to attack.

“Bucky!?”

He opened his mouth to scream.

The asset is awake.

- ☀ -

*March 3rd, 1991*

“Help,” a quiet, female rasped from within the limousine. “Help!”

The man on the motorcycle took his time. He’d been following them along the long strip of road for the past twenty miles, it was precisely 9:15 at night. He had until sundown to report back.

The limo had been taking its time, going a steady 55 miles per hour in a 65 miles per hour zone. But when the two way, single-lane New York state highway finally curved enough to need the use of its breaks, the limousine and all it’s passengers had taken a turn through a silver guard rail and tumbled over, nearly into a mountain’s ravine.

He stayed behind, far enough away that he could see the entire scene unfold ahead of him, just as he’d planned. Just as his handlers awakened him for.
The black limousine was upturned, wheels still spinning on the road and its front fender hung cleanly the cliff side, upside down and destroyed from where it’d hit the rails. Just one hard push and the limo will go tumbling down, but he won’t throw the car into the ravine.

His handlers needed the bodies to be found.

The Stark’s death will be washed across the news for months, years to come.

His handlers needed that. He was delivered to make it happen. He was to shape the century. This will be his greatest mission.

“Help!” The woman tried to shout again.

The asset switched the stolen motorcycle off, and hit the kick stand. Slowly making his way over to his choreographed scene, he counted up the dead bodies in the car. His puppets, bleeding, broken and nearly dead just like his handlers needed them to be.

Like the list that had been washed into his mind, he ticked off the dying bodies, knowing he couldn’t shut down until that had been completed.

He tallied them up like коровы going through the бо́йня.

One. Gregory Lewis, 34. Limo driver and family friend to the Starks. Kill or maim.

He flew through the glass front view window, his face was still bleeding making him nearly unrecognizable as he rested on the bent hood hanging over the cliff. The airbags sliced and redundant. Lewis’ neck was bent oddly and his arm snapped in half.

Dead upon impact.

The asset continued walking around the mess of crushed metal, satisfied that no one will be coming to help.


Passed out unconscious, bleeding out of his ears and nose, metal door bent and infused into his side.

Dead in less than three minutes.


Neck strangled from the seat belt, chest cavity bleeding from small shrapnel, will be dead in less than sixteen minutes. Eyes open, unfocused, suffocating. Hand reaching out . . .

“The baby,” Maria Stark wheezed. The asset’s boots did not crunch beneath the shattered glass and gravel, he walked like a cat, a ghost. But her eyes were glazed and looking in the direction where the Soldier stood in the shadows.

A ghost can see through other ghosts, echoed in his mind. A woman with red hair said that once.

He does not know anyone with red hair.

“The baby.” The dying woman tried to whisper. He read her red, bleeding lips.

But the asset frowned. The mission said nothing of a baby. There was not supposed to be a baby.
Bending over slightly to look inside the upside-down car, he zeroed in on a dark purple car seat strapped, crooked and upside down. In it, a tiny infant sat hunched over, her brown curls dangling over her face as she laid limp, upside down, short rivulets of blood trailing down her tiny, dangling arms.

This child was not supposed to be here. This was not part of the mission. This was not supposed to occur.

Instead of leaving, of calling in the local authorities to notify of the accident like he was supposed to do, the asset lingers in his chaos, watching the tiny body’s chest rise and fall with difficulty against the tight belt strap, slowly suffocating her tiny neck.

Unknown child. Two, maybe three years of age.

She will be dead in less than seven minutes.

The child gave a slight rasp against the tight belt around her neck and without care, without thinking, and in the first time he could really remember, the soldier did something out of his own choosing.

He reached in with his left hand, careful not to disturb his crime, and ripped her seat belt clean off the car seat.

The tiny child fell down onto his arm like a sack of potatoes, unconscious and still barely breathing. The bionic arm detected the warmth of her small body, three degrees below normal health, heart fluttering irregularly. But she will live.

He chose to save her, for a reason he knows not, and now this child will live.

He didn't know what to feel. In fact, he registered that he could be feeling some sort of emotion- a tinge of happiness, a smidge of satisfaction- but against the tidal wave of bad he knows he's done, saving this girl was barely a drop in the ocean of his consciousness.

But he did feel something. And as he stood back up, when he flipped her over onto his other arm, jostling her awake from her fatigue and she opened up her tired blue eyes, he felt a sudden unexplained protectiveness.

The little girl gave a slight cough against him. Her bruised face pressed into the black leather of his armor, nose nuzzling innocently into the cold barrel of the black AR-15 rifle strapped to his chest.

Her tiny face was fat and rounded, and her eyes were looking up at him as she boldly seeked out warmth from the cold assassin. He wants to curl his lip, wants to relay the feeling of unease and disgust, but he was not wearing the mask and therefore could not display the intent, feeling, emotion pounding behind his ribcage

*Emotion is for the weak. You are not weak, you are the Asset.* The words echo, unfamiliar, not his. A short man said it. Bald. Doctor–

The name eludes him. He ignores the thoughts unrelated to this Mission and looks back down at the unknown child.

There’s a bleeding cut on her forehead, seeping slowly from the area above her temple where tiny baby hairs were still growing out of.

The soldier barely moves when she snaps her eyes up to his in sudden awareness. He does not tense, but without even jostling her he’s already reached for the knife in his back pocket, holding it close
against her back, pointed into her spine—close, but not touching—and ignoring the warning bells in his
mind screaming at him not to hurt her, but unable to because she was part of this mission now.

The hair on the back of his neck is tempted to stand on end as she watches him watch her, the bodies
of her dead family six feet away.

He leers warily at the child, his face exposed without his mask or sunglasses to protect his identity.
The soldier confirms he must kill her now, wring her tiny neck and lay her tangled in the mess of
seatbelts. Jab the knife into her spine and replace it with a small shard of shrapnel. Make it look like it
was from the accident.

She’s only an infant but she’s seen his face, seen more than any civilian had ever lived to see.

She needs to die.

She’s seen too much.

So did the woman with the red hair, he thinks. But it’s gone before he can remember to question it.

The unknown child is now a part of the mission, a complication that will be eradicated in three…

The tiny girl’s hand reaches up to his unshaven, unwashed face as the metal hand presses the hunting
knife just a little closer into the dip between two spinal vertebrae. Beneath the thoracic nerves that
could paralyze her chest cavity, stopping her heart.

Two…

The broken little bird blinks up at him, her blue gaze calm and curious even as blood rapidly pools
on her hooded lids and the beads wet her dark lashes. There is a tiny shard of glass in her left, bony
leg, and without thinking, he takes his hand away from where it was about to wring her neck and
plucks the short shard out of her without warning.

The little girl gasps at the sudden sharp pain, her rapidly swelling lips quiver as she holds in the need
to cry.

The soldier’s mouth twitches with the unfamiliar need to frown as he clamps his gloved hand around
her little thigh and squeezes until the blood stops flowing and the wound clots. The baby remains
looking at him, stubborn, brave, and entirely too stupid.

Like the redheaded child. The redheaded child was entirely too cunning to be granted death. The
redheaded child saw his face and she lived.

This girl, the soldier thinks, would make a great asset.

“Are you an angel?” a tiny voice whispers, not in wonder, but something close to it and much too
matter-of-fact for the simple, uncalculating mind of a toddler. Her little fist remains on his chin
without fear or judgment, just open curiosity.

He holds her leg in his grip a little tighter, nearly crushing the thin bone beneath his leather glove.
The itch to correct his failure grows the longer she keeps her small hand on his bearded neck.

The child smiles at him. A tiny, delirious smile with two chipped front teeth peeking from her split
and rapidly swelling lips.

He will allow her to live. He thinks he’s allowed to make that choice. He’s the asset, he’s allowed to
make a call. He thinks.

He imagines a man, a friend on a train, and thinks he’d be proud of the decision.

The thought is gone before he could ponder it and he’s left looking down at the girl, thinking of his choice. Wondering if he’s allowed to make it, and realizing he doesn’t really care.

“… an angel.” She repeats, more certain now as her little fingers splay along his chin and jaw. A tightness occurs in the asset’s chest, a feeling of… regret… that he’d never experienced before, as the little girl looks up at him with all the trust in the world.

But then suddenly, her head lulls back, drunkenly hunches over herself against his chest as she finally gives in to her pain and trauma from the accident, and he remembers his Mission.

In a split second he re-pockets the knife he hadn’t even realized he’d unholstered, and cradles her tiny, bruised and battered head in his gloved hand, wet with the blood from her leg.

Holding the little bird close to where the unfamiliar pang of guilt and denial in his chest bloomed, the winter soldier picks up his yellow and black sunglasses and puts them on in the darkness of night.

Immediately, though the small screen behind his glasses, the words `<mission report…>` pop-up though the yellow tinted glass. The glass flickers as the one-way screen blinks in and out of his vision.

He does not respond, looking down at the passed out little girl in his arms, her face peeking through the spaces between the letters in his vision.

Gently, he lays the child’s body on the ground on an area clean of broken glass and shrapnel, away from the limousine, and away from the road where any passing cars might not be able to see her.

He walks away back to his motorcycle.

As he turns the bike on and leaves, over the roar of the wind and motorcycle, he finally hears the tell-tale sound of the blue-eyed little girl screaming, hysterically crying out for the "angel."

The asset finally frowns, through her shrill, desperate cries, and responds to the message still blinking in his vision.

“Полная.”
- ✯ -

Darcy sat at Bucky’s bedside.

It had taken her almost three goddamn hours to calm Tony down enough to actually help her, regardless if Bucky really did do what Tony said he did or not, she wanted to help him first and then freakin’ figure out where to go after that curve ball had been thrown.

By herself, Darcy sat in one of the hospital rooms on the 15th floor, the day after Bruce operated on him. The tower’s medical wing was the very same place she’d wanted to bring him to earlier to get that bullet wound checked out. And as she sat in the uncomfortable fold-out chair at his bedside, she realized how stupid everything had been and how lucky they were that they were in Tony’s tower with the smartest doctors in all of the east coast just a few floors down.

Bruce had explained everything. He said when the wires in Bucky’s shoulders snapped, the copper
released a poison, the electro-nerve implant in his shoulder had gone into fail safe mode and self destructed inside of his nervous system, directly linked to three central wires in his chest connecting him to his brain.

To put it dumbly, Hydra planned to poison their super soldier into a coma once the bionic arm threatened to prove useless.

*Meaning*, Bucky almost goddamn killed himself trying to protect her when Tony, the fucking idiot, shot his leaser beam into the wall.

If they had been anywhere else, if she hadn’t stubbornly insisted on them two hiding out at the tower, Bucky would have been brain dead less than ten minutes after those wires snapped.

She held his hand now as he slept in the hospital bed, and for the first time gave thanks for having this man pop into her life so suddenly.

He looked bunches healthier. The feeding tubes and IV drip finally seemed to take that sullen, pallid look out of his contours. His skin, beneath the baggy and dark eyes and still too-long beard, was a healthier color and his sunken cheeks were beginning to fill in good health.

If he could look that much better in only a day, she couldn't wait until he was fully recovered and on the mend.

His hand was large and callused and she kept it clasped loosely in her own, guilty that she felt so protective over the man that may or may not have killed her and Tony’s parents.

Darcy sighed, dropping her head on the sheets by his side, her hair falling to cascade over his stomach, and listened to his steady breathing through the oxygen tube Bruce insisted he needed despite whatever super-soldier genes Bucky had in him.

*Please be okay*, she begged.

- ☆ -

Three days after the Stark assassination, the asset sat in the bunker assigned to him. It was sparse of anything of actual importance. There was no bed and no chair- he was trained to stand, be alert, and prepared at any given second.

There was a crate of weights, dumbbells, and hard coiled, wire jump rope strewn at the furthest corner. He had no use for punching bags. One blow from the left arm and they would be obliterated to nothing but a limp, hanging nylon bag of spilling sand.

They were in one of the Hydra safe houses in New Jersey and in it everything was gray concrete and the ground was just as damp and cold as the wall and ceiling. The entire atmosphere reeked of wet sand and gun-powder. The small, high up window gave a barred view to miles and miles of pine trees splaying out from every which end.

The soldier stood at attention, legs splayed evenly and shoulders squared. His only entertainment was the soft and agile *swish* of the short pocketknife dancing between the fingers of his right hand. As the knife cut through air and the blade whispered along his skin, he thought of the child he'd saved. He no longer felt satisfaction in the life spared, felt no sense of pride at his good deed.

The soldier thought of the girl, and the fact that- in what he feels might have been the very first time- he acted out of Order. He made a move outside of the Mission.
The door in front of him opened.

“Who gives the orders around here?” the American man demanded immediately upon walking into the cell. His loud voice boomed and the asset could almost clearly see the sound waves echo against the concrete walls and vibrate against them. Behind him nearly a dozen other soldiers readied to give their handler back up.

The asset barely moved. His wrist hardly twitched as the blade continued to flick between his index finger, crisscross to the other side of his pinky, before rolling back over his thumb to begin the intricate weave again.

He kept his gaze forward, pinned on the man. Respectful, yet dangerous.

He kept his seesawing thoughts over the well fare of the child at the forefront of his mind.

“We don’t keep you here so you can just… make your own decisions!” a newspaper dropped at the asset’s boots and after staring into his handler's furious eyes for a long pause, he flicked his gaze down to the front page at his feet.

**DEADLY ACCIDENT KILLS STARK LEGEND**

Below the headline and the picture of the crushed limousine, in slightly smaller lettering read,

*Driver’s daughter- only survivor, mysteriously found on side of the road!*

"It was an angel"

The asset lifted his gaze, tearing it away from the grainy photo of the little girl’s crying, bruised face.

“You want to fucking remind me again, asset, where your sudden liberty to choose the details of your fucking mission came from?” His handler barked, nearly taking a demanding step forward before hesitating… clearly remembering whom he was speaking with.

The soldier lowered his head to keep his glare from view. The knife weaved through his hand behind his back at an even more furious pace, but he did not respond. He knew better.

“No witnesses get left alive!” The blonde man screamed, the agents at his back shifting nervously at the look of little to no fear or remorse, or even lack of any emotion, in the Soldier's face. "You want to rest, huh? You want to relieve yourself- use the bathroom. Eat… maybe blow some steam, get in a good fuck before your next nap-time, huh? Well first… you’ve got to finish. The. Mission!”

*Finish the mission. Finish the mission.* The words echoed through the sudden reminder of the emptiness in his stomach and the painful pressure in his abdomen.

“You're going to go back.” His handler said after a few breaths, calming down his reproach against the deadliest man on their side. “The kid is in a hospital in New York. Get in and stab her. Strangle her. I don’t know… molest her to death for all I care.” The knife at the asset’s hand froze mid swipe, and something in his face must have shifted because the men at the handler’s back lifted their guns at him in warning.

“You're going to finish this.” His handler jabbed a finger toward him before he turned around to walk away. "And then when you've finished," he said without turning his head, "we'll discuss your newfound… liability.”

- ⭐ -
There was a knock at the door a few days after Bucky’s surgery and Darcy jumped, ripping her hand from his limp one as she turned in her seat to greet the new guest.

“Darcy, Jesus Christ...” Jane muttered, keeping her voice low as she shifted around the bed, steering clear of the recovering patient.

Darcy smiled in relief as the sliding doors closed automatically behind Jane with a *swish*. She hadn’t seen Jane in weeks, and the days apart shone in the good scientist’s tired eyes and limp hair. The fluorescent lights weren’t really helping either.

“Hey, dude. Get any sleep lately? You look beat.” She sat back against the hard chair. Jane paused mid-step in the center of the large, sterile hospital room, her owlish eyes turning to glare at Darcy furiously. “Okaaay… what did I-”

“You were prancing around the east coast for *four days* with some,” she waved her hands around in the direction of the pale, unconscious man on the bed, "unknown guy that had kidnapped you off the street! And you couldn’t even have the decency to tell Jarvis to call me up here?!” Jane whisper-shouted, her hands clawing through her greasy, messy hair. “Do you have any idea how worried I’ve been?! You know how I found out you were back? Huh? Do you? Bruce had to barge into my lab, almost half *green*! Asking about the ramifications of a rusted, over-exhausted metal clog grinding against an internal-”

Darcy cleared her throat before she got too high on science speak, and Jane shut up, tackling her into a fierce hug.

“You have no idea, Darcy. No idea.”

