Governments couldn't be trusted.

The People have a right to feel safe.

"The safest hands are our own"

"If we can't accept limitations then we're no better than the bad guys"

What started out as two stances regarding accountability and control spiraled out of control with Helmut Zemo stoking the flames. Can an outside variable fill in the widening cracks of the Avengers before they are shattered beyond repair?
Prologue

“What were you thinking?” Agent Ross demanded.

“Steve isn’t going to stop so long as the other Winter Soldiers could be a threat” Sharon defended, crossing her arms over her chest.

“So you thought arming them with their trademark weapons was a good idea?” Agent Ross challenged, still in disbelief at his agent's actions.

“They wouldn’t survive without them” Sharon answered stubbornly.

“You know you played right into Ross’ hands right? He wants them to resist arrest. And you just gave them the tools to do so! You aided and abetted a criminal!” Agent Ross declared, just in case she didn't understand what her actions were going to cost her.

“I’m confident that Steve will make the right choices” Sharon rebutted, standing firm against her superior.

“Well he hasn’t so far” Agent Ross countered pointedly.

Sharon chose to bite her tongue rather than comment back.

Agent Ross took out a secured burner phone out of his pocket. He immediately scrolled down to Woo and clicked enter, bringing the phone up to his ear.

“Woo” a voice answered.

“Agent Woo. Agent Ross. Where’s that specialized Task-Force at with the investigation on the Winter Soldier?” Agent Ross asked (demanded). Dealing with all the adults around him acting like immature children had worn his patience down to zero.

“You mean you don’t know?” Woo questioned, sounding confused.

“Don’t know what?” Agent Ross demanded. Sharon giving him a confused look.

“They already captured the real assailant. Secretary Ross ordered their deployment to bring in the Avengers” Woo reported.

Agent Ross just looked at Sharon in disbelief.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Civil War really bothered me with how some of the Avengers were characterized. So this chapter gives a little insight into the thoughts of the other members of Team Cap and how I profiled their reasoning for siding with Captain America without being biased.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Third POV)

Scott was buzzing with excitement. *Captain America* needed his help! *Captain America*! He’d only had the Ant-man suit for about a year, and he hadn’t even been given (public) credit for defeating his only real enemy Darren Cross a.k.a. Yellowjacket. Out of all the superheroes coming out of the woodwork they chose *him* to help them defend the world! There was no way he was going to mess up this chance!

Sure he knew that he was risking a lot doing this, but if Captain America was right (And why wouldn’t he be?) then even if they were caught the government would most likely give them a pass for violating the budding Accords (which he really needs to read since he wants to continue being the superhero his daughter looks up to).

Hopefully Hank and Hope wouldn’t flay him too badly once they got wind of what he was doing. He was praying the fact he was on Captain America’s side and not Tony Stark’s would be a point in Hank’s favor. Personally he had nothing against the billionaire himself, his genius in engineering was awe-inspiring. But according to Hank Starks can never be trusted. Said they were no good thieves after his technology.

Hank had the decency to look awkward after I raised an eyebrow at the “no-good-thief” comment.

Hope however had a different opinion on Stark, which kind of confused him considering her father’s vocal dislike of the family.

To put it simply she was neutral towards the man, saying that Tony Stark “Was not his father any more than she was”.

Clearly there was some complicated history going on nobody felt the need to share with him. Regardless, right now he was starting to lean more towards Hank’s assessment of the man. How could Stark just waste time trying to arrest his friends knowing that some lunatic was on his way right now to awaken five more Winter Soldiers?! Sometimes doing the right thing meant breaking the law. And who better to stand up with against the law then Captain America himself!

He was so ready!

He had already shrunk down and taken up position outside the building near the airstrip. He was the element of surprise. The wildcard. He was going to show Captain America and Falcon that they were right to trust him.
Before he could react, streams of electricity jolted his entire body. Like a moth hitting a bug zapper.

“Shit” he thought as his vision went dark.

Sam hoped they were making the right call. There was a lot being staked on an ex-friend whose brain was still little better than fruit in a blender. He knew oversight was important. He was ex-military after all. But after seeing the corruption of SHIELD he agreed that the Accords needed a revamping and oversight itself so people like Ross couldn't stick their manipulative, greedy little hands in the mix and take advantage of them.

Of course it seemed like every chance they had to try and sit down for some semblance of a sane negotiation something else happens that seems to pit them more and more against each other.

He and Stark weren't friends. He respected the man for his tech skills and he had always heard (mostly) good things about him while in reference to his military deals, but he didn't really know the guy. Frankly he was much closer to Rhodes due to their connection through the Air Force.

The media portrayed Stark as an egotistical, irresponsible man-child, and the military considered him a stubborn, sarcastic, childish genius.

The reality?

He was a nerd.

There was no other way to describe Tony fucking Stark.

He was a nerd.

He respected the engineer for what he could do, and was grateful for him upgrading his gear, but he just didn't really have anything in common with the man.

While he had always done well in school he had always been the jock. The athlete. He had always wanted to be a pilot so he decided that joining the Air Force would be the best of both worlds while still allowing him to feel like he was doing something worthwhile in his life, only deciding to pursue a certification in counseling after his own experiences suffering with PTSD.

Stark (these days) was the active-duty non-combatant. The tech support guy behind the scenes. The tech support whose ramblings he could never hope to understand in any lifetime. Where Stark loved to hole himself up in his lab inventing and “sciencing” he preferred being outdoors and being as active as possible.

Despite their differences he could understand why the man so readily signed the Accords. By revealing that he was Iron Man he had ensured that the public would hold him accountable for his actions. And after the whole Ultron debacle it was no wonder the man who's known for challenging any and all authority would be more than willing to sign over his rights to the UN.

Just taking a critical look at Stark when he had shown up with Ross he was almost certain Stark was suffering from severe depression. The Accords weren't all bad, but if Stark was depressed it would explain why he was so strong in his pro-Accord stance.

And Ross was sure as hell taking advantage of it.

Of course he wasn't going to tell Steve his thoughts on that matter of things just yet. Steve already
hated the thought of Tony and Nat being under the Accords’ thumb. He couldn't be sure what Steve would do if he thought a mentally ill Stark was being taken advantage of by the government.

That was another matter he had trouble pinning down.

Steve and Tony.

The two of them were like fire and oil. The two go perfectly together, and yet it burns everything to ash.

From what he understood the two of them only really started getting closer after SHIELD fell.

*Flashback*

“You were retired” Steve said firmly.

“So what? You think I would be too busy sipping martinis to help you stop Hydra from murdering half the planet?” Stark stated angrily.

“I didn’t know who to trust!” Steve retorted back.

“That’s bullshit and you know it Rogers!” Stark yelled back, poking his finger at Steve’s chest.

Sam had to give the genius credit, not many would have the balls to challenge Steve to his face like that. Nat however looked unphased by the whole thing, so he guessed this was a normal occurrence between the two of them.

“I made what I thought was the right call” Steve said stubbornly, refusing to give an inch.

“Then next time call me!” Stark snapped.

Steve’s expression went neutral.

Sam recognized the expression as the one he always wore when he was assessing a situation.

“If you can trust me enough to have your back when fighting a bunch of aliens invading New York from a wormhole in space then you better damn well be sure I’ll have your back anytime you need it!” Stark exclaimed confidently.

*End Flashback*

And call Steve did.

He called Tony in on so many Avengers missions his retired status had been redacted.

Personally he thought Cap was always harder on Tony than everyone else. Especially when morals, ideals, and personal feelings came into play. Those two always ran either hot or cold. One minute they could be joking around and the next they would be butting heads.

In a lot of ways they were really similar. Stubborn. Bullheaded. Both challenged authority, and neither backed down.

The two of them together were the strongest wall.

But they were also an explosion waiting to happen.
So this whole one side versus the other thing going on really wasn't a surprise.

“Mr. Wilson” a voice sounded behind him.

He immediately unholstered his guns, directing them at the unknown.

He flinched slightly, startled that the voice was a petite, well-dressed red-haired young woman.

Clint couldn't help but feel he was missing something important.

When Nat had sent him a copy of the Accords he turned them down. Not because he thought they were wrong, but because he was already retired.

He had been a SHIELD agent. Oversight on enhanced individuals was what SHIELD did. Sure the Accords needed tweaking, but he was out and he was confident that Tony and Nat could play the political field to their favor.

Of course all that when out the window when Cap had called saying that Tony and Nat had been compromised. And there was no way in hell he was going to sit things out if that was the case. If the Accords were compromising Nat and Tony then he would follow Cap to help ensure the Accords’ demise in order to get their friends back.

But even so he couldn't help but feel like he was missing a huge part of this whole situation....And that was bothering him.

Sensing a presence behind him Clint quickly spun around, notching an arrow in his bow and taking aim at the poor bastard trying to sneak up on him.

The man quickly whipped out two custom Desert Eagles in response. “Damn those guns are nice” Clint noted appreciatively. With acuity and precision Clint quickly took in the man’s appearance. “Older. Forties. Fit. FBI. Quick to the draw. Custom weapons, so higher up the leaderboard” Clint analyzed.

“Who're you?” Clint asked, not quite willing to outright commit treason by attacking a agent of his own country before he had any information. Though he didn't lower his bow.

“Argent. FBI Task-Force sent to mediate before things get even more out of hand” the man answered coolly, not lowering his weapons either.

Clint let out a doozy whistle. “Agent Argent? That's unfortunate” Clint noted jokingly.

“Just give me five minutes” Argent said, ignoring his comment. Being surrounded by teenagers for years making him immune to the ex-spy’s childishness.

“You have two”
He didn't like her, but according to him he saw a similar potential for good in her that he had seen in someone else, and that gamble had turned out well, so he decided that maybe she could redeem herself too. He had shoved her at Natasha and warned her not to screw up again, to learn from her mistakes and use this as a way to start over.

He also gave her a harsh lecture on why mind manipulation is unethical, wrong, and just plain rape of the mind. She vowed that with this new chance with the Avengers she wouldn't use that facet of her abilities again unless there were severe extenuating circumstances.

Red curled around her fingers. While she wouldn't use her mind manipulation for this fight she was not going to go easy on anyone siding with Stark. She would do what she needed to do to protect and achieve victory for her side. Former allies or not, if they weren't with her then she would not be pulling any of her punches.