Darcy swallowed down her bite of guilt. Sure, she wasn't having a terribly fun time prancing around in a stolen car with Bucky, but she could have called Jane and Clint and made sure they knew she was okay.

Jane, shorter than Darcy but not by much, pressed her face into the side of Darcy’s head. “Thank God Thor’s not here,” Jane whispered.

Darcy snorted, patting Jane's shoulder as she tried to blink away the traitorous tears. “Never thought I’d hear you say *that*.”

Jane pinched Darcy’s side and Darcy squeaked from the sudden pain. “He would have killed this guy.” She nodded over to Bucky’s prone body, lying in the center of the bed with hundreds of tubes sticking into his mutilated shoulder where the arm used to be.

Darcy smiled, and she would have made a joke about Thor's ability to kill someone with a hug- caus God knew that man had a thing for broken, dark haired and broody murderers... but frankly she was just too tired.

A few nurses had come in the past several days and brought her food and changes of clothing. Even Tony had stopped by at one point and just sat down next to her, silent and angry after he'd translated and read the Russian file Bucky had stolen. But Tony still glared holes into Bucky's side-uncharacteristically quiet and contemplative.

She was tired, she was cranky, and she wanted Bucky to wake up already. She did not have time to ponder over anything she could have changed in her time during the dude's stupid, half-assed mission to get his damn memories back.

“Who is he anyways?” Jane asked finally after they’ve both sat down and quietened down. Her eyes
were focused on the red starred plate on Bucky’s shoulder, and all the tubes Bruce had stuck into his skin beneath it. Jane analyzed it quietly like the little scientist she was.

Jane doesn’t really watch the news. Unless it has something to do with a certain golden haired god, she never really cares for anything outside of her work and her lab. So, the fact that she doesn’t recognize the unmistakable red star that’s been flashed on every news station, in every country all over the world, for the past few weeks since the events in D.C- wasn’t really all that surprising.

“James Barnes. Winter Soldier. Brainwashed ex-Hydra asset. You name it. He was Steve Roger’s best friend in the 40s, slept through the years kinda like Steve did I guess… tried to kill the good Captain last week.” She paused, mulling over whether she should mention Tony’s accusation. “He’s also the supposed killer of Stark’s parents and my birth dad.” Damn it. The statement left a bitter taste in her mouth, and she didn’t want to point the accusatory fingers until she heard the man in question’s side.

(“I don’t remember,” he’d most likely say. But since she’d met Bucky she’d had some weird other worldly understanding with him.)

Jane blinked. Nodded. And got up to peer around the shadows of messy medical wires and silver, tarnished metal.

"Should we call Captain Rogers?" Jane asked, "I mean... you said he was his friend, right? Regardless of trying to kill him... or whatever."

Darcy hummed, thought about it, and realized that calling Captain America to the tower might not be something Bucky would want.

- ⭐ -

The hospital room’s lighting was too bright and the little girl in the center of the large bed was too small.

After the last nurse left for the night and turned off the lights behind her, he crept in through the window. Scaling the side of the building was child’s play- even with the hundreds of paparazzi and mourning civilians crowding around the Hospital’s entrance, he was able to enter without a problem.

He stayed close to the shadows, the agents assigned to make sure he got the job done were outside on the roof top, awaiting his signal when the time was right.

The little girl was alone, and as his heavy boots whispered above the sterile linoleum he once again wondered why he didn't just kill her at the accident scene and save him and his handlers this trouble.

Under the thin blue blankets, the little girl's chest rose and fell with ease. Most of her injuries were sustained to the head, with trauma to the leg and arm. He picked up the Doctor's file hanging at the end of the bed and considered wasting a few moments to read the thing.

But the asset put it down, shaking his head and picking up one of the pillows instead.

Strangulation was easy, and doctors were quick to blame suffocation on lung problems, especially on a child this small.

As he held the pillow in his gloved hands. Two feet away from her bedside he hovered close over the child's sleeping body, peacefully unaware of the murderer by her side.

"You're a mistake, птичка." He mumbled angrily, squeezing the pillow in his hands in anger over
his failure to finish the mission. The little girl gave a small, pained sigh in her sleep. She shook under the sheets as her little cast propped up to get more comfortable. The toes of her splintered leg, where the shrapnel had been embedded, wiggled out from beneath the thin cotton blanket.

The Asset remembered the first and only words the little girl had said to him.

"я не ангел," he spat, sneering at the child. Her nose twitched like a little rabbit's.

The asset stiffened, dropped the pillow and ducked into the shadows between the cabinet and the wall at the other end of her room. The door opened less than five seconds later.

"-telling you, Linda." An older woman muttered, "you're in danger. That accident had stink written all over it, and whomever had caused it... they're going to come back for Darcy. They're going to finish what they started, dove. Leaving her on the side of the road like that? It was a warning, I know it."

The woman sighed, and the squeak of the mattress's springs was heard over Linda's crying. After a few minutes of silence, and the Asset keeping as still as possible, the first woman began speaking again.

"SHIELD doesn't want to leak anything to the press, and God only knows how Howard's boy is going to react if he ever finds out his mother and father were most likely killed because of whom they worked for. Linda, you're my nephew's oldest friend. Scott is going mad at the headquarters trying to keep this tragedy from coming back to you and your daughter. If I see something else happen to this family-"

"I know, Peggy." Linda, the child's mother most likely, responded. "But I don't know what to do... where to go. Greg was-" the woman broke off as she began to weep again.

"Come live with us." Peggy begged suddenly, "the manor has the most structured of security, and Virginia is a beautiful state. Safe. Great for kids. Darcy will have nothing to want for and will live the rest of her life without looking over her back. You both won't."

Linda hesitated. "A life in seclusion is no life at all..."

Peggy gave a short, humorless laugh. "You free spirited women these days, you think living a life without caution is a life worth living. Heavens. An old friend of mine, Steve, he would have had a kick out of you, God bless his soul."

Without realizing what he was doing, without taking a moment to think his actions through, The Asset took a step forward and revealed himself from the shadows.

Immediately the older, dark haired woman stood up, a gun pointed in the Asset’s direction as she guarded the younger woman and child. Upon seeing his face the older woman, Peggy, gasped.

“James?!” The woman lowered her gun completely and took a step forward.

“Asset!” a voice barked through the static of his in-ear audio transmitter. “Mission report!"

The Asset looked at the older woman. Her previously poised gun was at ease, legs slightly bent, feet pointed towards him. Facial readings showed signs of disbelief, confusion, and recognition. This woman knew him. But he knows he has in fact never seen her before. He couldn’t feel the usual pulling at the back of his subconscious, he does not know her.

“I don’t understand…” the woman muttered. “James... you died. Steve said you fell off the train…
That was- that was nearly fifty years ago…”

“Peggy, what’s going on?” Linda panicked, staring wide-eyed at the Asset’s full black, leather armor and impressive gun strapped at his back.


Through the silent commotion, the little girl opened her eyes.

“The child’s in danger.” The asset warned, walked over to the window, and disappeared to the rooftop where he would commence in killing three of his Hydra teammates... each of whom had threatened to kill the child and her family themselves.

Chapter End Notes

Woo! That one took me way too long to write. I had to fit in quite a few things in here just to get this story rolling.

Where this chapter leaves off is where the Winter Soldier flashbacks in chapter 2 begin.

I just want to note, I have no intention of making this into some weirdo Imprinting=Jacob+Baby Twilight drama bullshit.

The Asset saved her life as a child because she was an innocent and he felt protective of baby Darcy. He doesn’t save her because she's Darcy Lewis and they're soulmates. He doesn't choose to not kill her (twice) because he's attracted to two-year-old Darcy's baby blues.

He saves her, against his orders, because he's got a heart beneath the cold Hydra exterior.

Thank you for reading!
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

- ★ -

Paris, June 2004

- ★ -

He came in through the window. Logistically, there were twelve different entry points which could have best given him the perfect advantage over Target. But he used the south-end balcony, the one with the view of the Eiffel tower, where the thirteen year old child slept in the darkness of her luxury.

He stared at her from the safety of the shadows, as her breath caught and swirled under the mass of messy hair. Hidden under layers of bed sheets, her tiny body burrowed into itself like a kitten.

She was a waifish thing, barely at the cusp of womanhood. Her high cheeks were pale and smooth, and he wondered why a girl attached to such a family held not one visible scar on her skin.

She’d make a promising asset, the thought crossed his mind.

A face like hers would no doubt be universally trustworthy. Political animals would bend backwards for the innocence he’d witnessed in her eyes. Tyrants would bow to the reckless determination she showed that police officer on the street.

She smiled in her sleep – peacefully and without the nightmares he knows haunts him. It gave him no satisfaction to know she dreamt happily, gave him no pause to know her life was a normal one despite the family he’d been ordered to tear apart.

She shifted, snorted so loud almost he jumped and turned to reveal her face more fully. With the ease of a cat, he maneuvered his way toward her bedside, stepping over the mess of dirty clothes and dolls until he was close enough to see long eyelashes through dark bangs.

He sneered. Standing up just a little taller against the wall. He stuffed his right hand into his pocket to touch the dark purple hat she’d handed him a few days ago. The cheap yarn was well worn. Soft. In the privacy of his room earlier – after careful search to make sure no one would bear witness – he placed the ugly hat on his own head… and it had looked absolutely stupid.

He took his hand from his pocket to reveal a silver chain necklace with a single, dully shining star pendant at the center- the same one she’d been staring at. Before he could stop the thought, he considered how glad he was that it wasn’t a red star.

“My condolences.” He mutters at the sleeping child, placing the necklace over her glasses on the wooden table. An offering of penance.

For a split second he wondered if he should return the hat too. His handlers would most likely take it. Burn it in front of him and destroy it with the intent to teach him to never to hold ties to his kills.

He took the hat out of his pocket and griped it tight, the yarn strings curved around his unyielding metal fingers.
Everything was starting to get foggy, the girl’s act of defiance in service of him changed everything but he knew his purpose was still to kill this girl’s aunt tonight. He should have no remorse. No guilt over the fact. It was his job- his mission. He was taken out of the box for this purpose. That was the way things were supposed to be.

But as he hid against the shadows watching over the kid that tried to defend him without even knowing who he was… well… the lines between what he should do and what he was made to do were blurring.

The asset put the hat back into his pocket. Keeping a souvenir, especially ones that reminded him of any speck of humanity, was never specified in the mission brief.

- ☆ -

“I knew I recognized you,” an old woman’s voice crooned from her seat near the fireplace. A gleaming snifter of blood red wine sloshed in one hand. An antique and well-taken care of revolver in the other.

The asset stepped out of the shadows, keeping his face obscured beneath the unused black mask. His own gun in hand lowered toward the ground, and he made no move to unarm her.

Target threat level: 4/10.

She gave a slight cough, brought the red liquor up to her painted lips, and took a slow sip as she remained fixated on the bright orange flames dancing inside the ornate gold fireplace mantel. The hotel suite was quiet and the constant chatter of happy family and friends was notably absent in the thick of the night. He had meticulously picked up and destroyed each and every bug plant in the room the night before, and today was his final night on the mission. He was to report back in less than twelve hours: Margaret Carter needed to be killed and the data Gramer had failed to get needed to be secured.

He flicked his eyes down to the gun in her shaking hand.

“The doctors here found an anomaly in my brain. Irregular something or other. I don’t understand the science speak…” Her dark hair gleamed silver in the firelight as she toyed with the gun in her left hand, turning it every which way, casting bright reflections on the wall as the light hit the polished silver of the gun’s barrel.

The small bun at her neck was in a disarray. Little frizzy curls caught against her mouth and eyelashes with every movement. She wore a silk emerald robe. Her bare, wrinkled feet, mapped with webs of blue and green veins, dug into the priceless Persian carpet at her feet.

The asset stayed by the door – his only visibility was the gleam of his mask.

The hat was heavy in his pocket. He had jumped from her bedroom balcony and scaled to the other side where his Target dozed in her usual chair.

Like a magnet the thing weighed him down. The hat burned him, bringing his awareness away from the old woman and down the hallway, where in one of the many occupied rooms the mark’s niece slept. The hat guilt him into reconsideration.

“A peculiar disease, Alzheimer’s,” she muttered to herself, then finally, she turned to look at him. Her thin neck twisted between the beads of her pearl necklace as she looked over the high winged back of her velvet blue arm chair, her thinning hair falling off the bun and over her shoulder as she turned to look him over. “My own brain is killing me, James. Do you know what that’s like?”
The asset remained composed behind the mask. The near invisible twist of his mouth was cloaked by the vinyl mesh and metal muzzling him. It cut into his cheeks, dug into his skin, and served to remind him of his place. He did not answer her.

His thumb brushed over the cool hilt of his gun at his right hand, and the woman’s perceptive eyes tracked the movement from across the room. In her hand, her own gun shook delicately.

He wonders what the kind girl will feel like when she wakes up to find her dead aunt. He took a second, ignoring the target’s inquiring look, to wonder if the girl will cry, if she’ll mourn.

The hat in his pocket is even heavier.

“Your hair is the same.” She sighed through his internal struggle, “In Darcy’s hospital room, I thought a homeless man had broken in… I thought- surely…”

She looked back at him. Her painted nails, long and pink, lightly rapped at the glass in her other hand.

_Clink, clink, clink_.

_Darcy, Darcy, Darcy._

He doesn’t recognize the name, it hasn’t been loaded into his memory, but he connects it with the little girl sleeping in the next room.

“Hydra’s been long dead… but no one would believe me when I assumed they were still out there.” She took a drag from her glass, much longer this time, until her lips were shining red from the alcohol and the half-empty glass was finished. She placed it on the low glass table beside her and sat back. “When I brought it up, SHIELD insisted I take an honorary retirement. Pick a new Director and go on a vacation, they said… When I saw you, in Darcy’s hospital room all those years ago… I knew for sure.”

The soldier frowned, not understanding. He tries to think back but nothing comes up.

“I searched everywhere for you. If Howard had been alive he’d probably have figured out where they’d been keeping you and I tried asking his son for help but you know how young men can be.” She heaved a watery sigh. “Tony’s sensitive, but he’ll find his way soon I hope.”

He doesn’t remember meeting her thirteen years ago. For all he knows, he just might have. But it makes sense. He knows her… or… he knew her. It answers the question to his hesitancy to kill this target, his delay to act and the sudden consciousness to his sleepless nights. It explains the weakness for the child.

The soldier thinks, pushes past the cold, and wonders if he’d known any of the others he’d been sent to kill.

Her eyes snapped back to his, and through his sudden bout of lucidity he realizes this woman hasn’t spoken with a hint of fear in her eyes.

“Hydra is still out there obviously. Watching. Waiting for the perfect moment to strike,” she says lowly.

Before he could stop them, the words bleed like a carcinogenic cloud behind his mask. “Their time to strike is here.” He muttered as if rehearsing a line, his voice rasping with a sarcasm that would have put him to the whipping post if any of his handlers had been present.
(He remembers the whipping post, he remembers the screams and a red haired child’s angry glares. Those are memories he wishes he didn’t have to fight to remember.)

But Margaret Carter heard him and nodded, not getting the fact that the man in front of her had just spoken out of turn for the first time in nearly a century.

“You said ‘their.’ Their time to strike. Does that not include you?”

He did not answer her and exactly one full minute and thirty-one seconds of silence pass them by.

“You don’t remember do you?” she asked finally.

Outside, the rain raged wildly in the first of the summer storms. Lightning lit up the room brighter than the small fire ever could. Still on high alert over his comment, the asset did not answer her as he let a clap of thunder fill the silence.

Hers was a question he knew better than to answer.

“That night… you came into the room like a ghost, told us to run and then you vanished into the night. I’ve been trying to find you ever since, you know.” Her voice was haunted, as if reliving a bad dream. Her thin brows furrowed, taking in his black armor and unkempt hair. Her eyes rimmed with tears and her voice wavered when she asked, “what have they done to you? Where have you been all this time, James?”

Something shifted, and the hat in his pocket burned hot.

“James Barnes? You are hereby requested for mandatory two-year military service. Welcome to the United States Army, son.”

Something in her tone triggers the memory and he latches on to it like a thirsty man in the desert. The sound of approaching bare feet padding against the wooden floor shook him from the reverie.