She knew (now) that Stark wasn't actually to blame for the shell hitting her house. It had actually been a poorly made replica of one of Stark Industries bombs sold on the black market illegally without Stark’s knowledge by Obadiah Stane.

*Flashback*

“If it had been Stark Tech you'd be deader than dead” Natasha stated assuredly.

Sam nodded. “Stark Tech doesn't fail. It's why the military was pissed when Stark shut down productions. He revamped the contract for other things like parachutes, planes, trackers, better bulletproof vests. Things like that. But it still didn't change the fact that no one had any legal way to get the best made weapons in the world anymore” he backed up.

*End Flashback*

Even knowing all that it still wasn't easy letting go of over ten years of hatred for the man.

Her current neutral stance with Stark (whom she rarely saw anyway) stemmed from her own guilt for her hand in Ultron (a fact she kept close to her chest), and appreciation for Stark keeping her involvement in Johannesburg from the public (at Steve's insistence). She hardly had the right to judge the man based on his past as the Merchant of Death considering everything she had willingly done under Hydra.

But even so, her hatred and vengeance had been what drove her through life, what she felt allowed her to survive the experiments done on her by Hydra. Just letting that go wasn't easy.

She did however understand Stark’s reasoning to a point. People were afraid of her, and if there was any risk of her accidentally lashing out things would only get worse for her. But she didn't like being confined. It made her feel helpless. Powerless. Weak. All the things she had felt prior to getting her powers.

She knew it was a bit irrational, but she couldn't help but want to take her frustrations out on the billionaire.

“Wanda” a familiar voice sounded from behind her.

“Viz”
The Task-Force appears!

Team Cap is down! *devious smirk*

What will Captain America do next?
Chapter 2

(Third POV)

Steve ran to the helicopter, silently praying that Tony wouldn’t show up.

Of course all his hopes were shattered the second a familiar EMP disabled his first getaway option. Steve watched as both Iron Man and War Machine made touchdown directly in front of him.

“Wow it’s so weird how you run into people at the airport. Don’t you think that’s weird?” Tony said sarcastically, his helmet retracting.

“Definitely weird” Rhodey replied, equally sarcastic.

“Hear me out Tony. That doctor, the psychiatrist, he’s behind all of this” Steve said, hoping to get his friend to listen to him.

Just then T’Challa swung in next to the armoured duo, landing soundlessly on his feet.

“Your Highness” Steve acknowledged respectfully.

“Captain” T’Challa returned, his helmet making his voice sound rougher.

“Anyway. Ross gave me thirty-six hours to bring you in. That was twenty-four hours ago. Can you help a brother out?” Tony said casually, though he had a hint of a pleading tone that was just noticeable in his inflection.

Before Steve could reply Bucky came running over to his side, tense with a touch of concern in his battle ready posture. Natasha immediately appearing as well in response to the potential threat.

“Everyone’s been taken” Bucky exclaimed.

“Taken?” Steve demanded, hoping he was wrong about just what Bucky was implying.

“Captured. I don’t know by who” Bucky confirmed, giving Tony’s group an accusing glare.

“Don’t look at us” Tony said offended, putting both his hands up.

As Steve was about to demand what Tony did with their friends a voice echoed through the airstrip.

“Your friends are perfectly fine Captain Rogers”

Both groups turned to see a young man decked out in FBI gear casually walking towards them. Steve shifted his gaze back to Tony with questioning eyes.

“He with you?”

Tony gave him a small shake of his head.

“Not mine”

“Son you need to leave” Steve ordered firmly, not wanting the kid to get caught in the crossfire.
“Yeahhh that’s not gonna happen” he said, now standing just between the two leaders of the Avengers. Taking a closer at him they noted just how young the FBI agent was.

“He looks like he just graduated college...Though appearances can be deceiving” Natasha noted carefully. Fresh out of college or not, the Agent was standing smack dab between two opposing groups of heroes, seemingly without a care in the world.

“Where'd they find you? FBI daycare?” Tony remarked sarcastically.

“Considering I'm here to breakup your little schoolyard spat because none of you know how to communicate like mature adults, I don't think any of you have room to judge” the Agent snarked back.

“Touche” Tony replied with a raised eyebrow, the young agent peaking his interest.

“Now if I could direct everyone’s attention to the screen here” the Agent said, flipping over a Starkpad, a video hologram appearing above it, showing a brown haired man tied up in a small containment room.

“Recognize him Barnes?” the Agent asked, turning his head to look at the former Hydra assassin.

“That’s the psychiatrist that triggered me” Barnes stated in disbelief.

“How the hell had he been captured? Is the footage actually real?” he wondered skeptically, narrowing his eyes at the agent in front of him.

“Friday scan for the accuracy of the footage” Tony ordered, trying to keep from clenching his teeth. If the video feed was real then that answered the question on how the Winter Soldier was activated in the first place…It also meant that Steve was trying to tell him the truth minutes earlier and not in fact trying to stall him with lies so he could smuggle his war buddy out of the country.

“How’d you capture him? He’s supposed to be on his way to Siberia right now” Steve demanded, suddenly wary of the kid in front of him. For all he knew the footage could very well be fake.

“Luckily Tony's here and for at least right now we can figure this out together” Steve thought, semi-relieved.

“You mean on his way to trigger five more Winter Soldiers?” the Agent questioned casually.

“Five more Winter Soldiers? What other Winter Soldiers?” Tony demanded, getting angrier and angrier by the second as the Agent revealed more and more information Steve had withheld from all of them.

“The five other Winter Soldier that this man, Helmut Zemo, killed” Stiles said, as if he wasn’t fanning the flames of potential conflict.

“What?!”

“Yup” the Agent said, popping the ‘p’.

“Boss, scans indicate that the live feed is in fact real. The man, Helmut Zemo, has indeed been captured and is currently being held prisoner aboard the Agent’s aircraft here at the airport” Friday relayed.

“If that's true then who are you?” Steve questioned (demanded). He was relieved that the real
culprit had been captured, but that didn’t mean he wasn't still suspicious of the agent in front of him, kid or not.

“Right, sorry. I should introduce myself. My name is Agent Stilinski. I’m the Co-Head of a specialized Task-Force within the FBI. Due to certain circumstances my Team was secretly put in charge of investigating the bombing in Vienna. Following the investigation we found and captured Zemo. From our interrogation on the way here from Siberia we discovered that not only was he the one behind the bombing in Vienna, but his true goal was to tear apart the Avengers from the inside” Agent Stilinski stated, turning off the holographic feed.

“I think he succeeded…Don’t you?” Agent Stilinski said almost mockingly, looking back and forth between the two sides, his hands behind his back.

“You knew about this and didn’t tell us?!” Tony demanded.

“You hands would’ve been tied because of the Accords” Steve countered.

“The Accords are meant for this kind of shit! And even if they weren’t, do you really think they would stop me of all people from going to Siberia with you to stop five Winter Soldiers from escaping!?” Tony demanded, furious and fed-up with Steve’s apparent lack of trust in him.

Steve winced at the accusation. He had wanted to call Tony. Had wanted to believe that Tony would choose him over the Accords. He shouldn't have let his mistrust of the government carry over to his friend. He and Sam judged too quickly (and incorrectly) that the Accords would chafe Tony too much and prevent him (of all people) from helping them. He was both happy and ashamed to be so wrong.

“He has a point Steve. I mean what the hell. I was going into this thinking that this was some kind of mock fight that you and Stark were staging in order to get rid of the Accords” Clint stated, walking towards them, clearly pissed off. There was an older bearded FBI agent with him who looked ready to pull his guns on Clint should he try anything.

“You alright?” Steve asked, relieved to see that Clint was okay after all.

“Physically? Yeah. Emotionally? Pissed off” Clint stated gruffly, “I'm supposed to be on a family water-skiing trip right now. Next time you and Stark have another lovers quarrel do me a favor and send me popcorn and not an Avenger's summons”.

“I can't believe you pulled Clint away from his family for this! You could’ve gotten him arrested!” Tony accused in disbelief, decidedly ignoring the getting-more-common-over-the-years mom and dad jab at him and Steve.

Ignoring the in-fighting T’Challa stepped forward closer to the Agent. “You have proof that man is responsible for the bombing in Vienna?” he demanded. Stiles turned towards the newly appointed King and nodded, “We do”.

“Bast” the young King muttered, guilt starting to set in place. If the Agent was in fact telling the truth then he had done a great wrong in attempting to murder an innocent man for a crime he had not committed.

“If I may see such evidence?” T’Challa asked. Though even if the Agent said no he still had the resources to see the information for himself anyway. He needed to be certain.

“Better yet, here’s what’s going to happen. All of you are going to get on my Team’s jet where we will head back to the Joint Counter Terrorist Centre and sort out this clusterfuck of a situation
before anyone else gets needlessly hurt” Agent Stilinski stated with a false cheer, clapping his hands together.

Both sides glanced at each other warily. Unsure of what to make of both the situation and the young agent in front of them. Friday may have confirmed the accuracy of the footage, but the Agent in front of them was a complete unknown.

“Young. Supposedly FBI, and part of a secret task-force we don't even know the name of, nor do we know who put him in charge of the bombing investigation...I don't like this at all. There's too many unknowns” Natasha analyzed warily to herself, though she had a feeling everyone else was thinking much along the same lines judging by all their expressions.

Sensing the unwillingness in the atmosphere Agent Stilinski changed his stance. Squaring his shoulders and setting his legs apart in a way that left him able to both attack and defend if necessary. His easygoing expression vanishing, and a harsh stony exterior taking its place.

“It wasn’t a suggestion” Agent Stilinski said with an almost dangerous tone.

Suddenly several FBI agents surrounded both groups.

“As the Co-Heads of this Task-Force Agent Stilinski and I were tasked with bringing all of you back to the JCTC…By force if necessary” Argent stated coldly, placing one of his hands on his guns in case his intentions hadn’t been clear enough.

“Don’t make it necessary” Agent Stilinski said warningly.

Both groups took catalogue of the agents surrounding them.

“They’re definitely not the typical grunts. Judging by their modified uniforms and the fact that some of them have custom weapons means that there’s the possibility some of them could be enhanced” Natasha thought critically, specifically eyeing the smaller Asian female who possessed a custom sword, and another brown-haired female whose stance and expression seemed almost animalistic.

“Get. On. The. Jet” Agent Stilinski said, the threat evident in his tone.

Taking the warning (and hoping Steve would too) Tony turned to his group, “Stand down…That means you too Underoos!” Tony yelled out, relieved that he didn’t need to bring Parker into what probably would have been a brutal fight after all.

Steve nodded.

“Stand down”

Chapter End Notes

And so it begins.

The Avengers have a long road in front of them.

Agent Stilinski and Argent take nobody's shit!
Chapter Notes

Hi all! This chapter is mostly to point out where most of the characters stand with each other right now. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Bucky's POV)

“This is awkward” Sam muttered, shifting in his seat a little next to me.

The makeup of the jet was similar to a military transport.

Meaning “Team Cap” was sitting on one side of the jet with “Team Iron Man” on the other, leaving us to either stare at the group sitting across from us or the floor.

On the other side of Sam Hawkeye was sporting an impressive pout. Black Widow had refused to let him sit with them. Personally it looked more like she was putting him in timeout rather than pushing him away out of spite.

Lang just looked like a kicked puppy (albeit one that had stuck its paw in a light socket).

That girl Wanda though bothered me...Something about her tugged at my memories. And not in a good way. Though at the moment she wasn’t doing much more than looking guiltily at the red android. For whatever the reason she bothered me at least I knew that one of the people on this jet could take her out if necessary.

Steve on the other hand was giving Stark his best sad/stubborn/hopeful stare, the same one he had when he had shown up at my apartment in Romania. Stark on the other hand was making a point of looking everywhere but Steve's face, particularly occupying his time with the hyperactive Spider-kid next to him. Though I could see that his jaw was tightly clenched, so he wasn't totally unaffected.

“The only thing awkward here is your face” I mumbled back at him, not being able to resist ribbing him a bit to pass the time.

That got his attention.

“Listen here Grumpy Cat-” Sam began.

But before he could finish what would have probably been an amazing comeback (*cough sarcasm cough*) the jet jolted as we presumably came in for a landing.

The agents surrounding us stood up, the ramp opening up to the outside.

“Allright. My agents and I will be escorting all of you to the designated conference room. So pick a buddy and let's move” Agent Stilinski ordered.

As everyone stood and started making their way down the ramp Agent Stilinski addressed me
personally.

“Sergeant Barnes”

I turned to face the kid, curious what he wanted, particularly since his tone didn’t sound hostile.

“Mysel and Ms. Martin will be personally escorting you along with Helmut Zemo in order to ensure that nothing will happen this time around” Agent Stilinski assured confidently, though there was a flicker of something else in his eyes. Sympathy?

Before I could even respond Steve had stepped right up next to me, uneasy defensiveness clear on his face.

“Can I help you with something Mr. Rogers?” Agent Stilinski questioned, annoyance clear in his expression.

“You said that the two of you” Steve began, gesturing to the kid and the petite red-head, “Would be escorting both Bucky and Zemo at the same time?”

“I did. Is there a problem?” Agent Stilinski asked, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Zemo is the one who triggered Bucky the first time he was brought in here. I don’t think the two of you know the risks you’ll be placing on yourselves and everyone else if he somehow manages to do so again” Steve challenged sternly, sounding very much like a senior officer lecturing a younger cadet.

“It sounds like you’re saying that you don’t believe that we’d be able to handle Sergeant Barnes and Zemo” Ms. Martin questioned casually.

Steve lowered his gaze to respectfully acknowledge the smaller woman.

Truth be told she looked more like a civilian than an agent (she wasn’t even wearing any gear), but I knew that appearances could be deceiving.

“With all do respect Mam, I’m sure you and Agent Stilinski are more than competent-”

“Good. Cause for a second there it sounded like you were saying that we didn’t know how to do our job” Ms. Martin stated, cutting him off with a smug, too-sweet smile.

I resisted the urge to snicker at the look on Steve’s face at her comment. He really did shoot himself in the foot on that one.

“With all do respect if something happens you’re gonna need my help to stop him” Steve continued stubbornly, apparently not trusting that somehow Zemo would get loose and trigger me again. Not an unfounded concern, but somehow I felt the agents were telling the truth when they said that they were more than capable of dealing with Zemo...and me if it came down to that.

“You know I’m really starting to wonder how someone like you got into the military when you can’t even follow a goddamn order” Agent Stilinski stated irately, stepping challengingly right up in Steve's face.

“I’m giving you one last chance Captain. Get your ass moving before you makes things worse for yourself and the other Avengers. If I needed your help I would have asked for it. But it didn’t. So I don’t. You’re already on thin ice as it is. So move your entitled, arrogant, self-righteous ass down the ramp and meet us in the conference room soldier” Agent Stilinski ordered unflinchingly.
“Kid has balls” I thought, semi-impressed.

Steve's jaw tightened. I suddenly had a hazy memory of a stubborn kid who would never back down from a challenge even when he probably should.

“Go Steve” I said firmly, my no-nonsense tone clear.

Steve glanced at me from the corner of his eye, the stubborn set still in his jaw.

For a moment I was sure Steve wasn't going to listen to me….But, surprisingly he reluctantly made his way down the ramp, annoyance clear in his stride.

“Hey, John Silver” Agent Stilinski called out, bringing my attention back to him.

“Do me a favor and carry this sack of lard for us” he said, kicking Zemo lightly with his boot.

“And if his head hits a few walls on the way out then whoopsy daisy” he continued jokingly.

“You’re not gonna cuff me or somethin?” I asked curiously.

“Are you planning on snapping our necks and escaping?” Ms. Martin asked, raising an eyebrow.

“No”

“Then grab the garbage and lets go. Its lunch time and I’m hungry. The sooner we finish here the sooner we can eat” the Agent said exasperatedly.

“Considering the circumstances it’d probably be better to order in” Ms. Martin commented, taking out her phone, “Any preferences?”

“Pizza might be easiest” Agent Stilinski replied casually as I lifted Zemo over my shoulder.

“So four meat lovers with olives, two pepperoni, two vegetarian, and a pineapple…What about you?” Ms. Martin asked, looking in my direction.

“Me?” I questioned in surprise.

“No. The unconscious terrorist” she answered with a sarcastic eyeroll.

“Um…I wouldn’t want to impose” I mumbled, not quite sure how to respond to that.

“And it’s adorable that you think I’m asking” she replied, sounding far too sweet.

“Dude you’re gonna lose just tell her” Agent Stilinski said as we walked down the ramp.

“…”

“Don’t worry about the cost either” he continued exasperatedly.

“…Extra cheese, peppers, olives, and sausage please”

“And to drink?” she asked.

“…Water”

In my good mood I may or may not have “accidentally” knocked Zemo’s head against the side of the jet as we exited.
(Stiles’ POV)

Walking into the JCTC I believed for about a half a second that maybe the tensions between the Avengers would ease a bit with Barnes being cleared of the bombings in Vienna.

I was wrong.

In hindsight I really should have figured that Rogers would deliberately disobey direct orders and wait for us to arrive with Barnes (Geez, and people call me paranoid).

And if Rogers wasn’t going in the conference room neither did anyone else.

Team Cap was standing by their ‘Leader’ and there was no way in hell Team Iron Man was going to let Cap and his team out of their sight for a second after all the trouble they’ve caused. Though from what I saw that Spider kid was no longer hanging around. Stark must’ve sent him home or whatever.

The only bright spot in the whole situation was seeing Scotty amicably chatting with both groups, intentionally standing between them as to not appear like he was taking sides. Even from here I could see the stress lifting slowly off each of the groups. Whatever he was saying was probably the only thing keeping both groups calm (and keeping Captain Stupid from disobeying any further orders). It truly was incredible how Scott had the ability to make anyone feel at ease around him.

That puppy-dog smile of his really should be classified as a weapon of mass destruction.

Curiously T’Challa was nodding at something Scott had said. The two of them then shook hands and the young King was then escorted away by his guards.

Finally reaching the mass of stupid, I mean group of heroes, I opened my mouth to ask Scott what that had been about only for a familiar annoying voice to cut me off.

“Agent Stilinski. I see you’re still in one piece” Secretary Ross stated with a hint of a mocking edge, strutting over to us like a proud peacock showing his feathers.

“Secretary Ross. I see you’re still an asshole” I snarked right back.

I heard a muffled laugh come from my left. And judging from Secretary Asshole’s glare the poorly covered laughter had come from Stark, though I could see that Scott, Lydia, Barton, Lang, Romanoff, and Colonel Rhodes were smirking as well.

“Still insulting government officials. One of these days you’re going to land yourself in jail” Secretary Ross noted with exasperation.

“It’s called freedom of speech. I have flashcards in case you’d like to review the constitution again” I countered mockingly, decidedly ignoring our amused audience.

“Haven’t lost any of that sarcastic wit I see. None-the-less I appreciate you and your Unit getting here so quickly. You’ve saved us a lot of lives and time” Secretary Ross acknowledged.

“Glad to help sir. Though unique circumstances aside I just want to be clear that this will not be a regular thing. Dealing with heroes and their…domestic disputes isn’t a part of our job description” I deadpanned.

“Unfortunately I’m going to have ask that you, McCall, and Ms. Martin remain here and
accompany myself and the Avengers to the conference room” Secretary Ross requested (ordered).

I narrowed my eyes at the manipulative bastard.

Ross knew that a majority of my Unit was ‘enhanced’ and was a consistent thorn in our side because of it. He sent an offer to us every other month for my Unit to be ‘upgraded’ to a personal task-force under his command.

As if that would ever happen.

“With all due respect sir, we’re not your Task-Force. We have more important things to do than babysit a bunch of psychological nightmares in spandex” I countered harshly.

“Ouch” Lang muttered, almost inaudibly.

“Be that as it may the three of you are the only people capable and trustworthy enough to handle Sergeant Barnes should another attempt at mind control occur” Secretary Ross pointed out undaunted by my subtle threat.

Why is it that all the psychopaths we meet have logical reasoning skills? It always left a sour taste in my mouth when they were right...Even so there was no way I was going to let Ross win this little verbal spar.

“I feel compelled to point out that you calling us trustworthy is actually counterproductive in making the Avengers feel comfortable and secure with our presence...sir” I mockingly pointed out.

If I was being forced to stay here was no way I was going to play nice with these morons.

I swore I could feel Barnes smirking next to me.