“Reporters caught wind of the discovery of three armed dead men on the hospital rooftop, their throats slit...” she began again, arms hugging herself around her torso, unaware of the upcoming intruder. “Unknown spies found dead with their throats slit? Right under the same rooftop that detained the only survivor of the Stark’s infamous tragedy?” she shook her head at him. “After that and your new-found resurrection, I figured it was Hydra but I could never prove it. Everyone at Shield called me crazy and it took every ounce of power I had to keep those dead spies out of the news… My niece could not know that she was being hunted after… You saved her life that day. You told us to get the bloody hell out of there and we listened, James! You saved all of our lives! The least I can do is help you! Tell me what they’re doing to you? How can I free you?”

How to free me? He wonders, but nothing comes to mind. He’s property of Alexander Pierce. Hydra does with him what they want. He’s their asset, their fist. He’s nothing but a weapon and this woman could offer him nothing.

Admiration for a kid aren’t emotions of a weapon, he considers.

A young girl with tangled blonde hair pokes her head through the open doorway. The asset slinked back into the shadowed corner before she could catch him.

“Aunt Peggy,” a little girl’s voice piped up sleepily. “Who’re you talking to?”

“Go to sleep, darling. I’m just finishing up my nightcap.” The mark responded, walking over to the
open parlor doors and all but shoving the blonde teen through it. “Back to bed now, darling.”

As if the girl’s presence brought on the reminder of her family, he watched his mark’s face through the glass reflection as it stormed over in wrath. She closed the doors and spun around, her soon-to-be murderer standing less than a foot away.

He was ready to complete the mission. The woman had had enough time.

“Why are you back now, James? Does Hydra want to finish the job? Finish off my niece?” Carter’s previous complacent and dulcet tones gave way to her brimming anger, her eyes looking around the room in desperation for her gun where she left it laying on the table. “You can’t have her! She’s my family and you’ll have to run over my dead body to bring her in to your bloody mess. I don’t know what you want with her, but you’re not getting her!”

“Your niece is not the mission.” The asset muttered, ignoring her. “You have information Hydra wants.”

His target blinked, a look of unsurprised weariness shadowing her face and body. Then she nodded and leaned heavily against the doors.

“I am your target then.”

The soldier did not answer her, but he stepped forward at her look of sudden, disappointed realization.

“The only information worth dying over are the whereabouts of the GH-084 serum.”

The target held a warped misconception that they knew each other and fell slack in holding in her secrets, he noted. He files her unwitting information and locks it away into the small amount of space in his long-term memory to report it back to his handlers.

“James.” The mark said seriously, standing up straight again. “James, Hydra cannot have the serum. The effects of it have been wildly unpredictable! My team found it decades ago and we’re just now figuring out the most basic of side-effects. If Hydra uses this, it could mean an army of mutants of the utmost unpredictable aggressions! You can’t have—”

“Where is it? The serum?” he asked, cocking his gun up.

She realizes what she’d accidentally revealed too late and her eyes widen. “Damn it, Bucky! Think about what Steve would say! You remember Steve? He was your best friend, he was your brother!” she cried out in desperation, reaching up as if to grip him. “You were a good man! You fought with the best of them! These people behind you are bad! They’re evil! They’re mind controlling you!”

As if the words were the trigger itself, the gunshot hissed through the quiet room and a small spray of blood splattered the glass doors behind her.

The long, silver barrel of the silencer smoked hotly as his mark looked down at the flesh wound on her arm, her face white as shock began to settle.

“What do you know about mind control?” The asset hissed, ripping the muzzle away from his face where it bounced on the rug and rolled toward the fireplace.

“I don’t know… Shield isn’t in the business of using those methods.” The mark muttered as she clutched her arm.
“You’re lying!” He snarled clutching her arm in his bionic grip and squeezing the small wound until blood oozed through the cracks of his metal fingers. “Tell me what you know of mind control. Tell me what they’re doing to me. Why can’t I remember anything?”

The mark- Margaret- froze, like a deer caught in headlights. “You really don’t---”

His gun pressed into the outside of her thigh and he squeezed the trigger until a sickening pop echoed quietly as the small bullet tore through skin and muscle tissue. The older woman cried out and buckled under her weight, almost falling to the floor if he hadn’t still been squeezing the wound on her bicep.

Blood blossomed like a rose on her emerald robe and his mind conjured an image of her, younger, in a red dress and heels… a tall, blonde man shyly smiling down at her.

Images flew faster and faster until he released her completely and the old woman fell to the floor.

“How do I know you?” He asked before he knew it. “Why can’t I remember?”

Margaret couldn’t answer through her pain-clenched teeth.

“You’re going to take your family back to the United States.” He hissed quickly and on a whim. “Do not show your face again until your agency has been eliminated, until then you are not safe,” he dictated quietly through her incoherent babbling. “As long as I’m lucid, your family will survive… But SHIELD will fall. It’s Hydra’s only Mission.”

- ☆ -

Ever since SHIELD fell things have been unsettlingly quiet.

FOX dubbed the Chitauri attack from two years ago as “A War Marked in History,” but now their biggest segment was a three hour loop on how the people are pissed that the government kept their secret agency a secret?

Tony’s big bang a few weeks ago in Miami against the Tangerine or whatever was yester-news, (which, by the fucking way, Darcy just found out about – thank you Clint, captain of the freaking Update Brigade) but the Black Widow’s free-lance “consultations” gets a five hour ethical debate on the freaking O’Reily Factor?

What did that mean for her job? Pepper Potts herself enacted Darcy Lewis as Assistant to watch over the SI New York branch but she hasn’t even called her in weeks. No “glad you’re safe” call or “Sorry You Got Kidnapped off The Street by an Unknown Assassin That’s Got a Creepy Crush on You Though” card either.

All news she’s watched while keeping vigil over Bucky’s bedside had been about the unknown whereabouts of Captain America and how Republicans are still on-the-fence over ex-soviet spy Natalia Romanova acting as a free-lance agent against the world’s current and future enemies.

The world was finally settling down now that the “dust” is settled nearly a month after the “unknown branch of government” was put down, but people were going on as if what happened on that bridge barely even mattered. They treated The Black Widow and SHIELD’s secrecy as the biggest news right now, but couldn’t offer a five minute segment on the evils of Hydra.

As if SHIELD wasn’t responsible in protecting pretty much all man-fucking-kind, right?

Isn’t anyone else goddamn worried we don’t have any of that protection now? That Iron Man and
his CEO publicly retired? That the military put a permanent hold on any Iron Patriot and all other super-suits alike?

*I mean, it’s not like I have to worry about safety,* Darcy thought as she finally reached the end of the hallway where she knew Bruce’s lab was. The Hulk was her friend and Iron Man was like her over protective uncle. Hawkeye was her best friend and his girlfriend killed people for a living.

Captain Underpants still had a blank in her “Famous People I’ve Met” notebook, but with Bucky still sleeping soundly only a few floors up in the recovery wing, that was a page that would probably get autographed by the end of the year.

The frosted glass doors opened up- seemingly from nothing more than a telepathic command- to reveal the demure doctor hunched over a microscope.

Darcy frowned when she noticed Tony was sitting at the stool toward the end of the lab. Of course, where one lab rat resided the other would too.

“Hey, Bruce.” Darcy greeted, holding up the warm pizza boxes she’d ordered. “Hungry? I got thin crust. Spinach and green peppers on a gluten-free pie. No cheese, no sauce, just the way you like it.”

He looked up over his glasses and set a few charts down onto his desk. “You ordered my favorite? What brought this on?” he smiled as he took a slice right out of the box. She pretended not to notice Tony looking up over at them from where he sat.

She took a seat in front of the cluttered desk. “The nurse told me earlier that Bucky should wake up any day now. I figured I owed you a huge thank you.”

Bruce’s smirk vanished and his gaze fleetly between her and Tony across the room. “Listen, Darcy. I don’t…” he sighed, trying to figure out how to phrase his thoughts, “I don’t really think you understand the extent to your, um, friend’s injuries-”

Tony’s scoff was heard over the whizzing and whirring of whatever he was fiddling with on the other side of the lab.

“I know. Which is what I came down here to talk to you about…” She nodded over to the pizza. She looked down at her hands twisting around a few napkins in her lap and tied to figure out how to broach the subject on Bucky’s mental health. He’s been out of it for days with no one to visit him except her and sometimes maybe Jane when her curiosity over the wires sticking out of his empty socket got too much to handle.

“This guy’s been through some serious shit and he has like, no one to help him through it. What can I do to help him acclimate when he wakes up?”

Bruce sighed. “I’m not that kind of doctor.” He muttered, removing his glasses and putting them into his shirt pocket. “Look, Darcy, I don’t know what to tell you. The guy has been held hostage for almost a century against his better judgment. He needs therapy, he needs a real doctor. I’m sorry but you’re not-”

She shot out of her seat before he could finish. “Qualified? Yeah I get it. He needs someone that can help him get better… not set him back.”

“Now I didn’t say that.” Bruce snapped, pointing down at the plastic fold-out chair until she was seated again. “You’re not going to hold the guy back- honestly, you’re probably the most qualified person in this building. He was put into that hospital bed trying to save you from that idiot’s laser beam.” He nodded his head over to Tony. “We’ll set you up with meetings with a professional that
Darcy nodded, “yeah, okay.”

Bruce nodded over to the microscope he’d been looking through. “I was doing analysis on his blood work. His nervous system has been altered due to the arm and the technology with it… most of the blood samples show signs of some kind of injected hormone in his system that changed a little bit of his DNA, it’s really incredible. Most of it goes hand in hand with my studies on the super-soldier serum… but other than Steve Rogers himself, I’ve never seen this chemical alteration on the human blood cell before.”

She nodded, “probably why he didn’t bleed out from that gunshot wound.”

Bruce hummed. “Yeah. But whatever it is, that stuff that leaked into his system did some serious damage, Darce,” he said slowly, as if trying to warn her. "That failsafe poison that came out of those tubes could have killed anyone, super-soldier or not. A few more minutes on that kitchen floor and he would have been dead trying to save you from Tony.”

Darcy swallowed back the lump in her throat, trying to fight back the emotion on yet another rescue Bucky’s made in her favor.

She looked around the lab for something else to focus on other than the mental image of him currently lying in a hospital bed upstairs. The lab was clean, orderly, not a speck of dust or grease stains in sight- definitely none of Tony’s personal rooms.

On the table in front of Bruce were a bunch of medical files and lab charts and so many words and numbers blurred together in his tiny, messy scrawl that had her eyes crossing over in an instant.

Shaking her head from the headache on that desk, she realized there was a familiar heap of metal on the table adjacent to him.

“So what’s the deal with the metal arm though? Can it be fixed?” she asks, nodding over to it, hoping like hell someone would be able to fix it. The memory of Bucky’s helpless look when he realized he was incapacitated without it almost sent shivers down her spine.

Bruce startles, as if he’d already forgotten she was even there, and looks up to where she’s looking.

He gave an embarrassed cough. “I’ve been trying to get him to look it over,” he whispered, “and it’s like he’s trying to pretend it’s not even here. But I know he’s trying to figure out how to play with it without me noticing.”

The whole reason they hitchhiked from Bucky’s massacre scene in the middle of nowhere to contact Tony was to fix the damn arm. She told Bruce exactly this and he responded with a shrug.

“Don’t know what I can- wait a second.” Bruce smiled, and with a gleam in his eye he rolled his chair toward the desk holding up the remains of the arm. “Follow my lead,” he whispered, putting his glasses on and picking up one of the pieces to inspect. The material was metallic and smooth, and it gleamed dully under the florescent lights.

“So, I tried doing a little investigating.” Bruce announced, holding up the scratched up metal plate. “I think this titanium disk part is made up of some sort of rare alluminum alloy. Hydra’s pretty sneaky getting their hands on this, it’s definitely a rare element. I don’t even think it could be found on this planet.”

Darcy grinned, playing along. “Wait up. How rare? Like, Captain America’s shield rare?”
“Well I’m not that type of scientist… but maybe I can grab a few of the interns from the restoration department downstairs and they could take a look at it for me. Those interns from Yale we hired are the best at—”

“Yale?” Tony exclaimed, swiveling in his seat to face them. “We’ve got interns from Yale? We’ve got interns from Yale working here? What is this some type of charity company? Fire them. Effective immediately. No idiots aboard S.I. Yale is a school full of posers and trust fund babies.”

“You’re a trust fund baby.” Bruce pointed out so quietly even she almost couldn’t catch it.

“Honestly, do none of you ever listen? Stark Industries is MIT exclusive,” he dragged his eyes toward Darcy, standing with her hand on her hip, and Bruce's annoyed expression. “Maybe Culver.” Tony shot from his desk and stomped over to them, picking up the smallest of metal shards off the desk without worry of slicing his skin. “And FYI, I see what you’re doing Bruce… and it’s working. Now get away before you break something else. Alluminum alloy,” he muttered to himself angrily, pushing Bruce’s chair away until it rolled back towards his previous space in front of his mountain of paper work and data. He picked up one of the shards and brought it close to his face, took a sniff, and (unbelievably) took a tentative lick. “This is not an aluminum anything. This is a titanium synthetic, mixed in with some kind of bulletproof coating. How did the murdering murderer remove this, you say?”

Darcy grimaced, “he used a crowbar and his bare hands.”

Tony’s eyes widened ever so slightly as he looked down at the hard metal in his hand.

“That’s impossible.” He muttered, picking up several different pieces and inspecting it just like the first. “Must be a weak point in the joint… fuckin’ idiots. Jarvis.”

“Yes, Mr. Stark.” The Artificial Intelligence responded.

“You can scan this thing? I need a manipulatable projection, I have to see all the layers inbetween.” He held up the dark twisted metal up for Jarvis’ inspection. A shimmering blue light shone from a faraway camera and fell onto the parts on the table.

“Winter Soldier’s cybernetic limb Scan complete. Would you be requiring any further assistance with this- uh, heap, sir?”

Tony shook his head, staring at the blue, iridescent pieces of metal now floating above their heads in the large lab. “Get the furnace ready. I don’t want to look at this shitty excuse of machinery anymore. Good for nothing Russians.” He muttered to himself, and dropped the metal piece onto the table where it clanged loudly against its counterparts.

“Very well, sir. Anything else?”

“No thanks, Jarvis. The Blood Traitor will be my slave tonight.”

“Yes, sir.”

Darcy snapped her head up. “Blo- excuse me?”

Tony ignored her, already ripping apart the translucent pieces and putting them together again like some creepy floating puzzle. “There’s some sort of electrical short-circuit break here from some kind of taser,” he said, spinning one of the parts around in the air. He turned to Darcy, holding up the piece. “Did you tase him?”
“What? No!”

Tony gives her a blank look, shoving the twisty wire into her personal space.

“I swear I didn’t!” she swatted the projection and it floated away.

"Hm. Pity."

She turned to Bruce for help but he was looking back down at his files in satisfaction.

- ☆ -

It’s been two hours and all they’ve accomplished was persuading Bruce to run down to Tony’s main lab and bring back his tool box. Darcy chucked her shoes and jacket about an hour ago and she was sitting in the center of the room with Tony’s projections still floating around their heads.

Tony, with all due respect to him and his genius, was an absolute idiot. He had done nothing except stare at the floating pieces that Jarvis had projected for them, unblinkingly for a full hour and then commanded Jarvis to incinerate the metal parts, claiming he could make a better cybernetic arm from scratch.

Well, judging by the blank look of near defeat on Tony’s face, he was failing.

“You shouldn’t have set it on fire, dude. You could have used it as reference-”

“Ahtatatata-” Tony cut her off, holding up a hand to silence her without looking up from his blueprints scattered out on the floor before them. “There will be no known Hydra products on the premises.”

Darcy slumped back against the hard desk. Her feet lay stretched out before her, cell phone on hand in case any news on Bucky came in.

“Why do you think it was Hydra that killed your parents?” It’s been a question she’s been evading since the moment Tony barged through his tower’s balcony and tried to shoot Bucky into the wall.

“You seem to forget, kid,” Tony muttered, staring down at his pencil, “that you and your dad were in that car too.”

Darcy shrugged. Sad for the loss of her birth father but completely unattached to it. She was barely four years old. She had no memory of the accident that painted the world black. She couldn’t remember anything about the people that died in there.

“Bucky said he doesn’t have any memories of anything before the debacle on the causeway in D.C. He said-”

“-can’t believe this.” He muttered, picking up the pencil again and continuing his design.

Something in his tone warned her she wasn’t going to like what he was about to say. Tony had his bitter face on, his shoulders were pinched and the fact that there was no music playing was a sign he wasn’t in a very good mood.

“What?” she snapped anyways.