“Get moving Agent”

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully you all enjoyed the interactions between the characters in this chapter. For those that aren't die hard Teen Wolf fans later chapters will explain the differences between Stiles and Lydia's interactions with Steve and Bucky. Stiles may have seemed overly harsh, but honestly I can't imagine Steve just letting them bring Bucky in by themselves, and Stiles knew that too based on the reports of Steve's actions in Romania.

The next chapter is significantly longer and it will be the start of the turning point for the changes in the Avengers.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Hi everybody! As promised this chapter is really really long. There is a lot of introspection going on for all the characters. So really take your time when reading! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(T’Challa’s POV)

White noise.

The world in its entirety was nothing more than white noise as I sauntered through the halls of the JCTC, accompanied by the Dora Milaje.

I was the King now.

The Black Panther.

I was supposed to be the embodiment of protection. Courage. Bravery.

A guide in dark times.

Leading with sharp eyes that could pierce through the darkness, and the wisdom to know which path to take.

But rather than protect and guide I had been blinded by the very darkness I was supposed to be able to see through.

I allowed my emotions to dictate my actions and cloud my judgement.

And Innocents paid the price.

Shame curled itself into knots in my stomach.

Sergeant Barnes may have thrown the bomb, but the deaths and injured in the tunnel in Romania were the result of my incessant pursuit of the man.

Had I not pressured him, made him feel threatened, had I not been there at all, then perhaps such tragedy would never have occurred.

Even worse, I had been warned of where my actions could lead.

*Flashback*

I sat outside the Vienna International Center, clutching my father’s royal ring. The ring of our ancestors.

My father was lost to me.
Gone.

In my failure to reach him I had seen nothing but acceptance in his expression at the end.

He knew he was going to die.

That very look in his eyes as I tried to reach him will haunt me to the end of my days.

I clutched the ring tighter as I heard the carefree chatter of those walking by.

My rage bubbling up at the injustice of it all.

Hearing happiness from others while my world was in shambles.

“Your Majesty” a voice addressed softly.

I turned my gaze up to see a young man with short curly dark brown hair, tanned complexion, and brown eyes. I vaguely recognized him as one of the attendees to the signing of the Sokovia Accords.

“Mind if I sit?” he asked respectfully.

I gestured to the empty space beside me, not fully ready to speak again.

I expected him to strike up a conversation. To offer his condolences just as everyone else had.

But he did neither.

For a time we remained like that.

Companionable silence. Almost forgetting his presence as I was lost in my churning thoughts of injustice and rage.

When he finally did speak it took all I had not to jolt at the sudden breach of noise.

“It’s not a good idea” he said plainly, not elaborating further.

“And what exactly are you speaking of” I inquired, curious just what he meant.

“Revenge” he said, turning his gaze to me, “It’s not a good idea”.

I bristled at his words.

How dare he say what I feel is not justified! That my father did not deserve justice!

But before I could tell the ingrate to leave he continued on as if my face held no icy rage.

“I understand where you’re coming from. The anger, the grief. You have every right to feel that way...But I also see something else” he said cryptically.

I remained silent, reluctantly allowing him to continue his little appeal.

“Your need for justice. Revenge” saying the last part more quietly, “Wanting justice is understandable. But revenge is not a path you want to take”.

Once again I felt my anger building as he spoke. How dare he tell me what I am to do! How I am to honor my father!
“I've seen what it can do to a person. Their need for justice turning into an obsession that consumes them. Changing them into a monster that they weren't before...I can't tell you what choices to make, what road to go down. My advice. Just be careful. I don't want you to one day look in a mirror and not like the person you see staring back at you” he said, sadly.

After several minutes of silence he took the hint and left. Leaving me to decide my next steps for myself.

*End Flashback*

I have no doubt that Bast herself had sent the young man to me as a guide in such a dark time in my life.

And I had not heeded the warning.

Seeing the young man again during another time of inner turmoil was an unexpected relief.

“Your Majesty, I promise Agent Stilinski will show you the evidence we have gathered. Right now however an honest discussion must occur on where to go from here with the Avengers and the Accords. I give you my word that once we are cleared here I will see to it that you have the proper closure you deserve. For right now just take the time to grieve your loss”

Scott McCall.

I will find a way to thank him for all he's done.

There is always a time to grieve. But right now I have important matters to attend to.

While my diplomatic immunity keeps me from being tried for my fault in the crime I have committed, it does not absolve my responsibility to those lives I have forever affected.

“Where to my King?” Okoye inquired as we arrived at my vehicle.

First Romania, then Sergeant Barnes. Perhaps there is something my sister can do for him.

“Romania. I have many amends to make”

(Third POV)

“Allow us to get introductions out of the way” Secretary Ross began, choosing to stand rather than take up one of the seats at the conference table like everyone else (minus Agent Ross who stood slightly behind him). A common power move, reminding everyone that he was above them.

They had settled within one of the facility’s largest conference rooms designed to seat up to fifty people. Lydia thought the room choice was ironically symbolic. Everything from the overly large table to the walls were made out of glass. A transparency the Avengers seemed to lack both with the public and each other.

“This is Special Agent Stilinski. Co-Head of a newly specialized Task-Force within the FBI. Mr. McCall and Ms. Martin are political liaisons for the government and part-time agents under Stilinski and consultants for the FBI. The three of them work closely with all branches of the US government. There have been plans in the works to include Mr. McCall in the formation of the Sokovia Accords. As it stands consider him as you would a representative of the United Nations and a World Leader” Secretary Ross detailed blandly.
“Why? Unless you’re going to tell me he’s some kind of secret prince or the puppetmaster behind the president I don’t see how he has the kind of authority or political pull to be a representative of the UN” Clint questioned skeptically.

“You’re right” Secretary Ross seemingly admitted, raising quite a few eyebrows.

“He’s not a leader of a country…He’s far more important than that” Secretary stated, as if he wasn’t dropping a huge bomb on all those present.

The Avengers (and Agent Ross) just gave skeptical glances back and forth between Scott and the Secretary of State.

“That son of a bitch” Stiles thought angrily, “He knows”

“Country leaders can be replaced. He can’t be” Secretary Ross stated firmly, looking very pleased with himself that he had cornered Scott.

“Contrary to that statement yes I can” Scott cut in, trying to salvage the direction the conversation was going. The last thing he wanted right now was to reveal the existence of the supernatural in a meeting that was supposed to be regarding the recent (and past) actions of the Avengers. Though the Pack was going to have to do a little investigating into just how much Ross knew. His inclusion into the UN alongside Charles Xavier and Blackager Boltagon had been a Level One secrecy order between them and the President of the United States.

“It’d just be next to impossible to do so, hence why I said he can’t be” Secretary Ross continued unhindered.

“Who are you?” Tony Stark demanded. This kid had never pinged on any of his radars, nor was in any SHIELD files. Though all three of the kids’ names did ring a vaguely familiar memory bell back when he had glanced over Project Insight’s target list in order to see if he recognized any particular names.

“Better yet, what is this Task-Force called?” Natasha questioned. If this kid was as important as Ross was implying there was no way he just came out of nowhere. There had to be a trail on him somewhere that she could dig up.

“All your questions will be answered at a later time. Right now we need to discuss this clusterfuck of a situation the lot of you created” Agent Ross said stepping in. As curious as he was there was a time and place for everything.

“Indeed-” Secretary Ross started, no doubt pleased to begin laying into the “heroes”, only to be cut off by a knock on the glass door behind him.

The group turned their attention to see a Domino’s delivery guy standing awkwardly outside the door.

“Foods here” Stiles said excitedly, springing up from his chair.

Ross just looked on in comical disbelief, switching his gaze back and forth between those at the conference table and Stiles paying for the food.

“Ugh finally” Lydia said, ignoring Secretary Ross’ raised eyebrows.

“Relief has arrived” Stiles declared setting down the boxes and drinks.
“You ordered food. Why didn’t I think of that?” Tony asked himself aloud.

“Do you like pineapple?” Lydia asked.

“It’s edible” Tony replied.

“Then you and Colonel Rhodes are welcome to have some. I’m not going to eat all of mine anyway” Lydia offered, knowing that Scott and Stiles would without a doubt finish off a whole pie themselves.

“Don’t mind if I do” Tony said, taking a piece for himself and passing another over to Rhodey.

“Miss Romanoff?” Lydia inquired, knowing she wouldn’t have to reiterate the entire question again for her.

“Thank you” Natasha accepted, taking a piece as well.

Almost immediately after Natasha took her pick Clint and Lang reached over for a slice of their own, only to get a sharp smack atop their hands from the petite red-head.

“I didn’t ask you” Lydia said simply, taking a bite of her slice.

Clint made doe eyes at Nat who in turn just raised an eyebrow back, her message clear, “Really? Why would I give you a slice of her pizza when you weren’t offered?”

Clint just thunked his head onto the table with a pitifully childish whine, staring longingly at the unattainable treasure. Lang joined in his sulking, giving the box hungry-begging-puppy-dog eyes.

Lydia was immune.

Wanda took the hint and didn't even ask the younger woman if she could have a slice, she already knew what her answer would be.

Bucky took pity on his one-time friend and passed him two slices, which rewarded him with a bright toothy smile from Steve.

“You’re not gonna give me a slice are you?” Sam stated matter-of-factly, glaring pointedly at Barnes.

“Nope” Bucky affirmed, popping the ‘p’ slightly.

“You ordered pizza? When was this?” Secretary Ross demanded, entirely fed up with the whole situation.

“During our escort of Mr. Barnes” Stiles answered unrepentantly.

“Let me see if I’m understanding this. When you were supposed to be escorting a highly dangerous, and highly volatile prisoner, you took his pizza order instead?” Secretary Ross demanded, starting to get red in the face.

“Yeah”/“Yeah pretty much” Stiles and Lydia answered casually, unphased by Ross. In fact if anything the Avengers thought they looked amused, purposefully pushing the Secretary’s buttons.

Secretary Ross looks at Scott, probably hoping that he would back him in the situation.

What he got was a shrug.
“We're gonna be here a while” Scott said simply, polishing off another piece.

“Oh I like these kids” Tony thinks with a smirk.

“You do realize how this is going to look on your records right Agent?” Secretary Ross threatened, turning back to Stiles.

“I’m not so sure it’s us who should be worried considering you allowed a terrorist to impersonate a therapist and not only allowed him to play you for a fool in framing Mr. Barnes for the bombings in Vienna, but he also got right through security and reactivated the Winter Soldier” Stiles fired back nonchalantly.

“Oooo burn” Lang said with a chuckle.

His laughter died in his throat the second the Secretary’s anger turned on him, relegating him to looking back at the tabletop awkwardly.

“With all due respect Mr. Secretary, up until this incident Sergeant Barnes was minding his own business away from all this chaos, and as to our knowledge has not engaged in any questionable endeavors since he went into hiding. And with the terrorist now accounted for Sergeant Barnes, while still dangerous, is not an immediate threat” Scott stated placatingly.

“He is a Hydra assassin—” Secretary Ross began irately.

“Okay I’m going to stop you right there. A.) He was mind controlled, B.) He’s not currently under mind control, and C.) Don’t you think your involvement here is a bit of a conflict of interest Mr. Secretary?” Tony insinuated, passively threatening Ross.

Ross pointedly glared at Stark, knowing full well the “conflict” the genius was alluding to.

“I can assure you Mr. Stark, my involvement here is strictly in the interest of the United States” Secretary Ross covered smoothly.

“Then I'll be sure to send you the summary of the meeting here once we're finished” Stiles cut in.

Secretary Ross gave him a blank stare.

“I don't see the need when I'll be standing right here” he deadpanned.

“But you said that you were here in the interest of the United States. Since you are not the United States ambassador for the UN, nor are you the United States UN representative I can only assume that your business here lies elsewhere” Stiles declared, giving Ross his rendition of the Grinch smile.

Now Scott and Lydia were already used to Stiles’ sarcasm and snark, the Avengers however were not.

While Clint and Lang were busy smothering their laughter, Natasha and Sam were giving the young agent impressive eyebrows, not believing someone who looked so young and inexperienced could actually be talking back to the Secretary of State.

“Oh my God it's a mini-Tony” Rhodey thought bewildered.

“That decides it. I'm keeping him” Tony thinks with a smirk.

“You sure you didn't have any illegitimate kids I need to know about?” Rhodey whispered to
Tony.

“Unfortunately I can’t take credit for that snark” Tony replied amused.

Wanda was just plain suspicious. She was itching to see just what was going through the young agent’s mind. There was always a catch to people like him. An ulterior motive.

“No” she reminded herself almost forcibly, “Without permission it is wrong. Without permission it is wrong”

She continued the sentence like a mantra. Even after knowing all the harm her mental manipulation has done, old habits were hard to break.

Vision himself was curious. From what he knew culturally those of younger status were supposed to treat their elders (particularly ones of higher status) with respect. Sure he understood that there were exceptions to the general societal rule, and that personality also played a part, but he would not think that someone who did not have a significant political or societal position would have the confidence that the young agent showed against Secretary Ross.

Unlike his fellow Avengers Steve was homing in on the fact Ross apparently didn’t have as much power in the UN as he initially thought he did.

Bucky was just profoundly grateful for Agent Stilinski and Stark’s interference. He was also really surprised that Stark was defending him all things considered…

Secretary Ross on the other hand was decidedly not amused. In fact, he was near beat red in anger. Stiles swore his head was going to pop off from all the pressure.

“Secretary Ross. Agent Stilinski does have a point. You have no jurisdiction here and from a mediation standpoint your presence seems to incite more conflict in the Avengers, which is currently what we are actively trying to avoid right now. I think I’d be best if you’d take your leave” Agent Ross logically deduced.

Tony had to hand it to the man, his argument was airtight enough that if Ross stayed it would end up sinking him further into the grave he already put himself in.

After a moment of clenching and unclenching his jaw Secretary Ross straightened his suit jacket with more force then strictly necessary.

“I’ll concede to both points” Secretary Ross said tightly, anger clear in his inflection.

“I expect a full report from both you and Agent Stilinski ASAP” Secretary Ross ordered as he stormed out of the conference room.

“Thank you” Steve said, turning his attention to Agent Stilinski appreciatively. He may be young, but the Agent clearly knew not to trust Ross.

“No problem. But ah, just because I hate Ross, doesn’t mean I like you either Captain Dumbass” Stiles said apathetically.

The emotional whiplash left the Avengers stunned.

“I’m sorry?” Steve said, confused by the vitriol now directed at him.

“Stiles” Scott admonished, giving his brother-in-all-but-blood a disappointed ‘seriously’ look.
“What the hell is a Stiles?” Tony muttered, though he was largely ignored.

“No let’s do this. After Ross I’m on a roll here” Stiles said sardonically.

“Relax kid we’re not the enemy here” Clint said placatingly.

“Oh really? Have you forgotten the whole reason were stuck doing this Dr. Phil session?” Stiles sniped back.

“I don’t understand why your angry with us” Steve inquired, wanting to know just why the kid seemed to dislike him as much as he did Ross.

Stiles just gave him a ‘you-seriously-did-not-just-say-that’ look, making Steve fight not to close off his expression too much defensively at the kid’s silent accusation.

“The Avengers have literally pissed off the entire world Rogers. And your current actions have only made things worse” Stiles stated matter-of-factly.

Steve just blinked in surprise at the direction of the kid’s reasoning. He thought it would have been more personal.

“I don’t know where you get off thinking you can just give the middle finger to 117 countries, and counting, but I can assure you that your actions were not justified no matter what way you spin it” Stiles stated harshly.

“They have their own agendas. Agendas that we can’t trust. The Accords would constrict us too much and prevent us from doing what we’d need to do to protect people” Steve defended, finally recovering from the initial shock, “They only proved that when they ordered a kill-on-sight order for Bucky for something he didn’t even do”

“While that may be true, that still doesn’t excuse your past actions” Scott said stepping in.

“Bucky was innocent. He was being framed for Vienna. You said so yourself” Steve pointed out.

“Dr. Stark. Could you pull up a video of the chase in Bucharest for us please?” Lydia asked joining in on the conversation.

After a moment of surprise at the request Tony took out one of his personal StarkPads. “Friday you heard the lady” Tony said.

“Straight away Boss” the AI replied.

The team watched as innocent bystanders were tossed from their vehicles, cars smashed, and the overpass was decimated. “Friday pause it” Tony ordered tightly as they reached the arrest.

“The Winter Soldier wasn’t the one who killed these people. James Buchanan Barnes did...You did Rogers...You killed all those people. For nothing...And the scary part is you don’t even seem to care” Stiles lectured viciously.

Steve’s expression blanked off defensively at the verbal onslaught.

“Even though there was supposedly a kill-on-sight order they still brought Barnes in alive, even after he blew up a bridge” Stiles continued angrily.

Bucky flinched at the accusation. Shame churning in his stomach. All those people...More names stained on his hands.
“Did you ever actually read the Accords? Because I don’t understand why you’re so against them” Scott calmly inquired after seeing Captain Roger’s expression, attempting to turn the conversation to a more productive topic.

“Yes I have. And it’s just a way to control us for their own use” Steve stated firmly.

“Great” Scott thought, “Now he’s on the defensive and will be less receptive to what we say”

“This isn’t like the 1940s Captain Rogers. The UN isn’t like the Allied forces or SHIELD. You can’t solve political disagreements with fists. If you want to change a political document you get on the inside and write up amendments to be discussed with the rest of the panel and delegates” Lydia explained like she was lecturing a child.

Steve turned his gaze to her, considering her words. Times were different now, but he wasn’t sure he could put his trust in so many governing bodies, not after seeing how infested SHIELD had been of Hydra. If such a powerful and influential system like that had been corrupted, then any other system could be too. No, the Avengers were better off in their own hands, free of any potential outside manipulations.

“Make no mistake, the Accords will be passed no matter what you do. And if you want a say, if you want to argue against the policies in it, then you have to voice your concerns during delegation, where things can be changed and altered before and after it’s ratified” Lydia continued when she saw the remaining stubborn set in his jaw, “Stamping your feet and refusing to sign isn’t going to make the UN not pass the Accords. In fact, it’ll just give them more of a reason to. But if you do sign then you will at least be able to amend certain policies more in your favor before its ratified, and then continue to amend them as time goes on”

“We’re telling you this because we’ve been where you are now. And right now people are afraid. The fact that you’re heroes doesn’t make a difference...It’s actually worse” Scott explained sympathetically.

“Exactly” Tony muttered, relieved that someone besides him, Nat, Rhodey, and Vision understood that.

Steve just turned to Tony with a confused eyebrow, however Scott explained for him.

“The Avengers are public figures. You are supposed to be the protectors of the people. And if the people are crying out, you need to listen…or else you’re not doing your job” Scott said almost pleadingly, praying that Rogers would listen to them.

“I hear what you’re saying. I do. But you can’t possibly understand our situation” Steve stated stubbornly. They were heroes. They dealt with the weird and abnormal daily. Things that blurred the ethical lines and raised questions typical people usually never even think about.

Scott sighed, closing his eyes in frustration. They weren’t going to reach him. Not like this. Not the way they were going about it.

Making his decision Scott opened his eyes once more.

“What the hell!”

The reactions were immediate.
Every Avenger (plus Bucky, Lang and Agent Ross) had shot up from their seats, immediately taking defensive positions (despite having their weapons already confiscated until after the meeting).

Red.

His eyes were fucking glowing red.

Still sitting calmly in his seat Scott faded his eyes back from the luminescent red to his regular chocolate brown.

“Have I made my point?” Scott said calmly, as if he hadn’t done anything abnormal.

“W-what?” Lang stammered, seeing as everyone else was still in their battle ready positions.

Suddenly Agent Ross understood exactly what McCall was doing, what he had done.

“Smart kid” Agent Ross thought, putting away his gun in order to watch what he was sure to be an interesting exchange.

“A minute ago you all were completely at ease with my presence…You had written me off as completely non-threatening…Now you’re all tight as a bowstring. Why?” Scott inquired, knowing exactly the answer he would get.

“Why? You just flashed satanic eyes at us!” Clint shouted indignantly.

“Exactly. People fear what they don’t know…What they don’t understand” Scott stated, making a point to look around the room at how all of them had jumped out of their seats at his little reveal.

“They fear what is different and unfamiliar…Even all of you…Whether you are heroes, agents, military officers, or regular civilians, the first instinctual reaction is the same” Scott said continuing to drive home his point to all of them.

“Fear is a powerful driving force Captain. I’ve seen regular people turn on each other and massacred their fellow community members. People they’ve known their entire lives…Friends and classmates deliberately harming and killing each other. Family killing family…All coming from a place of fear” Scott stated, the raw emotion and pain in his voice and eyes made it very clear to all of them that he wasn’t kidding.