Tony peered at her long enough that she squirmed in her place. “What?” she snapped again.

“You’re gonna take his word on that, kid?”
“Huh?”

“That guy has been trained by a league of assassins my dad died trying to get rid of. And you’re defending him every time his stupid name is brought up.”

“That’s saved my life more times than I can—”

“No, what he’s doing is putting you in fucking danger!” He snarled, stood up, threw his pencil onto the floor and stomped away from her, his dirty shoes walked all over the blue prints he’d been designing for the past hour.

Darcy froze. Her blood turned cold at the aggression she’s never seen before in her friend and she stood up to match his height.

“I’ve known you since you were in diapers, kid,” Tony turned around, pity expressed blatantly on his face. “Before your mom could get there, I held you in my arms when they called me to the crime scene. I was with you in the ambulance when they took you to the hospital with a stab wound in your leg and a cut on your head.” He pointed to the long scar on her temple and she tried not to reach down to touch the small wound on her thigh she’s had all her life. “You’ve survived your freshman year of college with Tracy Henderbitch as your roommate. I’ve bailed you out of jail after your recreational drug phase. You watched Thor fall out of the sky and you were there when aliens ruined the city. But never in my life have I ever seen you so goddamn naïve and stupid. The guy’s using you. He’s on the run from his superiors and he grabbed you as a shield.”

“What are you talking about.” she hissed back, pissed. “You weren’t there in that alley that first day. There was a man about to stab me with a knife! He kept going on about waiting for ten years to grab me… I’m being hunted too, man! Bucky’s protecting me!”

“You keep using his name like you’re old buddies, do you even know anything about him? He’s a psycho maniac, there’s rumors about him. Even Natasha Romanov is afraid of his history!”

“Bucky’s been mind-controlled. You know this, Tony” she pleaded. “That guy out there is scared and confused and he almost died trying to protect me from your stupid iron man suit!” she jabbed a finger at the suit in question, resting in the corner of the room disguised as a suitcase.

Tony stayed silent, his jaw visibly clenching as he looked up to the ceiling.

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“Tony, I don’t know what you’ve been up to these past few weeks—”

“Taking down bad guys and saving the world.”

“Yeah. Saving the world from bad guys… so stop wasting your time obsessing over the good one. Bucky’s good.” She closed her eyes and remembered the look of fear on his face when Gramer pressed that button in the clearing. She clenched her fists and felt the tremors go up her arms from his shaking, electrocuted body. She pressed her mouth together at the heavy, phantom feeling of pressure on her chest from when he fell onto her, shielding her from cracked plaster and concrete in Tony’s kitchen. She opened her eyes, fought against the memory of blood and years—decades—worth of dirt and sweat and filth swirling around both his and her feet in her shower stall. Tears swam in her vision and she suddenly itched to be by his bedside again. “You didn’t see what I saw, Tony. Bucky’s a good guy.”

Tony glared down at the floor, pressed his mouth into a hard line, and sat back down in front of his blueprints.

“I still think the psycho killed my parents and your dad,” he grunted. “Doesn’t explain why you’re
alive… but I’ll try not to throttle his neck next time I see him. Okay?”

Darcy smiled and rushed at Tony, ignoring his sudden panic at being touched, and enveloped him in a hug that she feels she needed more than him. “Thanks, dude. I appreciate this, really.”

“I don’t like this, kid. Even if you say he is a good guy… there outta be a few actual bad guys on the lookout for him.”

She nodded, stepping away. “I know. He’s been trying to train me. Showed me how to shoot a gun and everything- but I really suck at it though. Like, majorly suck.”

Tony opened his mouth to respond, but was interrupted by one of the familiar lab technicians from the Clinic floor rushing in through the door.

“Miss Lewis,” was all he needed to say, and as she looked at his worried expression she rushed out of the room toward the nearest elevators to the clinic floors, Tony hot on her heels.

“What happened?” she shouted at nurse running down the hall in the opposite direction of Bucky’s room.

“He-he’s insane! He just woke up and started shouting out a woman's name- the doctor’s are trying to put him down!”

Before she could finish, Darcy took off toward the room that had been her home for almost four days straight.

Inside was utter chaos. The hospital bed was turned on its side with one of the doctors pinned beneath it, scrambling for freedom. Bucky stood at the center of the room, heaving. His hospital gown ripped at the shoulder and falling half-way off his body. A nurse was cringing in the corner, holding up a thick syringe as a weapon against him.

“Bucky.” Darcy whispered, standing at the doorway, Tony hovering close behind. “Bucky, calm down… it’s okay, it’s me.”

Bucky turned toward her. The IV line that had been placed on his wrist had ripped away and a thin trail of blood spilled from the small injection. The red, tarnished star at his shoulder was visible through the thin, light blue gown. With every heaving breath, the three wires Hydra implanted into his nervous system swung back and forth through the gown’s arm hole.

Bucky turned his back to the nurse and stood at parade rest facing where Darcy cautiously stood. The nurse took that moment to free the doctor and evacuate the room.

His gaze was hard and his expression was blank, but when his eyes dipped down to her collar where her old necklace rested at the base of her neck, something in his mind visibly clicked into place, his body sagged, almost dropping to the floor if he hadn’t caught himself on time with his only hand.

“Darcy?” he hoarsely whispered.

She rushed toward him, pushing past Tony’s outstretched arm and dropped hard onto her knees in front of him, enfolding Bucky into her embrace. One of the cold wires in his shoulder rubbed against her hand and she tugged him even harder to her, his face ducking to burrowing and hide in her hair. She reached her hand up and twined her fingers into his mass of hair, keeping his head close to her.

“You’re safe. You’re here with me. You’re safe, Bucky” she mumbled into his ear quietly so Tony wouldn’t hear, grateful he was finally awake but worried over his state of mind. He was shaking
against her, leaning against her so heavily her back bend and bowed backwards. He clutched at her t-shirt with his fist until the material stretched and hugged her tightly.

“I’m safe?” he whimpered, his words muffled by her hair and neck.

“You’re okay. You’re safe now. I promise.”

Over his shoulder she caught Tony’s gaze. The words, “I told you so” practically burned across her expression.

Chapter End Notes

Holy hell, this one took me forever to pump out! You guys all deserve an award for your unwavering patience! Seriously! I am so sorry this took me so long! Apologies for typos or anything else, this story is unbeta'ed and I was excited to post this chapter super fast after I finally finished!

I'm not sure if any of you remember, but I had mentioned that I had never seen any of the Iron Man movies. Well, before I wrote this chapter, I finally did! I watched all three of them consecutively, so my 'Tony Stark' is now as adequate and cannon as I can possibly make him! In the last few chapters I wrote that he stormed into the tower wearing his suit and then blew Clint into the wall with his iron Man hand beam-thing...well, that was before I knew that he blew up all of his 100+ marks. So, in the spirit of agreeing that Stark is a maniac mechanic, let's pretend he immediately created one more prototype and blasted Clint into the kitchen wall with it.

Speaking of Clint, I know some of you have been asking for him but I know that I didn't mention him in this chapter. Just know he will come back, I promise you! I haven't forgotten him or that fact that- as previously mentioned, Tony blew him into the friggin wall. Lmao.

Also, I feel like The Good Soldier has been dragging a bit. Especially judging by how long it's taking me to write the chapters, I want to get things moving along. So, I will be bringing in The Black Widow (babyyyy) sooner rather than later. She's going to stir up some jealousy feels in our homegirl Darcy, and also train her alongside Bucky and his new metal arm, into good enough shape that she can accompany HotStuff McGee on his self-assigned mission to retrieve his old memories.

Once again! Thank you for reading! I hope you all loved this chapter as much as I did. It took me forever to write, and like all tough projects, I'm proud of the blood sweat and tears this chapter gave me these past few weeks!
Lots of love, guys!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

- ⭐ -

**Hydra Facility. Somewhere in Siberia. A few months after Peggy “escapes.”**

- ⭐ -

She fucked him like she hated him. Though in a way he supposed she most likely did.

One of the twenty-eight Red Room operatives he’d trained was back. But he didn’t recognize her-not at first.

Dark red hair, he noted absently as she bounced above him, most likely due to some sort of dying process- he blinked and the curiosity was banished.

Each thrust jostled the jagged curve of metal near his shoulder and irritated the flesh around the plate. Her moans rang in tandem with his groans as the serrated edges of the metal arm rubbed and scratched at his abused and callused skin.

The soldier gripped onto the slim muscles of her hips, metal and skin splayed along fine sinews of her abdomen. He ground his fingernails in until the flesh yielded. Tan turned white as his hands kept digging- trying to inflict as much pain as he could get away with without bordering onto hostility.

Breasts bounced and curls swayed and the soldier lay on his back and let her work for her goal. He was calm, disciplined... a poor choice for a lover.

Like an angry cat she pawed at his chest too close to his shoulder- her nails dug at a welt between his collarbone and metal arm and the soldier hissed harshly.

“Like that?” she purred, Russian accent nearly nonexistent through years of practice. Nosing up his neck, she purposely inched her hand to brush against the wound she’d reopened.

Before she could blink, he caught both her wrists and tangled them behind her own back.

She glared at him through her hair. She was the most beautiful woman he’d ever seen.

But she had a lot to learn.

Without preamble he ripped away from her. She bounced onto her back to the end of the bed as he pounced, shifting his forearm to her neck and cutting off oxygen to her airways. The blankets had bound her legs. Her arms were behind her back and pinned down by her own body. She was flushed and naked and fighting for breath. His heart rate hadn’t accelerated above the allowed 56 bpm.

“Your tactics need improvement.”

Natalia sneered and, before she could spit into his eye, his hand clamped down harder around her thin neck.

“Our supervisors need the whereabouts of that serum for-” she wheezed, face turning purple.
The soldier glared down, keeping his voice low to not alert the men outside his cell. “I take orders from one man only.” He didn’t risk telling her whom.

Natalia finally managed to break out of his headlock and gulp for breath.

“That woman you didn’t kill,” she began after composing herself. “Agent Carter holds information that could bring the entire empire crumbling down. When everything goes down, just who do you think will be the first for execution? Huh? The threats. The assets! You’ll be the first to die. They brought me back in here to get you to reveal whatever that woman has up her sleeve—”

“I didn’t fail the mission.” He lied, remembering Margaret Carter’s admission of her brain disease. She’ll be out of the equation soon enough- with or without his help. The soldier stood up. Natalia remained quiet. “But what I do know is that when Hydra falls...” he continued, shifting his sweatpants up and turning around to face the still naked assassin. “I will not be the only asset falling with it.”

She did not answer, so he turned back to inspect the various maps tacked to the wall. Flyers, each more frayed and creased than the last were held in place with pins and knives of varying sizes. Right at the center of the wall was the face of his next target, Prime Minister Ju Chang, marked in red.

“Keep your eyes open.” It was the only warning she was going to get from him.

Natalia fixed her dress and the next time he sees her he’d try to remember to apologize.

- ⭐ -

The next time he sees her is only a month later in Beijing and he’s wearing an unfamiliar purple hat.

He does not remember her name, or her face, or her hair, but the insignia on her suit belonged to the enemy of Hydra. He puts a bullet through her hip and the Prime Minister is dead.

- ⭐ -

“Hold still, damn it!” Darcy growled, fighting against Bucky’s flinching torso. “I’m trying to help you and if you won’t let me change your bandages, then Nurse Ratched down in medical will. And, dude, trust me, she’s not as nice as me!”

Bucky sighed, rolling his eyes so far up his skull it probably tickled the walnut it nested. “You’re taking the bandage off wrong.” He grumbled wryly, tugging at the tight fitting t-shirt she stole out of Tony’s closet. “You keep pulling against the cuts.”

She set the gauze down and directed her glare at him. “I watched you pluck a bullet out of your side with nothing but your fingers and a knife.”

He raised a brow and sat back against her throw pillows with the air of innocence.

"My point is that you’re complaining about a little sting in your shoulder?” she slammed the medical tape down onto her bedside table and stomped away back to her desk. “Do it yourself then.”

With nodded promises to Dr. Banner to keep a close eye on him overnight, Darcy had led him back to the safety and comfort of her bedroom where he’d been huddled by the window ever since- staring at his bandaged shoulder like a kicked puppy.

She stared pityingly up from the files Bruce had handed her. They were packed thickly with several nation-wide case studies on post-traumatic stress and disabled veterans, each one more detailed and
graphic than the last. Her homework, he had said. To help her be better equipped to handle one of her very own.

The files Bruce gave her were thorough, detailing numerous different therapies medical doctors and psychiatrists alike have taken to help improve the livability of a person suffering from PTSD. Darcy closed the file she had been reading and threw it onto the “Suicide” stack. It was dangerously close to teetering off her desk and falling into a heap on her floor.

She turned back toward Bucky, ignoring the morbidity and overall unhelpful load of bullshit on her desk, to watch her real-life whack job pathetically try to unwrap the thick twist of bandages covering the stump at the end of his bicep.

“Just,” she sighed, letting go of the heat her fight had built up. “Just tell me what to do.” Was that supposed to sound dirty?

He huffed and handed her the roll of gauze and the antiseptic again. “Unroll the old tape. Gently. Then unwrap the old bandages. Once you get to the base, wet the old cloth with antiseptic so-” he hissed and tore his arm away.

“What!? What did I do!” she tore her hands away where she had tugged on the bandage just a little too eagerly from his stitches.

He mumbled to himself, something that sounded suspiciously like "you're doing this on purpose, kid" and cautiously placed his limb back into her waiting hands. “Don’t tug the tape until you’ve wet it again. If you take the gauze off after the blood’s dried up then it tugs on the wound. You have to wet it first to let it slide off- there. See?” he mocked.

I swear, he never talked this much before, she thought. She looked up at him from her lashes and tried to hold back the comments just bubbling up.

“You know I-” she stopped with a choked breath as his skin was finally revealed.

His skin was almost unnaturally white, almost the color of the gauze covering him. What was left of his left arm, beneath that infamous metal that took almost six doctors to remove, revealed a grizzly crisscross of blue welts and old unhealed scars.

She looked up to find Bucky nearly as shocked as she, only he was hiding it a heck of a lot better than her. The yellowing veins beneath his translucent skin looked like they hadn’t seen the light of day in years. His skin was frail and wrinkled, like it's been soaking in its own sweat. His muscles were grossly defined like a caricature of what a normal man's arm would be.

He was Van Gogh’s Starry Night of bruises and pock holes.

Worrisomely, she wondered what the inside of that metal arm must have looked like. She remembered- it was smooth and shiny to the touch, bits of scratches and dents from where the metal must have clashed with something stronger... could the dents have reached through and permanently dented his own skin?

The quivering muscle beneath was worryingly hard, almost unnaturally hard, as if it's been under constant strain- shaped completely disproportionally to his normal, whole, arm. The lines of his muscles were criss-crossed and molded to the modern crisp lines of the metal arm.

The middle of his left bicep, where the initial removal must have been back in the 40's or 50's or whenever it was they'd taken him, was scarred over into a thick callous. Her entire palm smoothed over the callus at his stump. If she knocked on it, it might've made a noise.
Her fingers ran over each individual crease in his skin. A fleshy, dented version of the metal arm she'd grown to connect him to.

“Dude,” was all she said. Words were lost. When was the last time this arm saw the light of day? She wanted to ask but feared the answer.

She poked below the ever present metal shoulder pad, still wielded into his very skin, but it seemed to have been loosened somewhat during the surgery. Where the cluster of dark blue stitches were, hung colored wires leading into his chest banded together with medical tape. No longer sparking and frayed at the end, the wires swung high against what little arm he had left.

His skin puckered and blood rushed beneath her gently pressing fingernail. “This looks painful,” it came out like a question. She wasn’t talking about the stitches.

Bucky tried tugging the arm away, his movements calculating as he watched her without looking up from where his elbow would have been.

“Don’t really feel it.” He pressed down at the base of his bicep, at the edge of the thick callus. His thumb nail pressed into his skin until she listened the near faint “flit” where the callus pulled apart beneath his rough nail.

The cut was half an inch long yet no blood came out.

“Ow!” she squeaked as if it was her skin he was slicing his nail through. “What are you doing?”

He lifted his lips into a self-depreciating smile, “the metal arm had been in place since as long as I can remember, there’s no feelin’ in here. I barely remember what this arm actually looks like.” He eyeballed the very faint, near invisible, cluster of moles running alongside the side of his bicep.

"On top of everything else you don't remember? I'd say this is pretty insignificant."