Steve and Bucky felt a sudden rush of sadness for the young man in front of them. This kid had been severely hurt and traumatized. In fact Scott reminded both of them of some of the kids from the concentration camps they had helped rescue.

Meanwhile Tony, Ross, and Natasha made mental notes to figure out just where Scott grew up. There had to be records of such horrific events somewhere.

“When my friends and I were only sixteen we ended up becoming our Town’s protectors” Scott revealed glancing at Stiles and Lydia, knowing full well it would get the Avenger’s attention.

And boy did it ever.

“No way” Clint said in horrified disbelief.

They were heroes.

These three kids in front of them weren’t a fucking Task-Force. They were heroes.
“Oh my God” Sam mumbled horrified. They were fucked up ten ways to Sunday from everything they’d been through. And these kids have been doing it since they were in high school!

“We protected them. We saved them…And they hated us…They hated us for saving their lives…They hated us because they were afraid of us…Of what we could do…That we weren’t normal” Scott detailed painfully, his words finally beginning to hit home for them.

New York.

“We were blamed for incidents we stopped that caused large losses of life even though more would have died if we hadn’t intervened” Scott continued.

DC. Sokovia. Lagos.

“As a result anyone not ‘human’ was deemed too dangerous to allow going about their lives as they had in the past…That we needed to be stopped, controlled, and eradicated before we hurt any more humans”

The Accords.

“How are you and your friends alive?” Wanda asked, speaking up for the first time.

Scott turned to face her. Unshed tears rippling in his eyes.

“Not all of them are”

Each of the Avengers closed their eyes in mourning. For the loss of young lives they had never met, and will never get to meet.

“Fear does things to people. It makes you act in ways you never thought you would before…Look at what it did to you. You were so afraid for your friend that you went off on your own to bring him in, and innocent people were needlessly hurt” Scott said, trying to connect the experiences so that they all understood better, “Had you trusted your team then that might not have happened”

Steve looked away in shame. He knew that now. Bucharest, the airport. If he had just trusted his team then things wouldn’t have gone the way they did.

“Zemo used your fears, mistrust, and irrationality against you. And because you allowed your emotions to dictate your actions it caused a rift between you and those you call your friends. Which was exactly what he wanted” Stiles cut in since he was one of the few who had spoken to Zemo in depth.

“Now think about what your actions portray for all the other people in the world. You’re supposed to be Captain America. You stand for liberty, rights, and justice. You’re showing the world that you won’t follow the law, that you’ll do whatever it is that you feel like and say ‘fuck the consequences of my actions’. If Captain America won’t listen to the rights of others and follow the law, how can the People expect that anyone else ‘different’ will either?” Stiles challenged.

“Damn” Steve thought. He hadn’t thought of it like that. He always felt a million tons of pressure on him by being Captain America. Some days he wasn’t even sure he could handle it...But there was apparently so much more riding on the title than even he had thought of.

“They’re scared. And they have a right to be. Hell you scare me! You can’t just say f-u to a document without truly understanding it!” Stiles berated harshly.
“The Accords are the first right step towards bettering the relations between those that are human and those enhanced or ‘different’. And they’re far better than the original alternative” Lydia stated.

“What do you mean?” Steve asked, confused what she meant.

“The governing bodies originally wanted to pass the Super-Human Registration Act. A law enforcing the mandatory registration of any individual that has powers, or were enhanced through some method, accidentally or otherwise, anyone that uses magic, is part alien or non-human, or is enhanced with technology in any way, even if it’s a medical necessity or prosthetic, and anyone seen as dangerously intelligent” Tony explained, jaw tight.

“What?!” (*Lang, Clint, Wanda, Sam, Steve*)

Seeing the apparent confusion from Team Cap Tony decided a more detailed explanation was needed.

“The Act was an ‘upgrade’ from the Mutant Registration Act. An Act that demanded the registration of all mutants and what their powers were. Of course it was discovered that this was an attempt to isolate them from the rest of society so that they could be easily corralled and later terminated as a threat. I don’t think I have to remind you what Hitler’s first move against the Jews was for you to see the parallels Cap” Tony scoffed.

Said man’s eyes darkened in realization. This was exactly why he didn’t trust governments!

“The Super-Human Registration Act was the same thing but on a much larger scale. And unlike the Mutant Registration Act it has a large band of supporters…And it would have been passed. However, thanks to the late King T’Chaka the Accords were created instead. Active Heroes now will only have to register their Hero name. They don’t have to give their civilian identity or home address. Anyone with powers will be trained by the Avengers, though they can choose not to be heroes, or they have the option of going to Xavier’s School for Gifted Youngsters, a boarding school for kids with powers to both get an education and learn how to control their abilities. The Inhumans would no longer be targeted and executed…Need I go on?” Tony lectured, annoyance and exasperation clear in his voice.

“The fact you could be so ignorant and selfish as to risk the lives of millions just because you don’t want to take responsibility for your actions has me deeply questioning your status as a hero, soldier, and a decent human being” Lydia spat venomously.

Steve barely managed to keep from flinching at the young woman’s tone.

“Believe me, I understand your position. People look to me like I’m some kind of righteous moral compass. That I hold all the secrets to world peace. But I don’t. We don’t. We’re still human. We still make mistakes. But it's how we handle them afterwards that’s important” Scott lectured, taking a gentler tone with the Man-Out-Of-Time.

“Are you secretly a hundred years old or something?” Lang asked, hoping to dissolve some of the tension and negative energy. He was really feeling out of place here.

“No” Scott answered with a small amused smile.

“My friends, colleagues, and I have been through a lot together…We’ve had to learn a lot of hard lessons. Lessons I never expected to ever be confronted with…People that I thought would be with me forever…are the ones that I lost…That we lost” Scott said slowly, looking at Stiles and Lydia.

“Damn these kids really know how to pull at your heartstrings” Rhodey thought sadly.
“Some people that I thought I could never trust…ended up saving my life…More than once” Scott continued, facing all of them, guiding them from his (ironic) position at the head of the table.

Wanda clenched and unclenched her hands at that admission, giving a subtle glance over to Stark, and then back at the younger man in front of her.

“We’ve suffered through losses, betrayals, war, torture…Allies became enemies. Enemies became allies” Scott detailed.

Bucky wanted to find a way to hide these kids away from all the horrors of the world. No kid should have to face war and torture. To be forced to become a soldier.

“A mentor once told me that just because something is broken, doesn’t mean things are falling apart…it’s just taking a new shape” Scott continued sagely, “Nothing ever stays the same. The world is constantly evolving, changing. For the better…or worse. And that’s something you can’t control. But your choices and actions can sway the outcome”

“With all the new heroes coming out in the open, and more and more super-humans appearing the Accords were always an inevitability…And if not the Accords than something else would have been ratified” Lydia explained.

“Every other government military facility is held accountable for their actions, why shouldn’t the Avengers be held accountable as well? Especially with all the destruction your so called ‘help’ has caused?” Stiles questioned.

“Exactly” Rhodey agreed. That whole mindset was part of the reason he got behind the Accords to begin with.

“If we hadn’t handled them more people would have died” Steve countered, though his voice was far less defensive.

“Maybe. But the point is the only person on your Team doing any kind of public amends is Dr. Stark” Lydia retorted.

“Because the majority of you keep to yourselves the public has no idea who you are” Stiles said, bouncing off Lydia’s statement, “You think anyone is going to defend her when all they know about Wanda is that she caused the deaths of several people in Nigeria? She’s nobody to them. Just someone who randomly appeared one day with the title Avenger”

“You’re all so arrogant that you think you’re untouchable because the world ‘needs’ you to protect it. Because of that you’ve distanced yourselves from everyday life and regular people. Causing a disconnect between you and the reality of the world” Lydia berated, glaring pointedly at Natasha, no doubt referencing her televised court hearing.

“And I’m happy to break it to all of you, but excluding Dr. Stark and Dr. Banner, not the Hulk, none of you are special cookies. You’re all easily replaceable” Stiles said with a mockingly happy smile.

And even if they didn’t know it, the Avengers truly were easily replaceable. Not only because of the various other heroes and ‘enhanced’ coming out of the woodwork, but the members of the supernatural community alone were easy replacements. Just find werewolves, hunters, a user of the mystic arts, and a thunder kitsune and you have the Avengers two-point-o.

The majority of the Avengers just glared at him.
“Barring Stiles’ statement your public status does benefit you. Even with all the current negative publicity Sergeant Barnes should still be good to go” Scott placated.

“Good to go? What are you talk about?” Steve demanded.

“You’re kidding right?” Tony demanded in disbelief.

“What?” Steve demanded. He knew he was missing something big by Tony’s expression, but he had no idea what it was.

“We’re talking about his charges on all the counts of murder your buddy wracked up from his time as Hydra’s pet attack dog” Tony stated sardonically.

“It wasn’t him. He was being brainwashed. He had no control” Steve said darkly.

“And no one here is disputing that Captain. But that doesn’t mean he gets a pass from attending trial. No-one is above the law” Lydia stated as if it should have been obvious.

“He shouldn’t be tried for something he had no control over” Steve stated coldly.

“Justice still needs to be served Rogers” Stiles said, equally icy.

“Killing him isn’t justice” Steve stated, barely keeping himself from raising his voice.

“Kill him? Where the hell did you get that from?” Stiles demanded.

Steve focused his hard gaze on him, confused what he meant by that.

“Wait, you can’t seriously think Barnes would ever get the death penalty when you said it yourself that he was brainwashed” Stiles said in disbelief.

“Ross said he wasn’t getting a trial. What am I supposed to think?” Steve countered, giving said man a nasty stare

Ross resisted the urge to smack himself in the face. Yes he was a staunch believer that if someone had committed heinous crimes that they should just be locked away without trial (he'd seen far too many criminals get away in his time in both the Air Force and CIA), but he didn't actually have the power to do that.

"Which means it's my fault Rogers high-tailed it with Barnes after the helicopter crashed" Ross thought bitterly.

“Okay no. Even if Ross did say that he wouldn’t be getting a trial there’s no way he would’ve been able to follow through. One that's illegal, and two, there’s far too much publicity on the Avengers. All you would’ve had to do is go on TV and say your former friend was brainwashed by Hydra, wasn’t being given a fair trial, and was in the hands of a man whose experiments on humans created the Hulk and Abomination...Which I have ample evidence of” Tony stated pointedly.