He hid a smile.

She tried not to think about just how long he’d been mounted with that excessively heavy weight. She picked up the antiseptic again and tried very carefully not to disturb any skin this time.

“You’re very patient.” He said finally after a few minutes of companionable silence. She snorted. “No, really. You are, кукла. Well… first and foremost you’re perceptive of situations. But you cover things up with jokes and brashness. An tactic many naive-”

“I’ll try to not let that offend me-”

“-What I’m trying to say is with practice comes ease. That’s something not many good assets understand.” He seemed to be just talking to fill in the silence, something she didn’t think him capable of doing until he recently relieved himself of his muteness. They were alone and he’d always seemed to prove her wrong in their solitude. “Some people think that assassins, spies, that they learn how to sit quietly without moving for hours on end. That they’re skills are forged from an iron fist and extensive training. They are, don’t get me wrong. Hard work makes hard soldiers… But most men don’t make it very far because there are things… basic instincts, natural disciplines, that they lack.”

She watched him watch her through the window. It was night time outside, dark and cloudy from an upcoming storm, but the New York lights lit up their little bubble.

“I want to apologize for the way I treated you at first.” His leg twitched on top of her bed beside her,
and Darcy assumed that may be his tell for nervousness. Or maybe he had to pee, she couldn’t be sure with him anymore.

“You don’t have to apologize about anything, dude. I’m the one who owes you. If those people next to the car rental place had gotten to me I’d be toast. Not to mention that psycho in the woods. You don’t need to apologize-” Bucky smiled and opened his mouth to reply- “However, if you do wanna apologize, you can say I’m sorry to my sense of smell. You seriously reeked, and eight hours in a small car with you was no joke. A garbage can – better companion than you.”

Like many people, he didn’t seem to know how to respond to her.

“I remember training a few assets.” He continued without acknowledging her. “They came in a few groups at a time. They were kids almost. The eldest could’a been ni’teen. It’s my job to enforce resilience and stealth.”

He looked down at her again as she finished up pressing the wet cloth to his sutures. As she was wiping up the excess antiseptic solution with a clean tissue, she realized that he’d been picking up some of her slang. And that faint, faint, faint, Brooklyn accent really suited him.

She noticed, when he realized she wouldn’t scold him for talking so much, he continued eagerly.

“They needed to be smart above all else and they needed t’know how to get out of a situation instead of gettin’ killed. How to use what they had to get information effectively. How to see a losing situation for what it was and manipulate it to their favor. There were many that… well, they just didn’t understand the concept of discretion the way some others did. There were many that failed on their very first mission… those were… those were more dangerous weeks. Their success depended on how willing they were to survive and when they failed, I failed... I wasn't supposed to fail.”

Darcy squeezed her eyes and without conscious effort her small palm found the callused bump he’d been glaring at not too long ago. She gave his left bicep a small squeeze, hoping he’d feel it but knowing he wouldn’t.

“I was soft on one kid. She was fierce an’ wild, and t’be honest… at first I thought she was a feral cat picked off the street. She was tiny and dirty and I didn’t think she was going to last. The way she was frothing at the mouth any time a man would come toward her. She wouldn’t have lasted a week.”

He dropped his head back and she wondered how much trust he had in her to bare his neck like that. Trust… or he was just that capable of incapacitating her. Singlehandedly.

“What happened to her?” Darcy had to ask, finally bandaging him up again, careful not to jostle the paper thin skin she assumed has never seen the light of day since the 1930s.

“She proved everyone wrong. She was graceful when she fought, she killed with a know-how and determination that most experts three times her age could never achieve in all their lives. She looked at me for guidance and made sure I was always looking when she got in a kill. She was only nine years old when they gave her acodenname. Ballerina.” He looked into her eyes, and for a second she hoped that he was remembering it all instead of the little glimpses she knows he’s clutching to.

“How do you remember all that yet forget something as basic as showering?” She couldn't help herself, honestly.

Bucky rolled his eyes.

“Those lessons I taught where never wiped from my memory to serve as a warning. They allowed
me-” his mouth curled at open disgust toward the idea that he had to be ‘allowed’ to keep something as simple, as personal, as a fucking memory, “-to remember training those kids- to remember all their strengths and weaknesses- in the case I ever need to take one of them out.”

He stayed quiet then for a really long time. Darcy really hoped that he didn’t have to “take out” too many of those children…

“But they also let me keep those memories for another reason.”

“And what’s that?”

Bucky looked her dead on. No shadows in his eyes or fear in her belly.

He looked at her as if he’d finally found an answer to something he’d been searching for.

“It’s easy for me to scope out natural talent for basic things like, I dunno, the patience to wait out a slow mark, or determination to get a job done, or the strength stick to your guns and get it done right.”

He didn’t have to say it. She wished he didn’t say it, she begged him with her eyes not to say it. But he said it anyways.

“You’d make a good asset, Darcy.” And he said it. Thanks, Universe. “You might lack the grace or the skills, and you’re shit with a gun. But you’re smart. You’re quick on your feet and you’re brave against the odds. Something not a lot of people are. You also have friends in high places. If that Russian man was looking for reasons to capture you for the past decade… those must be why.”

Darcy pushed away from him and walked toward her window, folding her arms around her midsection. A good asset? Was that supposed to be a compliment coming from a guy that could singlehandedly wipe out and entire cavalry of dudes with guns? Her mind spun with that information. She was smart? Yeah sure, she was awarded “Best Comebacks” back in her senior year of high school, and her aunt had always told her all her life she was a little too bright for her own good. But her grades in school were never amazing, and she hadn’t been a secret agent since the age of eighteen like her adopted cousin was. If she was good at anything at all it was making a crazy good lasagna- and maybe forging a decent looking set of fake IDs.

Something was missing. He was leaving something out. Something important. This wasn't about a dead dad she never knew, or even Tony and his parents or that eerie drawing of a baby in his book back still laying in her bathroom.

The only special thing about her was the fact that her family was friends with the Stark's, but even that had nothing to do with Darcy.

Darcy was a nice person and nice persons didn’t get called “good assets.”

“When you found me in that alley… that wasn’t some coincidence was it?” but she a hunch on what his answer might be.

He looked away, back to the mess of her room and the closed door beyond it, and the connection was lost. “I needed someone to hide me. And I needed someone I could trust.”

“And what?” she sat up straight, throwing her arms up, “You scoped me out? One look at my glasses and you said, ‘this chick looks like she could hold her tongue. I'm gonna risk her life and have her help me.”
Bucky didn’t look down, but under the heat of her glare she thinks any lesser man would.

He shrugged his good shoulder. “You seemed like a friendly face. Like, I don’t know. I feel like I’ve met you before. In another life. In this one. I don’t know.”

Darcy watched him watch her. “You think Tony was right. You think you saved my life—”

“-spared your life—”

“-that day the Starks and my birth dad were killed.”

Bucky shook his head. “It’s not just that!” He frowned when she reared back in surprise at his outburst. “You—” he stared down at the slight shine of her old necklace resting between her collarbones. ”Where did you get that necklace?”

"What this?" she held out the lone star pendant. She never realize how much it matched his arm. "My aunt gave it to me, why?"

He stared at it, that look in his eye again. That cusp-of-a-break-through look. He shook himself out of it and she dropped her pendant from her grip. “There’s a bigger picture and I think you’re in it. I just can’t remember why or how.”

Darcy settled back down, unsure what to do with his little declaration now. “What happened to the girl then? After you trained her?”

Bucky didn’t answer her. And the silence of the room reaffirmed all her suspicions.

“Let me guess,” she said bitterly on his behalf. “You don’t remember.”

- ★ -

“Aim higher. You have to make up for your height. Keep your eyes on the target.” Bucky barked in the training room at Stark Tower. He’d been snarling orders into her ear for all of ten minutes and she was already as fed up with him now as when they were in the woods.

“I can’t even see the target,” she muttered, shoulders hurting under the strain of keeping her position for so long.

She could almost hear Bucky rolling his eyes. A thick leg kicked between hers, widening her stance and somehow relieving the pressure between her shoulder blades.

“Triangle position your legs and then the upper body is better supported. Your spine will thank you later.” He kicked at her foot gently until her trainers slid forward. “Right hand dominant, left foot dominant.”

“Okay.” She huffed, feeling a bead of sweat drip down her spine out of her sports bra and stick to her t-shirt. “Can I shoot yet?”

“How the hell do you think you can shoot yet if you can’t even hold the gun without crying? Keep steady.”

“Yes, sir!” she jeered.

A rustle of wind tickled her side and before she knew it, Bucky had her arms pressed behind her back and the butt of the gun she had been holding pressing into her chin.
“If you’re not going to respect me-” he growled, sticking the unloaded gun a bit tighter into her throat, “then I’ll make you.”

Darcy had begged him to give her the full Winter Soldier training experience. She wanted him to push her to the limit and make no error in babying her…

Something she was seriously regretting.

“Sorry.” She mumbled sheepishly, getting out of his hold once his arms loosened enough. "Not very good at respecting authority."

Tony had finally finished a prototype of Bucky’s arm. It was shiny, and Bucky almost hummed in satisfaction at the lightweight material it was made out of. Even the shoulder plate where the red star had been was removed.

Top of the line physical therapists climbed over themselves for a chance to peek at Bucky’s arm and try to rehabilitate it. But Darcy staved off the moochers with a glare and a growl.

Not a scratch or dent on his new arm was in sight and after several methods of proof and reassurance, for the both of them, there was not one tracking device or implanted inside of the bionic limb. The wiring in his shoulder, not that she was much of a scientist to begin with, seemed to have been safely put into place, and the arm moved along to Bucky’s every thought just like the last one did. Only better, caus this one was made out of a rare metal that it seemed Hydra couldn't get their hands on.

For someone that claimed to really, really hate Bucky, Tony did come through like she'd hoped he would.

But with the reassurance that he was no longer unarmed in a mysterious tower with a billionaire genius, a big green monster, and Clint, he was less the “poor puppy” hobo she’d been babying, and all super soldier assassin ready to train her ass kicking and screaming.

“Again.” He barked, shining a red laser from one of her pens toward the far wall. “Stance. Target to your left.”

Darcy quickly pivoted her upper body toward the red dot to her left without moving her “FIRMLY PLANTED!” feet.

“Follow the beam!” Her arms and body followed the ups and down and lefts and rights as he curved the little red glow light every which way around the empty training room.

“Good.” He said finally after an hour of that. His first actual compliment. “Let’s a break, кукла.”

She was heaving, her breath hitching from exertion and she hadn’t even budged an inch from her spot. They’ve only been at this for a few days, but Bucky’s training was so extensive she’d completely bypassed sore and moved on to feeling like she had walked out of her body entirely and was just an innocent bystander to the constant boxing and gun handling.

She’d packed a lunch for them this time, finally having the chance to make that lasagna she’d promised him, and a small notebook for a little side project she’d been meaning to bring up.

“What’s that?” he nodded around a forkful of hot pasta.

“Don’t talk with your mouth open, nasty.” She bunched a dirty napkin at him. he threw it back and happened to actually hit her square in the face.
“Idiot.” She said, wiping her forehead from the sauce the napkin spread. “It’s a journal. I figured. I dunno. You can write stuff in it or something.” She blushed, pushing it towards him and sticking a slice of chicken into her mouth to keep from babbling.

He picked the small light blue diary up with an incredulous look. “My Little Pony?” he asked, reading the front cover.

“It was the only one I could find. It was Pepper’s neice’s and she left it here last summer. We’re not allowed to leave the tower until we’re safe so it’s the best I could do okay?”

“An entire building and not one office supply closet?” he frowned.

Darcy shrugged, but he’d taken to showing her more than just fighting, and she’s always been a natural world class bull shitter. “This one has sentimental value.” She lied.

Bucky set the light blue diary to the side, he stared at it as if it were about to get up and beat him any second. “A paper and pen wouldn’t work? What do I need a journal for anyway?”

“You can write down your memories. You had mentioned before that sometimes they slip away before you can really decipher them. Well, maybe if you write it down before you forget it’ll be easier to put them together. Like a puzzle or something.”

“There are sparkling horses on the cover.”

“Well,” she added carefully, looking down and a little to the left the way he’d instructed her how to lie successfully, “they’re very--”

An alarm blared through the training room. Bucky jumped, plates clattering to the floor as he stood on high alert, shielding her from view of the doorways and windows.

"That's the panic alarm," Darcy said confused, "only Tony has access to the switch so Jarvis can activate it. It rings through the entire tower. He must have pulled it."

The lights overhead flickered strangely. Bucky grabbed her by the arm and picked up the firearms they had been practicing with.

"Stay close." He commanded, hopping over their discarded lunch.

A loud noise clanged behind them and Bucky pounced, throwing Darcy away behind him and aiming two guns where the noise came from.

"It's just me!" Clint yelped, hair mussed and sweaty as he held his hands up for Bucky not to shoot. Behind him an air vent cover bounced against the linoleum where it had fallen. He was wearing his Shield issue tactical suit but his pants-

"Are you wearing leggings?" Darcy shrieked.

"Not the time, Darce!" Clint announced, picking up his fallen arrows and marching toward them. Bucky didn't drop the guns immediately until Darcy placed her arm gently at the crook of his arm.

"Do you know what's going on?" She asked, noting the more tense Bucky became every second the loud alarm bells rang around them.

Clint opened the doors and led them toward the nearest staircase, but instead of leading them toward the Lobby like protocol asked for during an Emergency Evac, he pointed up.
"Get to the helipad. Someone's made an ambush trying to rush the tower. There's insurgents downstairs, about fifty fuckers with guns. Big guns. Big dudes with big guns. Friends of yours?" He sneered to Bucky as he passed him, taking steps three at a time as Bucky stayed behind to watch Darcy's back.

"Leave him alone, Clint." She defended. Yeah, Clint and Bucky not the best of friends yet either.

"What do they want?" Bucky demanded, passing Darcy a knife and double checking her taser's power for her as he removed small weapons from her person and stuffed them into as many pockets in her clothes he could find. She struggled for breath against the third landing they ran up.

"Beats me! You think this hearing aid is tuned into Bad Guy Radio? Huh?" Clint ranted, already sweating against his suit, the stretchy latex making a strange rubbing sound as he ascended. "Fucking tailor. Fucking piece of shit suit." He muttered to himself as he tugged at the purple spandex at his crotch. "Most of them were talking your language, bro. Weird accents. Russian. I'm no expert but my guess is they weren't born and raised."

Assets. Hydra sent other Assets after Bucky.

She and Bucky looked at one another in silent understanding. This was not good.

"Is Tony on the helipad? Bruce? Oh my god, Jane? Is Jane okay?"

"Bruce hulked out, he's fending off the attackers." His tone was worried. Clint picked up Darcy's hair clip as if fell loose from it's hold and clattered down a few steps. Her hair tumbled down and clung to her sweating neck. He clipped it onto one of his arrows and continued onward. "Jane was with Tony when he got the request to pull the alarm. My guess is they took the suit- half way gone by now to where we're going."

Darcy gasped for breath, the roaring of blood in her head muffled by the still blaring alarm system attacking at her ear drums. She felt a gentle hand at her hip, quietly urging her on. Her short legs pounded onto the stairwell with renewed strength.

"And..." she gasped, taking a breath, "where-?" She tried, unable to speak and run multiple steps as fast as they could.

"Where is the helicopter taking us?" Bucky finished for her, barely sounding winded at all as they passed the sign depicting Level 79, nineteen up from where they started. If they got out of here her as was going to look fantastic.

"Hideout." He said simply. They finally reached the 80th floor, the last one leading to the roof.

"Wait here. I'll go out first in case some of them got smart. If it gets ugly, Darcy you know where to hide-"

"-in the vents. There's an emergency latch in the lab bathrooms that'll take me to the hidden basement, I know." She clutched to Bucky's arm, fear and adrenaline pumping through her body and pushing away all feeling in her legs. She leaned against him as she struggled to catch her breath. It was almost embarrassing really.

Clint pushed the heavy door open an inch and peeked through and she could see the helicopter on standby, the propellers and system already on and spinning courtesy of Jarvis. Bucky pulled her back until the stream of light was several feet away from her and she was firmly shrouded into the dark corner of the stairwell once more.
"Lesson one in Reconnaissance," she remembered him lecturing. "Any time you can see the outside then the outside can see you."

She stayed as far back as she could, pressed against Bucky's side.

Darcy jumped with a squeal, at the immediate gunfire against the Exit door. Clint gathered his arrows and jumped outside, the door quickly falling shut behind him. Gunshots rang in a steady stream into the thick wall in front of them until concrete began to rain lightly inside the stairwell. Bucky clamped his hand on her mouth, and quietly hushed her loud hyperventilation.

"Calm down. You've faced worse. Your friend is fine." Slowly she calmed down but every blast of a gun had her more and more tense for Clint's safety.

She knows he's capable, but the sudden raining of bullets on the other side of that wall was worrisome.

A few scary long minutes later the door opened slowly, the light shone through and missed them by inches as they stayed hidden in the darkness. Bucky shifted his weight so he was in front of her and placed a firm hand on one of her pockets, reminding her of her weapons.

"It's me!" Clint announced. "Suckers don't know what-ouf." He was cut off by loss of air as Darcy ran into a tackle, gripping him in a tight hug.

"Oh God, oh God. oh God." She chanted. "Oh God."

Clint lightly pulled her away and tugged her into his embrace. "Hey, bro. You freaking on me now? Your singing is scarier than these bastards, trust me."

She chuckled, allowing him to lead her outside toward the waiting helicopter. Bucky close behind. Clint pressed his hand to the side of her face to shield her from whatever massacre he'd created on Tony's roof.

Darcy swallowed back bile as she noticed her sparkling blue clip latched onto one of the arrows embedded into a man's bloody neck.

Chapter End Notes

I love you guys. Thank you for encouraging comments pushing me to finish. If it wasn't for you guys I would have given up on The Good Soldier. I'm sorry my writer's block lasted me so damn long.

Again, apologies for typos or errors. I don't read the comics. This story has thus far been Canon with the MCU with a few little AU quirks.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

EXTREMELY important Author's Note at the bottom. Read when finished.

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

- ★ -

Baron Wolfgang von Strucker was wary. In a world ruled by guns and violence, he was the only one left to believe in the extraordinary. He might have been a mad scientist, a collector of dreams and believer of miracles, but in light of recent events, with the falling of Shield and public unveiling of Hydra, he was restless for the impending revision of his oldest experiment.

He might have been cast aside by Hydra years ago, turned away due to his radical notions and firm beliefs in the impossible, but he was still a visionary and it was his dream that created Project Winter Soldier from the beginning. It is with that same dream that he will see it through to the end.

“Doctor?” He bid through the communications piece at his wrist. Floor to ceiling glass lined the walls of the hidden facility, he stood at the end, watching his latest experiment in the flesh. She was sitting in the room inside, her red hair cackling with energy as it fell over her eyes. The glass was several inches thick, soundproof, bulletproof and shatter proof, but as the young woman blasted a block of red energy toward him in anger, he took a step back.

“Yes, Herr Strucker?” Dr. Jenkins asked, arriving seemingly out of thin air.

“Has word arrived on my soldier?” He never took his eyes off the red witch. The objects in her room floating around her, her eyes were scarlet with mania and anticipation.

“The Winter Soldier has been found hiding away in Stark’s Towers.” The doctor began. “One of my colleges has informed me of a recent development with his limb. The old one has been replaced.”

Von Strucker hummed. “Stark’s doing, I suppose. They must have run in to the emergency self-destruct mechanism.” He turned and the doctor followed along, the man’s cheap white sneakers squeaking along the tile as he peered into glass room over Von Strucker’s shoulder. The boy stood at a standstill a few inches from the glass, his nose nearly pressed up against it as they came into view. In a blink he was across the room, watching them from the corner closest to the shared wall between him and his neighbor. His curled hair barely stirred with the speed.

“He has found her,” Dr. Jenkins said finally. “The girl. The one from the accident.”

Herr Strucker hummed again. “His redemption, or as he most likely believes she would come to be.” He dug through his pocket absentmindedly for his speed-o-meter. He held it up to the glass where the boy inside ran so fast he was rendered invisible. The numbers on the small screen fritzed.

“Should I call for an order to take the girl? We can-”
“You are a scientist, Taryl. Not a tactician.” He tossed the speedometer to the doctor’s chest and he fumbled to catch it. “I’ll handle my end, and you take care of yours…. I want the Winter Soldier.” Wolfgang von Strucker said. He said nothing of his plans for the girl. Turning away from his second miracle, he continued down the hall, leaving the doctor to gawk behind. “The Chitauri scepter has created wonders thus far, don’t you think?” The doctor nodded enthusiastically, his eyes gleaming in the reflection of the clean glass as he watched as the boy-miracle flashed from wall to wall. “We poured blood and sweat into creating our Soldier. The time has come to take him back from Hydra.”

“I shall prepare the scepter.” The doctor called from the other side of the deserted hallway.

Von Strucker opened the iron doors at the end of the hall and muttered to himself, “and I shall prepare an attack on Stark Tower.”

- ☆ -

Clint would have liked to think that he put a little finesse into his rescue mission. If you would have asked him, he had showed the infamous Ghost Assassin a thing or two and schooled him on the finer side of shooting things. The chopper was already on thanks to a back-up protocol that wired most of the jets and helicopters to fly all important personnel to safety as soon as an emergency alarm went off.

The rotor blades were spinning, causing the new cape he’d upgraded onto his tactical suit to billow behind him. If you asked Clint, he looked badass and capable. The only thing left to do was press the green button on the dashboard and soar toward the next hideout. No mess no fuss. Darcy and Bucky were basically his bitches- he literally had this so under control.

But Clint was not telling this story, Darcy was. So if you asked Darcy about what really happened on that helipad after Clint retrieved her and Bucky from the stairwell, it was everything but badass or graceful.

“Fuck!” Clint swore as he tried to pry the helicopter’s doors open. He tugged at the locked handle, his arrows clattering to the ground as they fell from the canister tied onto his back. “Jarvis, open up!”

He hollered at the keypad’s speakers by the knob.

There was a familiar automated voice speaking through the monitor beside the door. “Verbal command incorrect. Access denied.” Jarvis replied.

“What?” Clint screamed over the winding of the blades above them. He turned to Darcy, quickly pointing at the keypad and shrugging in confusion.

“He said, ‘access denied!’” She yelled over the roar. Her hair was flying every which direction and she had half a mind the grab the bloodied blue clip that was still deeply lodged into a dead man’s face.

“Access de-? I’ll show you access denied, you piece of shit computer!” Clint punched against the bullet proof glass. “Door open!”

“Verbal command incorrect. Access de-”

“Abracadabra!”

Darcy looked behind her to the bloodshed Clint tried to shield her from. There were only five bodies, most notably, one of which was floating face down on the side of Tony’s pool. A cloud of blood
swirling through the woman’s long hair. She shivered, and turned away from the sight to watch Bucky, a little ways behind them sauntering from body to body, picking up ammo and quickly disassembling the weapons instead of taking them for themselves like she’d assumed he’d do. He took any found knives and stuffed them into his ever present backpack.

“What’s the hold up?” Bucky announced once he’d reached them.

“He can’t get it open!” Darcy yelled over the wind. “Can you…?” She made a vague gesture at his metal arm. Bucky smirked and motioned her to the side. He pushed Clint out of the way, his metal arm swatting at Clint’s side almost too casually. Clint yelped in pain, clutching the rib Bucky flicked.

“You mind?” Clint yelled, “I’d rather not break any bones today!”

Bucky ignored him and propped his foot onto the metal step beneath the door and tugged. The helicopter’s lock gave way with a loud screech that hurt her ears over the roar of the chopper’s blades. The door slid open with an easy whoosh.

“Yeah.” Clint yelled, barging past Bucky without so much as a thank you. Bucky was about to usher Darcy inside when the backdoor leading to the stairwell was kicked through with a loud bang.

“We got company!” Clint yelled, eyes wide as he went to reach behind him for an arrow, only to remember he’d dropped them all trying to get the door opened.

“Get in, Darcy!” Bucky hollered, lifting her by the armpits before she could even react to the gun fire, and tossed her unceremoniously into the back seat. He quickly scooped up Clint’s arrows and dumped them on Darcy’s lap. Clint crawled in gracelessly behind her, tripping into the pilot’s seat with an embarrassed grunt.

Bucky pulled out his firearm and knocked out three of the armed men in rapid succession. Before she knew it, the three men had fallen on top of one another, dead. Whether it was his intention or not, their bodies made a barricade between them and the door.

“Freakin’ awesome.” Darcy whispered, watching Bucky’s shoulders roll with tension as he stepped forward to take down two other men that had tripped over the human barricade. He’d dropped his backpack at some point and she could see his back muscles cling to sweat soaked shirt she’d cut a hole into to fit his arm. Darcy was lurched out of her seat when the helicopter began gaining altitude. She swiveled around, clutching at the back of Clint’s chair. “What the fuck are you doing! Bucky’s still outside!”

“I’m not doing anything!” the joystick beside him was moving on its own, Clint’s hands were in the air, away from touching anything. “It’s been activated to autopilot and I can’t take it off!”

“Bucky!” Darcy screamed, watching the fallen man get up to point his rifle at Bucky. Flashbacks to the last time someone pointed something at him flew through her mind and the image of him withering on the ground in her arms brought back hidden fears. The helicopter began taking flight, they were already a considerable distance from the ground, too high for Bucky to jump up and reach for the bar step.

“Clint!” She begged, sitting forward and clawing at his suit, “we can’t leave him! Circle around!” around him the other four men were beginning to stand as well.

“I can’t!” Clint barked, shoving her persistent hand away in panic. “The helicopter keeps trying to get back on autopilot! I have control for like two seconds and then it’s gone again! It’s like it’s got a mind of its own!”
“Figure it out, Clint!” She snapped over the howling wind rushing through the opening beside her. She held tight to the harness behind her to lean over the edge, watching Bucky below.

Bucky looked up at them and ran toward the ledge closest to the helicopter. “Darcy!” he called out. He wasn’t that far away, if she could just reach a little bit she might be able to clasp his hand. *God, fuck, help me,* she thought as she planned what she was about to do.

“Call Tony, Clint! Get him on the phone and ask him for the override! Try and keep the helicopter stable so I can get Bucky!”

“What do you mean so you can get- what the fuck do you think you’re doing!” Clint screamed, turning around to find Darcy halfway hanging out of the helicopter, holding on to nothing but the harness and the railing. “This woman’s going to give me a heart attack I swear.” He muttered, fumbling for his cell phone and speed dialing Tony.

The wind ripped at Darcy’s hair as she stood at the opened door, her foot nearly slipping on the step and she clutched the railing like a lifeline. How do people do this for a living? She thought as she held on for dear life. Her heart was pounding in her ears and her blood had run cold. She didn’t dare look down. The helicopter jerked and Darcy screamed, clutching the cold metal tighter as Clint fought for control again.

“Sorry! Sorry! Fuck!” She heard from inside. “Tony?” she heard Clint ask over the phone. “What’s the damn override code for the autopilot!” he barked. Darcy’s arms were tingling but her eyes were glued to Bucky, waiting for the right moment to grab his attention and snatch him back into safety.

“What do you mean there is no override? Why? Because I’ve got Darcy hanging off the side of the fucking helicopter playing interference and an ex-assassin about to be left behind at your tower!” Clint was quiet for a moment. “…Leave him? I’m not leaving that psycho behind! He could kill me with his pinky!”

She was still close enough to see all of Bucky’s minute actions. Through her wind tangled hair, she watched Bucky throw bullet after bullet, each one hitting its mark, but the men kept trickling through the doors and soon enough there would be too many for him to take on at once.

For a second she let herself worry about how so many of the enemies seemed to have made it to the 80th level. She feared over SI’s workers and security team. Stark Industries may have been her place of work but the tower was her home- a rush of newfound anger for these terrorists daring to attack them blossomed in her gut and set fire in her eyes.

“Darcy!” Clint barked over his receiver. “Either you’re gonna do something or you get back in here!”

She narrowed her eyes and looked down at the chaos surrounding Bucky. “Hey!” Darcy shouted down toward the men on the balcony. “Look at me! I’m up here!” She waved a free hand in the air, going as far as sticking her middle finger at the masked douchebags.

“That’s *NOT* what I meant!” she heard Clint holler in panic.

She ignored Clint. This wasn’t gonna be like that time in the forest. Darcy squeezed her fingers tighter around the metal bar, her eyes furrowed in anger as she screamed profanities to the men below her.

“Look at me, you fucking pussies! I’m over- oh shit!” Darcy screamed and ducked to the side, her
foot slipping off the step and hovering midair as she held on tight with her arm. A rain of bullets from out of nowhere whizzed past her too close for comfort and landed into the metal to her right. She could see Clint through the hole of bullets look up in alarm. Bucky popped the man that had aimed at Darcy, able to get him from the distraction she’d offered.

Darcy turned to inspect the scene. Several news choppers were flying below them, capturing the live action with their cameras. A flash of green caught her attention from below.

“Incoming!” She screamed.

A loud roar sounded over the wind and gunfire. Every man paused for a heartbeat and an eerie silence descended the people on the balcony.

“Fuck yes!” Clint screamed and the helicopter dipped and turned closer to the scene, finally in control.

The fight stilled and a giant green beast soared into view, a pillar of broken glass ascended through the air behind him as the Hulk sprung onto the balcony out of nowhere, taking down with him half the group that had Bucky surrounded. Darcy smirked. This defense just turned into offense.

“How ANGRY.” Banner roared, spittle and saliva projecting from his mouth as he turned toward the round of shots at his back. He swiped a giant hand and the men near him fell, tossed off the balcony with a scream. She squeezed her eyes and tried to ignore the mental image of that man’s imminent landing.

“Get back inside, Darcy!” Clint yelled, flipping a few switches. “Let’s see what this Stark Tech is capable of.” Darcy clambered inside quickly, her hand protesting from the sudden change. She harnessed herself into the chair away from the open door she had been hanging out of. On the sides of the helicopter, a giant machine gun appeared through an opened panel.

“Bucky’s down there!” She reminded, her breath held as she watched said Asset below drop his gun and resume defending himself with a metal lawn chair.

“Like I can forget.” He muttered, flicking a clear lid off a red switch and pressing down harshly. Darcy jumped out of her skin as the machine gun’s barrel unloaded. The rotating magazines automatically refilled itself, the giant ammunition’s shells floated through the air towards the ground like raindrops.

Water from the pool kicked up like a geyser as the machine gun aimed a straight path toward the open doorway where the men had been retreating into. After a few seconds no more men came out.

The balcony had to be littered with dozens of bodies. The ringing in Darcy’s ear, the echo of millions of bullets blasting through the air below them had her believing there had been hundreds of armed men, not, she recounted, twenty-three.

Who were these guys? She wondered. She roamed over the masked men, some were women with long tangled hair spilling through their masks. Bucky took down more than this in the forest and he barely broke a sweat.

It was quiet for a second, the only sounds were Hulk’s sulking as he pawed at the dead bodies, sweeping them to the side like confetti after a parade. Bucky remained standing, watching Hulk warily. After a few minutes Clint dropped the helicopter a few degrees until Bucky could jump inside, backpack and one of the enemies’ black masks in hand.

“You okay there, big guy?” Clint spoke through the speakers, addressing Hulk.
Hulk turned, his face scrunched into a snarl. “SMASH?” he asked, barreling closer to the hovering helicopter. Bucky latched onto the plane and jumped inside with a graceful swing.

“No, no more smash, big guy. I think we’re okay for now.”

- ✮ -

They were in the depths of Iowa’s countryside and not a house, person, or car had been seen for miles until Clint felt it was safe enough to drop Tony’s helicopter onto what seemed to have been an abandoned field.

After an hour of walking down a lone dirt path, nothing but husks of corn to see for miles, they found a farmer kind enough (or dumb enough, depending who you’re asking) to allow the deaf guy, the sweaty guy with a metal arm, and the half-naked guy along with their girl pal, onto his truck.

“She’s so cute!” Darcy fawned over the laminated picture of a little gap toothed girl smiling proudly in front of a brown speckled horse. And by truck she meant Jeb’s two seated rusted tractor. The boys were left standing where they could on top of the big red machine as she rode with Jeb, the farmer kind enough to let her sit with him.

“Yeeeap.” He grinned, teeth missing and rotten in some areas, but his eyes were kind as he looked down at the picture of his only granddaughter. “She’s the spittin’ image of her may-mie back in her own day. Nine years old but I reckon she’ll be a great rider.”

Banner nodded his head kindly, offering the chatty farmer a smile that didn’t reach his eyes. He shifted on the hard vibrating hood of the tractor, holding on to dear life as the engine rattled beneath his ass.