Steve just looked at Tony in shock. He had never thought of using his publicity in that way before. He had always left the interviews to Tony because they had reminded him too much of when he had been the military’s performing monkey. Actually...More importantly, Tony had evidence against Ross?!

“There is no jury who would have been able to convict him on his crimes as the Winter Soldier. None. But now because of you he’s facing murder, assault, and reckless endangerment charges that
now aren’t going away because you didn’t take the deal” Tony continued vitriolically.

“A deal you won’t be getting again” Natasha scoffed.

“Idiots the lot of them” she thought unimpressed.

“What deal? I was never told about any deal” Sam demanded.

“That’s…true. I never did have the chance to tell you personally before everything went to hell in a handbasket…I can work with that” Tony mumbled thoughtfully to himself, thinking of the several ways he could spin that to get some of the charges on Sam dropped.

“After Bucharest if Cap, Wilson, and Barnes had signed the Accords then all the crimes they committed in the last 24 hours would have been made legal and Barnes would have been sent to a psychiatric facility to help with the Hydra programming” Nat explained, glaring disappointedly at Steve.

“And why is this the first time I’m hearing about this?” Sam demanded, a dangerous edge in his voice.

“Cause Cap told me ‘up yours’, though in less crass terms” Tony said bitterly.

“Sam—”

“That wasn’t your decision to make Steve! It involved both of us, and Barnes! Why the hell wouldn’t you tell me?” Sam demanded angrily.

“We would’ve had to sign the Accords. At the time I thought I was doing what was best” Steve defended.

“Well if we had just trusted Stark then maybe they could’ve brought Barnes in instead of the Task Force getting involved, gotten him acquitted from the bombing allegations earlier, and he would’ve already been on his way to getting the help he needs to remove the Hydra programming. All this would’ve been different if you had just trusted hands that weren’t your own” Sam snapped back.

“What the hell Steve” Barnes said in a low, dangerously sharp voice, “I spent the last seventy plus years having my choices taken away from me. You don’t get to decide things like that on my behalf”

“I thought I was making the right call after I learned Tony had Wanda on unofficial house arrest” Steve defended weakly, fighting the urge to rub his temples.

“That’s your problem. You did what you thought was best. You can’t decide that you know best for other people” Lydia pointed out harshly.

“She’s just a kid” Steve countered (horribly).

“Dude, she’s four years older than me. She’s not a kid in any culture, or definition of the word” Stiles deadpanned.

“Even if she was, your argument would still be invalid. If you consider her adult enough to fight alongside you and the rest of the Avengers then that would make her status as a ‘kid’ null and void. Unless you’re admitting to allowing a juvenile out onto the field without proper training or psychological evaluation?” Lydia challenged.
Tony tried not to wince at that. If anyone he was the one guilty of bringing a kid into a fight he didn't belong. Sure Parker was already doing superhero work on his own, but he really owed Stilinski for stopping the standoff at the airport. If the kid had gotten hurt he wouldn't have forgiven himself.

“Fine, but he still kept her imprisoned at the Compound” Steve said, trying to defend his decisions.

“You mean her home? The place with a spa, pool, and movie theater?” Stiles scoffed.

“A gilded cage is still a cage” Steve said pointedly.

“Did you ever stop to consider why I was keeping her in the Compound?” Tony demanded, “Actually, you know what? Friday play the trending YouTube videos on the Scarlet Witch” Streams of holographic videos were pulled up into the air. The chants of protesters calling out “Burn the Witch!” ringing in their ears.

“Well what’d you know? He was protecting her. And you once again made things worse by jumping the gun and assuming you knew what was best for someone else” Stiles declared mockingly.

“Hey! Steve isn’t the only one who’s fucked up. We all have at one point or another, so quit jumping down his throat!” Clint said defensively.

“And you’d be referring tooo?” Lydia stated condescendingly, sounding like she knew exactly what he’d meant but was making him say it anyway.

“Ultron for starters since you’re here to apparently pick apart all the mistakes we’ve made on our jobs” Clint stated as if he were saying the obvious.

“Well aren’t you all a bunch of pathetic hypocrites. And just when I thought you lot couldn’t hit lower than rock bottom” Lydia said in a casual mocking tone.

“I’m pretty sure they already fell through the other side of the Earth and are currently still being propelled into outer space by their own assholery” Stiles scoffed.

“Excuse me?” Clint demanded.

“Alright let me spell it out for all of you. Ultron was created by the Scarlet Bitch sitting over there” Lydia said simply, pointing right at Wanda.

That accusation got everyone’s attention.

“Are you fucking kidding me–” Clint began angrily, getting back up from out of his seat.

“Enough!” Scott commanded, slamming his hand down onto the table. The sheer power and authority in his voice literally shaking the room, reminding everyone he was not as normal (or harmless) as he looked.

“Lydia will now continue her explanation. If anyone tries to interrupt her again I will have Agent Stilinski silence all of you if that is what it will take to force you all to hear reality” Scott threatened in an even tone, not raising his voice once. Though he didn’t need to. The threat was clear, one toe out of line and they would start losing some of their privileges of being unconfined while they discussed their issues.
Scott looked over to Lydia, giving her the go ahead to continue.

She was so ready for this. So ready to give the Avengers a piece of her mind. To show them all the suffering their actions had caused her to feel.

“As I was saying before, the ex-Hydra Bitch is responsible for Ultron’s creation. I know that for a fact because I possess precognitive powers that allow me to sense death…All death” Lydia emphasized sharply.

The Avengers looked to her in shock, some of them (Lang) even paling a bit at the thought.

“I am able to sense the dead, the dying and those who will potentially die. This allows me to discern how a person dies, where they will die, and/or what will cause their death in the first place” Lydia continued.

“That...must really suck” Lang thought. Of all the powers you could have she was stuck with such a depressing one.

“Maybe I should reference her over to Xavier” Tony contemplated.

“In events where a massive loss of life is to occur I will receive a vision of the root cause of the incident that can be used in order to prevent it from happening” Lydia stated, “And do you know what I saw one day?”

Nobody dared to say a word.

“I saw Tony Stark standing in some sort of abandoned lab in front of a glowing scepter. Unbeknownst to him a woman in red with long brown hair approached him from behind” Lydia began, glaring directly at Wanda as she spoke, “And without him even knowing it I watched as she propelled a red mist directly into his head, and his eyes started glowing red”

Wanda closed her eyes tight. No. No they were never supposed to know!

“Then the next thing I know I hear the screams of thousands, the Earth crumbling beneath me…and when I looked up as I was plummeting down to the Earth below? I saw a metallic monster with glowing red eyes. The same red as the Woman’s hands” Lydia concluded, not taking her eyes off the Scarlet Witch.

The name truly did suit her.

The Avengers stared disbelievingly at Wanda, who had yet to deny Lydia’s accusations…or defend herself.

“And the fact that we have video evidence of her mind-raping him and even her own admittance of guilt, helps too” Stiles said casually, flicking up two screens from his own FBI issued StarkPad for the Avengers to see. The damning videos displaying almost word for word what Lydia had foreseen. Wanda’s admission at the church confirming it all.

“How do you have that?” Tony choked out.

“We scout out every overtaken Hydra base in order to make sure they’re not performing certain experiments or collaborating with our enemies. A colleague and I found the footage when we hacked the cameras” Stiles explained, empathy for the older man in his eyes. Even knowing you were brain fucked doesn’t make the pain of your actions any less. Stiles knew that pain like an old friend.
Clint had his hands on his head.

“That’s what you meant when you said that it was all your fault” he whispered to himself, though everyone heard him.

Wanda put her head down in shame. Sokovia. All those people...her fault.

Steve couldn’t think.

Ultron was Wanda’s fault?! Tony had been under Wanda’s influence that long and none of them had noticed...or questioned it!

“The Scarlet Witch is not a child! She and her brother willingly sided with Hydra and allowed them to experiment on them for the purpose of revenge. And because of her mind-rape” Rhodey snarled, furious he hadn't seen the real cause behind Tony's actions sooner, “She is responsible for all those killed and orphaned because of the Hulk’s rampage and Ultron!”

Wanda flinched at the mention of Johannesburg.

“You all blamed Tony for Ultron, hell the whole world did, he even blamed himself, when it wasn’t his fault at all. Instead you all just used him as a fucking scapegoat!” Rhodey yelled, just as furious at himself as he was at the others.

He and Tony had thought it was his PTSD getting worse again, causing him to hallucinate. They had both agreed maybe it was time he took another step back to work on his health again. And here sitting in front of him was the real fucking reason Ultron happened! And that fucking reason had the gall to become an Avenger!

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Steve said, quietly, addressing Tony this time.

“I suspected...But I didn’t know for sure” Tony admitted, not looking Steve in the eyes.

“You still should have told us” Steve said. He had failed. He had failed Tony. He had failed Tony so badly.

“Yeah, like any of you would’ve believed me. You believed the word of a Hydra Agent over your own teammate. You threw your vibranium shield at my chest. I’m not the Hulk. If my armor hadn’t gotten to me in time I would’ve died. None of you questioned why after 30 years of creating AIs why one would suddenly go rogue” Tony said bitterly.

Steve flinched at the memory of how he was so quick to raise his shield at his own friend like that.

Lang couldn’t help but silently agree with that. He had thought it was odd that Tony Stark, the man who had created his first AI at seventeen years old, would suddenly create a murder-bot, but hey things happen and he doubted that it was on purpose. But now...knowing that a fellow Avenger had actually mind-fucked him...that...that...he really wasn’t feeling comfortable here in all the dysfunction.

“That’s why Bruce left isn’t it?...And why you left and became an active duty non-combatant... Because you didn’t feel safe around us anymore” Natasha asked (stated).

Even without Tony confirming anything she knew. Bruce left because of his actions under Wanda’s control. Because he had to fight alongside the woman who caused him to attack Johannesburg. Because she broke his trust and pushed him down a crater. Because he had his trust broken in them and himself. She had just started attempting to open up to another person, to allow
herself to show some vulnerability, only to be left behind. She understood why...but it had still hurt...more than she wanted to admit. And really they couldn't blame anyone but themselves. Frankly she couldn't imagine Bruce staying in the same compound as Wanda even if he had stayed anyway.

Stark said nothing for a moment.