“Okay there, big guy?” Clint was standing on the step beside Darcy, holding on to the faded leather backrest behind her.

“Yeeeap.” Bruce muttered, mocking Jeb’s annoying catchphrase below his breath.

“Yeeeap.” Jeb announced for the hundredth time. “Reckon’ we outta be within town’s limits real soon, ladies and gents. Say, where are you headed again? Couple of city slickers like yourself ain’t common ‘round these here fields.” Jeb side eyed Bucky who’d been casually walking alongside the tractor without word or complaint for the past hour. “Where’d they breed that friend of yours anyways? He seems to have the endurance of a horse. He’s been walkin’ nonstop, not a peep out of his mouth either.” Jeb turned back to watch the road, shaking his head. “Could use some men like that out on the field.” Darcy can almost imagine Bucky rolling his eyes.

“A couple of friends of ours have a place in Mt Vernon. We’ll be staying with them.” Clint replied easily, having been from Iowa originally and understanding the land better than the other ‘city slickers.’

Jeb chewed on a toothpick as he squinted against the late afternoon glare. “Reckon about another couple hours ‘fore you get there. Nightfall will definitely hit yeh soon. Them friends of yours got cars? Maybe another UFO to teleport you back from whatever alien planet your friend there dropped from?” he nodded over to Bruce sitting in front of him, skin tinting green around the edges before going back to pale then green again. “Y’all popped out of nowhere on the road, won’t be so unlikely.”

Clint shook his head, evading his jab. “They’ll be waiting for us at Eldridge, you said how much
longer until we get there?"

Jeb pointed at a tiny speck in the distance. His wrinkled finger directing them to the faintest of outlines in the horizon. “Eldridge just down yonder. Won’t be another half-hour’ ride.” Darcy squinted, her hand coming up under her bangs for cover from the blaring sun. If she squinted, she could see an outline to a tall water tower, but not much else was to be seen other than long green fields, cows, and dirt.

Banner, Clint, and Jeb kept up the chit-chat, and as she was about to lean back and close her eyes, she felt a small rock hit her right at the back of her head.

“Ow!” She hissed, turning around to find Bucky waving her toward the ground. “What?” She mouthed.

“Come here.” He mouthed back, he tilted his head to the road, indicating he wanted her to walk with him.

“Are you crazy? I’m tired.” She mouthed back, turning around again. She didn’t have enough time to settle before another rock was hitting her on the head again.

“Better go see what lover boy wants,” Clint muttered lowly. Darcy sighed and clambered off the still moving tractor. Mind you, it was only going ten miles an hour. She pushed Clint roughly and he fell into her seat with a happy sigh.

“Where you goin’ missy?” Jeb asked confused as she was about to jump down to the ground.

“Just gonna keep my friend some company.” She nodded to Bucky, fiddling with a cloth in his hands.

Bruce turned to watch her from his perch worriedly and over the rumbling of the tractor, she heard Jeb whisper to Clint, “that there her boyfriend or somethin’?” Clint snorted but Darcy didn’t hear his answer as she landed on the dirt with a thump. A cloud of dust kicked up with her landing and mucked up her old chucks.

“What.” She grunted, easily falling into step with Bucky. They trailed behind the tractor for a few beats and he wordlessly he handed her the cloth he’d been fiddling with. “What’s this?”

“ Took it from one of the bodies.” He folded the thick cloth over until she felt a wet spot. Her fingers came back bloodied as she pulled away.

Darcy made a face. “Dude. Ugh.” She wiped her hand on her jeans. “What are you giving me this for? And I touched it. Jesus.”

“DNA.” He explained, carefully folding over the mask and tucking it into one of the pockets of his backpack. “You think we’ll have any way of testing it where we’re going?”

Darcy scoffed then smiled softly. “You say this as if you don’t know who I hang around with. If Tony Stark is involved, then please, smart houses are too dumb for Stark tech. I’m sure there’ll be a lab where we’re going.” She nodded to his backpack. “Smart move, by the way. Mucho props, dude.” Bucky smiled. Not smirked! But smiled, and for second, with his fuzzy scruff coupled with the setting sun and the wind blowing his hair around, her throat dried and breathing became just a little harder.

They walked behind the lugging tractor in silence with Jeb and Clint’s chattering their background noise. Her fingers accidentally brushed against his metal hand and she wondered, for a heart-
stopping second, if he’d felt it.

- ★ -

“What the hell is this?” Darcy deadpanned as the tiny log cabin came into view. The surrounding forest as picturesque, and if there were some hallmark postcard, she’d pay big money to stay in the beautiful little cabin in the forest.

But this ain’t a vacation, Darcy thought. She was hoping for something a little more James Bond hideaway and less… storybook gingerbread house.

“Greetings!” Stark sauntered out of the front door. The porch wrapped around the little house. The light brown oak seemed to have worn well with age. A mesh hammock hung between two large columns connecting the railing to the roof and flowers, long dead and wilted to dust, were potted in colorful pots along the steps to the porch. “Took you guys long enough! Get lost?”

“Might as well have,” She heard Bruce quietly mumble as he rubbed dust from his glasses with the tail of his shirt. He put them on and appraised the cabin with approval.

“I see you made it in one piece this time.” Tony sneered, eyeing Bucky with distaste. “Have fun single handedly destroying my tower?” He held up his cell phone, waving it in their faces. “Watched the whole thing. Jane almost had a heart attack before the god of thunder barged in. Nice stunt, kiddo.” He raised his hand for a high five, just as Darcy rounded on Clint with a frown.

“You said this was a hide out.” She accused said archer as he broke though the hidden trail through the woods.

“Am I invisible? My arm’s falling asleep.” Tony complained behind her, still holding his hand up for a high five. Bruce lazily tapped Tony’s palm with knuckle. “Thank you.”

“It is.” Clint grinned, sauntering up toward the door in excitement. Everyone followed him as he held the doors opened with a flourish. “Welcome, to my humble abode.”

“Uh,” Tony interrupted, removing his dark sunglasses to glare at him. “Jane, Thor, and I, you remember us don’t you? We’ve been here for the past five hours. So run along and let me do the welcoming?”

Clint glared. “If you hadn’t noticed.” He snatched Tony’s cell phone from his loose grip. Tony sputtered. “We were a little busy trying not to get killed, no thanks to your fuckin’ fucked up system we would have been here hours ago. And I’ll give the tour. This is my-” Darcy grabbed Bucky’s hand and dragged him along. Pushing through Beavis and Butthead into the cabin.

“What ‘fucked up’ system?” She heard Tony bark.

“I love them.” Darcy spoke to Bucky under her breath, as he followed her blindly through the small living room. “But I hate them.” He smiled secretly, giving the house a quick once over. Probably counting the exits or windows, she assumed. “Hungry? There’s probably food. Or a shower. You earned it. You’re probably tired from-”

“Singlehandedly destroying the tower?” Bucky quipped, mimicking Tony’s words to her as they entered the small kitchen. She snickered, opening the fridge and rummaging through several scattered cans of beer for a bottle of water. She handed one to Bucky and took one for herself.
She hopped onto the countertop and gestured over the mouth of her bottle to the cloth tucked in his bag. “You gonna tell them about the DNA spot on that mask? Either way what’ll that solve, the guy’s probably dead anyways.”

He shook his head with a slight smile as he stood closer to her. Darcy swallowed, her throat suddenly dry. He smelled like sweat and metal and dirt. And he was crowding into her side where she sat. “I took it from one of the men right before they turned and ran.” He whispered, turning to look behind them in case the idiot brigade decided to snoop. “Clint said they might have been Russian, trying to look for me. But I don’t think that was the case.”

He didn’t seem to notice his proximity or what it was doing to her. He wasn’t even looking at her, but staring hard at the tiny star necklace resting between her collarbones- that or he was looking at her boobs.

She was pleasantly okay with that.

She leaned a little closer to him. Her shoulder leaning into the damp sweaty shirt she had been admiring on the rooftop. He was still speaking, but the words were faraway and out of reach. His baritone lulled her like hypnosis as she focused on his Adam’s apple bob beneath his growing whiskers. He was warm, and his heart beat healthily in his chest. She felt every steady thump, thump against her side. His abdomen was hard, and she swallowed, remembering the image of it covered in soap as she’d helped him shower. She could almost feel the ridges between each ab. If she tilted her head she could almost red her cheek on his pecks-

“Lady Darcy!” The sharp shout of joy threw her off kilter for a second. Bucky’s chest retracted from her side and she was left cold through her sweater. She sighed inwardly.

“Thor?” She turned around where she sat and watched he and Jane rush around the countertop toward her. Bucky slinked back into the shadows to watch as she was engulfed in red and gold armor. Thor’s giant tree trunks wrapped around her back in a generous hug more appropriate for snapping spines. “Jesus. Can’t breathe!” He let her go and smiled sagely. “What’s with you? You’ve never been so grabby before.” She smiled lasciviously. “I like it.”

“We saw you hanging off of the helicopter, Darcy.” Jane snapped in anger. “What the hell do you think you were doing?”

She turned away from Thor’s serene smile of respect to face her best friend/boss/and apparently mother. “What the hell are you talking about? How did you know that?”

“Midgardians have always been a brave force. But you, lightning sister, have truly inspired the gods of Valhalla today with your valor. Well done.” He bowed over and kissed her hand in a show of admiration.

She grinned, turning to look for Bucky as if to say, are you seeing this shit? But he was nowhere to be found.

Chapter End Notes
Hello readers!

Starting this story I did extensive research and set everything up for this exact moment. It's almost a year later (wow, I'm a slow writer) and I'm exactly where I want to be. I got the idea for this fic from the ending clip in The Avengers (2012). Because the villain in my story was revealed to be the villain in Age of Ultron, I won't be updating again until Age of Ultron comes out on May 6th.

My story is still AU, but like everything, things leak out. Things I assumed to be common knowledge turn out to be spoilers for some. Since Von Strucker happens to be a main guy in the movie, I HIGHLY recommend to everyone to put off reading any of my next chapters UNTIL YOU HAVE SEEN THE MOVIE.

I'd hate to be the one spoiling the movie for any of you.

Thank you all for your constant dedication to my story!

Also, also, also. Is anyone interested in making a poster for this fic? I want to recommend it on tumblr so I can get a tiny bit more exposure, but would like to add a picture! I'll of course, give you 100% credit for your image and a shout out!

Again, you guys rock. Love you all!

-kathy
DON'T READ UNLESS YOU'VE SEEN AGE OF ULTRON.
There aren't too many spoilers, for those of you that are brave and want to continue. But for the good of my sanity, wait until you've seen the movie. (It released three weeks ago in the US, if you haven't seen it yet... what the hell is wrong with you?!)

If you have seen it: Yay!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

- ⭐ -

Washington D.C. — Three days before Peggy’s funeral. One and a half weeks after the fall of the helicarriers.

- ⭐ -

He stuck to the shadows. Never staying in one place for more than a day. He stole what he needed and threw away nonessentials. His amour, combat boots and weapons were discarded beneath an abandoned dumpster on the corner of 6th and Formont St behind a car rental building.

He kept a knife in his hoodie pocket, a small pistol tucked into the deep pocket of the jeans he’d swiped from a thrift store.

It was raining, and he stood under an unlit lamppost, across the street from the small crowd gathering by a smudged window lit with TV screens of different sizes. The sign above read FixIT, a technology repair shop. Through the window, the plasmas looped the same news station.

"In other news, Captain America still missing in action after he’d been caught on film falling from a giant plane." The anchorwoman was cut to a shitty clip of a man in a blue suit free falling into the canal. "Sources say Shield, a hidden branch of worldwide government managing the extraordinary, had been infiltrated by long thought gone Hydra agents- a gang from the 1940s thought to have been exterminated by Captain America. Information, detrimental to the safety of this country and its people, had been leaked into the web. Mr. President, is Hydra a threat to America?"

The small crowd grew larger as the President spoke of freedom for his country and safety for his people. The soldier was adept enough at catching lies to know he’d just told a big one. In the small chance the President was telling the truth, believing Hydra wasn't a threat, he was an idiot.

He walked away, sticking to the alleys until he’d gotten to his destination.

Капитан Америка had done a very poor job concealing where he lived, and it hadn’t taken him long in his mission to find his apartment. He used the rooftops and an old lock picker to open the terrace door he remembers the man barging through weeks ago. It had been fixed, replaced with a steel reinforced barricade to keep the building from getting broken in to again.

He crept along the old browned walls, careful not to creek along the wooden floorboards as he took
the stairs to Steve Roger’s level. There must have been files left behind, papers on his case against
the Winter Soldier and Hydra.

He made it to the sixth level without getting detected when the sound of someone approaching
alerted him.

“I’m fine, mom.” A woman spoke from across the hall, exiting the elevators, cellphone in hand. “I
made it here safe. Sharon couldn’t pick me up from the airport so I took a cab. I’m at her apartment
now.” The sound of rolling luggage squeaked against the hardwood and stopped at the end of the
hall.

The soldier stiffened as he stood on the other side of the wall. If she turned the corner she’d see him.
He jumped, caught himself on the overhead light and used his strength to hold himself up against the
ceiling.

The woman turned the corner.

Her dark curls were masked by a purple hat, her body a mass of sweaters and colorful knit scarves.
Her perfume wafted up to his nose, sweet and floral.

She dug around the top of the door hinge, barely reaching the top, to pick up a spare key wedged
along the wall. “I’ll meet you tomorrow to talk over the funeral arrangements.” She jammed the key
into the lock and it stuck, the knob jiggling against her effort. She huffed. “No, mom. Yes. Okay.
That’s fine. No, I’m not sure if Sharon will be here tonight. I don’t know, she said something about
an interview.”

She twisted the key and the door opened, she grabbed the handles of her luggage and hiked her
purse higher. “Yeah, I know.” She sighed, this time long and suffering. “I miss her too, ma.”

She entered the room and as soon as the door closed behind her, the soldier dropped from the ceiling
and landed on the ground with a low crouch.

He made sure to keep his footsteps light, not wanting to alert the new tenant beside Captain
America’s of his presence.

- ✷ -

She didn’t catch sight of Bucky until the refugees hiding away in Clint’s cabin were well into their
third glasses of whiskey, but Darcy was confident he hadn’t gotten into trouble in the deserted woods
on his own.

“Hungry?” She offered him her untouched bowl of the questionable muck Clint made with a bag of
Military rations and milk. It had a bite to it. If Mac and Cheese tasted like sawdust it’d probably taste
better than the crap she’d been served. Bucky sniffed it, either too tired to pay attention to the group
behind him or uncaring of the five sets of prodding eyes on him.

His fingers were muddied, as if he’d spent his day digging through dirt, and she ordered him to wash
his hands with a stern frown.

Bucky gave her a small smirk. “You’re getting a little loose in the mouth, doll.” But he listened and
went to wash his hands anyway.

They had all been sitting around the proverbial campfire, listening to Bruce speak as he regaled what
he could remember while playing Big Green.
“They didn’t stay down.” Bruce repeated once Bucky came back, with clean hands, and ate her bowl of questionable pasta. Bruce removed his glasses and cleaned the lenses, his dark eyes squinted at the faded rug beneath the couch. “None of them looked the same. They weren’t tied to any one ethnicity. It’s as if these people were picked at random and turned into soldiers overnight.”

Tony was fumbling with his tablet, that clear thing he lugs around that can control every piece of tech he owns. He tapped a few buttons and a holograph of the Tower’s ground level appeared in the middle of the room.

Jane gasped and turned her face into Thor’s bicep. In the video, blood and gore were splattered along previously pristine marble. Debris and glass were shattered everywhere. In the bulk of it all was the Hulk, tossing away five garbed attackers with big guns like they were nothing but toy blocks.

Masks fell and different faces were revealed. An Asian man, an American woman, someone whom might have been a middle-eastern teenager, all of them were fighting with a finesse that couldn’t have been taught at a local self-defense class.

“Assets.” Bucky said, breaking the silence that had overcome the group, watching the fight in the hovering screen. “Someone found a way to create assets without a serum.”

“Assets.” Clint deadpanned. “So… people like you?”

Bucky nodded. Darcy turned to look at him, he was staring through the hovering screen where it showed Hulk gruesomely toss a man into a marble pillar. Bruce winced at the soundless scream.

“Obviously not,” Jane said, finally peeking from Thor’s side, “We’ve all seen footage of James from two months ago, you’re capabilities exceed way more than these people.”

“James.” Darcy snickered at the sour way Bucky’s mouth pursed at the use of his name.

“They’re attacking by brute force. Like the Hulk would, only- you know- they’re humans.” Bruce continued, following along quickly. “It’s like they’re not thinking, they’re not using common strategy. They can aim their guns all they wanted but they still didn’t get far enough to do anything. Who attacks an armed tower in broad daylight?”

“I wouldn’t say they didn’t get far enough,” Tony said throwing up another video footage of his lab. The three story glass chamber was infiltrated with dozens of masked people, the lasers of their guns pointing every which way. “They got plenty far. They’re in my freaking lab.” The armed people left the lab- a room, which by the way, was filled with billions of dollars’ worth of technology, and took none of it.

Bruce fiddled with his glasses again, taking them off and putting them back on. “They wanted something specific.”

“My father always said, ‘to make a great king, you must have wits and strengths’. ” He quietened down and wrapped his arm around Jane. Darcy pretended to choke up at the lovesick eyes they made one another. “I have strength, endurance, and resilience in the battle field, but this beautiful mortal woman is my wit. Those armed men, they had the brawns. So it thus begs the question… who holds their wits?”

Clint agreed with a hum. “Thor’s right. They’ve got a puppet master. Whoever sent the attack to the tower, it was a message. Ain’t no way anyone’s that stupid.”

“Those people were a decoy.” Bruce muttered as Tony popped another scene showing the Tower’s employees taking to the streets to run for their lives. “They wanted to know who was in that tower.”
“High profile place, big city. Lotta eyes on the scene.” Clint confirmed.

“So, annihilating my home wasn’t the endgame?” Tony frowned, taking down the fight scene and turning on a local channel news reel of Darcy hanging off the Helicopter, trying to distract the men from Bucky. Tony frowned at her in earnest as the news Anchor questioned her integrity in nearly getting herself killed. Darcy shifted in her seat uncomfortably as all eyes turned angrily to her. SI TOWER ATTACK IN NYC! in large block letters were blaring below the anchorwoman. Peggy Carter’s niece caught in the crossfires? were the small headlines below.

Heh.

“Those soldiers are disposable.” Bucky confirmed, turning the blazing eyes away from her, thank God. “My guess is they found what they were looking for.” He opened his mouth but lost the words until her hand squeezed his bicep encouragingly. “There are things that I’m slowly remembering. So many weeks off the chair must be eroding away the wall they’ve built up inside my head.”

“Chair?” Thor asked, the only one not in the loop of Bucky’s condition. Jane explained, and the look of disbelief was apparent. “My sincerest condolences, comrade.” If she wasn’t so attuned to Bucky by now, she wouldn’t have known he was trying to hold back his shock.

Thor’s apology must have had some effect on him, because he spoke more rapidly. “I remember weapons left in the field from my winter soldier days… dangers I can still prevent. Off grid bases. Tech. I think whoever infiltrated the tower was looking for-”

“Excuse me, your winter soldier days?” Tony interrupted with a scoff, “you mean like what, two days ago?”

Bucky tensed, a frustrated frown marring the open look he’d been sporting before. Everyone threw themselves into an uproar at Tony’s uncalled for comment. Jane threw her napkin at his face.

“Tony, com’on-”

“Tony!”

“Stark, I don’t think now’s the time for-”

With a frown Darcy threw her blanket off herself and stood up, walking over to Tony with clenched fists.

He had the presence to be sheepish as he tried to hide behind his tumbler of whiskey.

“I love you, Tony.” She confessed quietly, ignoring their silent audience. “I’ve known you my whole life and you’re family. But if you say one more fucking joke.” She jabbed a finger into the spot his arc reactor had been and he winced, “I will never speak to you again. Are we clear?”

Tony looked up at her, his expression lost and for a second he actually looked remorseful. But it cleared away again and he was once more the smarmy jerk she’d always known.

He didn’t apologize, but the nod he threw to Bucky was enough for now.

Bucky didn’t finish what he was going to say. Something for which she was grateful, because when he cornered her in her guest bedroom after her shower, her sputter of surprise was enough to worry a dead man.

“What do you mean you think they were looking for me?” She grabbed him by the neck of his shirt
and tugged him into her room. She shut the door after making sure no one had seen, and locked it.

She turned around. In an empty room Bucky could take up enough space to suffocate her. In this tiny, dust layered bedroom, she felt inconspicuous beside him.

“Explain.” She demanded. She hiked her towel higher around her body, uncaring and unashamed she was naked under it. Her hair was wet around her shoulders and she’d need to dry it before she caught a cold.

Bucky sat down on her bed. The mattress creaked under his weight and he pretend to inspect the cuffs of his metal wrist to give her the illusion of privacy as she changed into pajamas.

As soon as she was dressed and toweling her hair in front of him, he began reciting his suspicions. “They didn’t fall back until you revealed yourself to be on the helicopter.”

She waited for more, but that’s all he said. “That’s it? What are you…” then it clicked. “You think those super-creeps want me? Why? Cause they didn’t want to shoot me? Are you insane? That’s the dumbest-”

He gently reminded her of the Russian man trying to kidnap her the day they met.

“Yeah but, that was a onetime thing. These guys couldn’t have been related, the MO doesn’t match up. That asshole in the alley was ready to chop my body into chunks if it got me into his car. You’re telling me these super enhanced ‘assets’ with the mass to overthrow Stark friggin’ Tower are gonna dip as soon as they catch sight of me?”

He was about to respond to her when he stiffened, turning toward her door, his head cocked as if listening to a conversation on the other side of the house. “Do you hear that?” Before she could say no, Bucky shot off her bed like a bullet. “We gotta get outta here.”

“Whoa, whoa!” she cried out as he grabbed a few clothes from the closet that didn’t belong to her and stuffed them into his weapon’s bag. “What the hell’s going on? What happened?”

Bucky bounded from one side of the room to the other, quickly picking up her things as she stood like a doof in the middle of the room. Bucky ran toward the window, swiping the curtains out of the way and hefting the window pane upwards. The cool breeze made her nipples harden, she wasn’t wearing a bra or sweater, but he grabbed her by the arm with the intention to push her through the window. “Bucky! Bucky stop it! What the hell’s the matter with you?”

And then she heard it. Over the bustling of leaves in the wind, the tell-tale sound of a motorcycle’s engines rumbling. “Who’s that? Who’s here?” Someone at her bedroom door knocked.

“Darcy?” It was Jane. “Hey! You’ll never guess who just got here!”

She and Bucky looked at one another. His mouth was set into a hard line and his expression seemed determined, as if he was preparing for something. “Uhh… who?”

“Captain America! Didn’t you have like the biggest crush on him? You kept talking about his ‘bubbly butt of justice’-”

“OKAY! Jane! God!” Darcy cried out, face heating up in mortification. Bucky’s arm on her shoulder tightened. “Just uh, give me a minute!” she turned around, swatting the constricting hand away from her. “What do you want to do? I know you’re like on the run from him or something, if you wanna go we’ll go. Let me know. We can go right now if you-”
“No.” He didn’t look at her, letting go of her arm and the loss of contact left her off kilter for a moment. His small step backwards was too far. “I’ll go. You’ll be safer with these people. I’ll figure out who’s hunting you on my own and deal with it.”

She started, freezing in place. “Excuse me?” he turned toward her window, and in a last flash of desperation to keep him from leaving, Darcy threw the door open. “Bucky’s running!” she screamed loudly into the house, “help! Help!”

Bucky swiveled in confusion, half way out the window before he realized what she’d done. He opened his mouth the say something and immediately slammed it shut as someone entered her room.

Darcy turned, guiltily, and was met with Captain Roger’s impressive chest. His arms were spread beside him submissively, a look of hopefulness was etched in the set of his wary smile.

“Buck?” he asked cautiously, watching Bucky under a lowered, cautious gaze. “It’s me, Steve.”

Darcy turned to catch Bucky’s reaction. He swallowed, and like a deer caught in headlights froze, one leg still thrown over the window to escape from Steve.

“Yeah I know.” Bucky said, and with one last wary glance at Darcy, jumped out of the second story window.

“No!” Darcy screamed in panic, throwing herself into Steve’s side to move him out of the way. Steve rushed forward, tossing himself out the window only a millisecond after Bucky.

Heart pumping a mile a minute she ran down the stairs, barefoot, already knowing with the way Bucky was programmed that he’d probably half disappeared into the night by now.

“Bucky’s gone!” she screamed into the house, willing for anyone to listen. “He’s leaving! Steve rushed after him!” she reached the front door, several people running at her heels. She threw the heavy door open and the cold breeze washed over her. In the direction she’d seen him jump, she took off, feet flying over twigs and dead leaves.

“So what!” she heard Tony grouch, but follow after her none the less. “Let him leave!”

“Bucky!” she screamed into the woods, dark shadows cast every which way making it impossible to see. Between the break in the leaves above here the moon lit bright, but it wasn’t enough. The pines were large and shadows cast her in darkness. She could hear the other’s voices behind her. The light of someone’s flashlight, or maybe Tony’s suit, illuminating a path.

She heard Clint come up behind her, his flashlight lighting her way. Everyone minus Bruce ran several yards away. She stumbled over a patch of dirt and nearly slipped if he hadn’t caught her elbow and steadied her on time.

“Mind tellin’ me why we’re chasin’ this asshole in the first place!” Clint growled, taking her arm and steering them east.

“He was gonna leave! I had to do something!”

“Why not start with lettin’ him leave?!?”

She narrowed her eyes in anger, fed up with the way both Clint and Tony seemed to detest him. She was about to snarl a reply when suddenly Clint stopped, making her stop alongside him.

“I hear something.”
Suddenly the trees broke through to a clearing thick with the smell of mud and compost. In the thick of it all were Steve and Bucky. The latter trying to attack, while Steve tried holding him off, never throwing a hit against Bucky’s onslaught of punches. Bucky socked Steve in the nose, the loud crouch practically echoing in the clearing. Steve’s head fell back and a spray of blood flew between them. He held his nose, and suddenly he rammed Bucky in the abdomen, using his upper body to pick him up off the ground and tackle him to the ground.

They rolled, kicking up dirt and grass, as they both threw swift punches at each other’s faces.

Suddenly, Bucky had Steve in a headlock, his fist beating at Steve’s ribs mercilessly. She could see the silver plates coil and move to his whim, the metal pieces puzzling together to strengthen his hold around Steve’s neck

“No, no, no, no.” Darcy muttered, stepping forward to try and do something, anything.

Clint whistled below his breath at the fight. The other’s arrived just on time to catch Steve use his legs to lock around Bucky’s head. Bucky was flipped onto his chest, face digging into the dirt as Steve held him down, arms high up his back and angled dangerously far. A little harder and Bucky’s arm would get snapped.

“500 says Cap wins.” Tony bet.

“Money’s on the asset.” Clint sniggered, watching as Steve’s eyes seemed to widen as Bucky’s arm sprung from Steve’s hold. Bucky’s metal arm broke from Steve’s hold.

“Did I program that? I didn’t program that!” Tony says, watching the arm rotate in a 360 degree angle, all the way around, until it clutched Steve’s neck, until suddenly, Bucky was up, and as if weighing nothing, Steve was soaring through the air towards them. He landed with a pained groan right at Clint’s feet.

“Boyfriend not too happy with the reunion, huh?” Clint quipped, wincing as Bucky ran with the anger of a bull toward Steve. Steve got up with a hiss, holding his ribs. Bucky used his running start to jump, aiming a kick at Steve’s injured side, when suddenly Steve twisted, grabbing Bucky mind air by the ankles and tossing him into the tree beside Darcy.

“Seriously, did anyone see the arm?!?” Tony wailed, eyes wide at his tech suddenly defying what he’d created it to do.

Darcy and Jane both screamed at the loud crunch as his body practically wrapped around the giant tree trunk.

Bucky got up, not one to stay down, and Darcy sighed in relief.

Thor chuckled, “he is a mighty fighter.” He said with respect. Holding Jane and Darcy behind him in case things got a little too close.

“I don’t want to hurt you!” Steve yelled, as he blocked a fist aiming for his face.

“You’re the reason this happened!” Bucky screamed, practically shrieked as he ceaselessly threw punch after punch. Steve, unable to block every one of them, held back a bowl of pain as they landed to his face repeatedly. “Torture! Mind control! Starvation! They used everything on me!” he cried loudly, “So I. Can. Be. You!” he did a combination, two jabs to Steve’s side and a kick to his legs, throwing Steve off balance for a moment before Bucky used that split second of hesitation to land a roundhouse kick to his temple. Steve fell to the ground with a loud thud, taking longer than usual to get back up. “It’s your fucking fault they made me!” Bucky hoisted Steve by the lapels of
his brown leather jacket and tossed him across the clearing again, he broke a few branches during his
fall as he’d soared through the vegetation.

Steve was losing, and fast, and all three men seemed to realize it at the same time.

Clint ran into the fight, tackling Bucky before he made Steve’s face a bloody pulp. The loud
whirring of Tony’s Iron Man arm cut through the men’s harsh breathing and anger, his weapon
pointed brashly into Bucky’s face, Clint held Steve down and backed him away from the raging bull
that was the winter soldier. The white light on Tony’s Iron Man palm illuminated the blood seeping
from Bucky’s nose and split lips.

Darcy gasped at the revealed gruesome sight, and the soft noise had Bucky looking her way from the
corner of his eye.

“Stand down!” Tony ordered, his usually sarcastic tone severe and desperate. “You better calm
down, kid.” Bucky swatted Tony’s arm with his metal hand, jumping to reach and strangle Steve’s
neck. As he tried to push past Tony, a loud blast was freed from his palm and blew up a tree in the
distance, missing Jane by a hair’s breath. She shrieked, throwing herself to the ground before the
blast could hit her.

It was enough to spur Thor into action.

Suddenly, a crackling of thunder whipped through the air, static conjured around him and a strike of
lightning illuminated the small clearing, landing directly between Bucky and Steve. They were
thrown to the opposite sides of the clearing from one another. Another flash of lighting served as a
warning.

“Have you had enough?!” Thor demanded. Clint ran over to Steve, offering him a hand to stand.
Tony still had his Iron Man arm aimed at Bucky where he was laying on the ground, heaving
through his closed mouth.

“Bucky?” Darcy whispered, tears threatened to spill as she watched him in fear. She didn’t know his
hatred for Steve ran so deep. It was fearsome, the way Bucky’s usually calm and collected
expression turned ugly in rage. Morphed in madness to avenge what had become of his life against
the man that had unknowingly been the sole reason for his so-called purpose.

He was created with a mission to kill, to be like the weapon Captain America was. Only, Bucky had
a deep seeded apathy in him, created by years of torture and triggered with the sight of Steve.

Bucky looked at her, his anger and rage seemed to soften as he watched her come to him, barefoot
and unafraid. She ignored Tony’s shouts to stay away from him, his warning to pick her up like a
two year old and toss her over his shoulder if she didn’t stay away from him.

She fell to her knees next to Bucky, aware of the eyes on her, most heavily those of Captain
America’s as he watched her lay a gentle hand on Bucky’s badly bleeding cheek.

“I’m sorry.” She whispered simply, beating herself up, knowing this fight was all her fault and she
should have listened when he begged them to disappear before Steve found him. Her words weren’t
enough. “Should have listened to you.”

Bucky swallowed, unwilling to show any more weakness in front of the people he’s made enemies
of tonight.

“Let’s go. We’ll pack a bag. We don’t have to stay here if Steve does.”
From across the clearing Steve heard her, he was about to respond, when across a knife soared through the air out of nowhere. Darcy fell back in shock as a long black blade dug into Bucky’s hip seemingly out of thin air. She looked up, eyes wild in shock, and into the eyes of Natasha Romanov, several yards away, arm outstretched from her toss.

“That’s for the bikinis.” The Black Widow muttered.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts on the movie? I thought it was spectacular, however wayy too much goin on. Nat/Bruce? And her whole "I can't have kids, who's the real monster now?" Didn't like that at all. Clint's random back story just to fill up the fact that he's had nothing going for him in the past movies? Ehh.


So much Steve. So much of that beautiful face. So precious. (and the fact that he may or may not mention searching for who know who!!!????????!!!????!)

End Notes

Disclaimer:
-I own nothing, all characters belong to Marvel. Title from song "The Good Soldier" by Nine Inch Nails.
-I apologize for any incorrections.

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