That momentary silence broke something in Steve.

“That…was a part of it…But I truly did want things to work out with Pepper. Being on active Avenger duty was killing…killed our relationship” Tony admitted slowly, for once keeping any sarcasm from masking his pain.

Rhodey grabbed Tony’s shoulder comfortingly, Tony quickly taking ahold of it.

Vision felt a great sadness for the man. He and Dr. Banner were the closest thing he could equate to being his ‘fathers’ in the human term for the word. Logically he knew it was tough for Mr. Stark to be around him because of his previous life as Jarvis. But even with that emotional difficulty Mr. Stark made sure to keep himself available for him in case he ever had any questions.

He had even encouraged his budding bond with Wanda. Now knowing what he did...what she had been so willing to do to him, left him with a feeling he could not readily identify.

“Besides, Wanda genuinely wanted a fresh start. I’d be a hypocrite if I got in the way of that” Tony commented. If he got to have a fresh start from being the Merchant of Death then he could swallow his discomfort and step aside to give someone else that chance too.

Wanda gave him a grateful (awkward) smile. Deciding then to make more of an effort to make proper amends with the billionaire she had wronged so much.

“You let a fucking Hydra agent become an Avenger?” Bucky demanded, sounding more angry and betrayed then Steve had ever heard him before.

Everyone snapped their attention to Bucky...no, the Winter Soldier.

Because there was no doubting that lethality anywhere.

“The same cold icy stare that promised nothing less than death” Natasha observed, a chill going up her spine, “A Winter Soldier indeed”

“The Winter Soldier with Barnes’ conscious awareness. Now that’s a scary thought” Tony thought fearfully, moving his hand near his ‘watch’.

“Bucky, you need to calm down” Steve said slowly.

“Calm down? Oh believe me Captain I am calm. Right now I want a damn explanation why you let a mind-raping Hydra agent on your fucking team!” Bucky demanded, the promise of murder in his eyes.

“She wanted a do-over Buck. Her brother was killed when they were helping us fight off Ultron. She deserved a fresh start” Steve replied, hoping he could appeal to the part of Bucky that was his old friend.

“Her brother’s death is her own fault. You reap what you sow” Bucky declared coldly.
Wanda flinched, closing her eyes in order to keep the tears from falling.

It was true...She knew it was...But hearing it out loud...She couldn’t accept it...That her actions caused all those people in Sokovia to die...Caused her brother to die.

That was the real reason she still held onto any anger towards Tony Stark. Her misguided revenge at him caused her to indirectly kill her brother. It was easier to blame him. To pass the blame off then to accept what her actions had caused.

“I’m not saying that her past actions weren’t wrong, but she regrets her choices now” Steve stated, trying to find some kind of middle ground that wouldn’t end up with Wanda being killed by Bucky.

“Even so. She let Dr. Stark take the fall for Ultron. If she really wanted a fresh start she wouldn’t have used him as a scapegoat” Lydia cut in.

“I…” Wanda stammered, trying to find something, anything to say.

“She was scared. The world would’ve had her crucified, whereas everyone expects me to be a walking disaster” Tony defended.

Wanda looked at the man sadly. She really didn’t deserve his words.

“You know what? I’m so done! You shouldn’t be paying for other people wrongs! I’ve had it up to here with hearing how you have been taking the rap for everything they do wrong while they sit comfortably by! They’ve never had to take responsibility for their actions because you and SHIELD had always covered their asses. Now that SHIELD is no more and you left active duty they’ve had no-one to pass the blame off to. My advice to you, let them rot!” Agent Ross declared.

“You learned years ago that if your actions have consequences you try to make amends as much as possible. You never justify your actions at the cost of others. They have yet to learn such a lesson”

The momentary silence was almost comical seeing as everyone had basically forgotten his presence in the room.

Agent Ross was almost proud of himself for stunning them all to silence.

“Obviously with their list of fuckups” Lydia scoffed, breaking the shock in the air.

“If there’s something you’d like to say then by all means. You haven’t held back yet” Natasha stated.

“You and Spangles over there dumped all of SHEILD’s files and made them accessible to the public. Ringing any bells?” Stiles stated sardonically.

“We didn’t have a choice! SHIELD was compromised and needed to be brought down!” Steve defended.

“Hell yeah it was compromised! But again you had a genius, billionaire that could have hacked into the hellicarriers, that he helped create, and shut them down without causing the deaths of thousands of people in addition to the hundreds that died when the hellicarriers fell” Rhodey said as if it should have been obvious.

“Thousands?” Steve questioned, entirely confused where that had come from.

“Yeah Rogers, thousands. When you and Widow dumped all of SHIELD’s files you not only compromised the safety of the majority of SHIELD agents who were not Hydra, but you
compromised the safety of all their friends and loved ones too. Anyone affiliated to SHIELD even indirectly and/or oblivious to its existence was then targeted not only by Hydra, but by other enemies of SHIELD as well” Tony sneered, “Dumping those files caused the deaths of almost 1000 people…and that’s with me and Rhody scrambling around to save as many people as they possibly could”

Steve paled at the realization. That’s why Tony had been so pissed off back then...But he had never told him those numbers...

“What? You thought that Tony and I were just sitting on our asses while hellicarriers were raining down fire upon the world?” Rhodes mocked, “Sorry Tony and I couldn’t be there to stop your stupidity. We were busy trying to save as many people as we could from the fallout of your fuckup. And what did you do afterwards? You skipped on your merry way without even a thought of the potential consequences of your actions while Tony had to reencrypt and hide all the files once again and delete any copies off the internet. Not only that, but he ended up hiring 40% of the surviving SHIELD members so that they would be under his company’s protection and he sent all the civilian family members of SHIELD he could into Witness Protection”

“You should be counting your lucky stars that your family wasn’t listed within the SHIELD databases Barton, or else they would have been in danger from the information dump as well” Tony said with a huff.

Clint just cursed under his breath. He hadn’t even thought about that! He had just been relieved that Shieldra was gone. He hadn't thought about the consequences for the innocent SHIELD agents or their families with the plan because he knew his family was safe. If his family had been on file...Just how much of a selfish bastard was he?

Natasha knew the consequences of the data dump. She knew all the lives put at risk because she allowed herself to be caught up in Steve's charisma. But she had also looked at the bigger picture. If they tried to reach Stark the Hydra agents in SHIELD would have been immediately tipped off, and they were too far away from New York to hitchhike it to Avenger's Tower. There just wasn't enough time before Project Insight was launched, and Hydra agents had been planted everywhere in DC. It wasn't the best decision, or even a good one, but was a necessary one. What finalized her decision was knowing Clint’s family would at least make it out alive. She wouldn't have gone along with Steve if the plan put them at risk. Maybe that was cold, but she was ex-Russian. She knew how to survive a Russian Winter (survive the consequences of her actions).

“Holy shit” Lang thought horrified. Even he would've known to call Stark in that situation! Captain America wasn't what he thought he was. He wasn't sure he could be a part of a group where it's leader was willing to sacrifice the lives of other families as collateral damage...except he almost fucking had. He had taken Captain America’s side against international law! And his family would have paid the price for it.

“Holding firm to your opinions and beliefs is fine. Everyone does it” Scott said, “But when more and more people start getting hurt…and more people fear you than trust you…That’s when you have to take a step back and ask yourself: Am I really doing things the best way that I can?”

Was he doing things the best way he could? Steve wasn’t sure anymore.

“Saying that you think you know better than 117 countries…that’s not arrogance. That’s dangerous…And history’s shown us people that believe they know better than the rest of the world end up like Hitler and the Red Skull” Stiles stated harshly.

“I’m nothing like them” Steve said viciously.
“Why? Because they were the ‘villains’?” Stiles countered, “You’re justifying the needless deaths of all those innocent SHIELD agents on the helicarriers because you say it needed to be done when that’s not necessarily the case! How is that any different from Hitler saying that the Jews needed to be killed because they were the plague killing Germany? Because you’re Captain America so therefore you have to be right?”

“Have you ever heard the expression "If the whole world smells like shit, check under your shoe”?” Lydia inquired, “If the entire world is telling you you’re wrong, then you need to seriously take another look at what you’re really standing for. Because right now you’re no longer protecting the ‘little guy’, right now you’re the bully. Now the little guys are finally pushing back and you don’t like it because it makes you feel powerless again. That’s the real problem”

“The serum for all its accolades had serious negative side effects. It removes a person’s empathy and makes them latch onto power. That’s why the Red Skull became a sociopath. It’s also why you were chosen by Erskine right? In the hopes that you’re morals would counterbalance the need for power and the dulling of the ability to empathize. And right now…you’re starting to lose it. And you can’t hide that from me. I can sense all your emotions so I know for a fact you’re losing your ability to empathize. It's still there, you still care, but unless you get help now, you will be the next Red Skull” Scott stated assuredly.

“I get it! I screwed up!” Steve shouted, everything finally reaching its boiling point.

“Great. Now that you’ve realized the errors of your past actions you shouldn’t have any problem signing the Accords” Scott declared.

“What?” Steve said, his mind finally free of his momentary outburst.

“If you are sincere about your regret for your past actions…For the fallout of SHIELD”

Steve. Sam.

“For when you were under Loki’s control”

Clint.

“For the assassinations you committed because of Hydra”

Bucky.

“For the red in your ledger”

Natasha.

“For Ultron”

Wanda.

“You will sign” Scott declared, “You will sign because it is the right thing to do”

Scott stood up from his seat, Stiles and Lydia following right after.

“The Accords aren’t some dog leash. It will function much like the partnership you had with SHIELD…So I implore you to read it again. Read it and do what is right” Scott said firmly.

A blanket of tension laid itself upon the room.
“Great. Are we done? Cause I’m getting sick and tired of playing therapist for you socially stunted morons! I have my own issues to deal with!” Stiles declared, motioning towards the door.

Scott nodded, but before he left he turned to Steve Rogers once more.

“And one more thing Captain”

Steve turned his attention to the young man. The inner turmoil clear in his eyes.

Scott bore into them with his own look of sharp lethal decisiveness.

“If you wish to hold firm to your beliefs that is your right. However, if you continue to threaten the world because of your bullheadedness, you can stand firm to your beliefs all you want, but I will kill you where you stand”

Chapter End Notes

Whew! Man that was a doozy!

The Avengers are starting to see the errors of their ways!

And believe me, the Pack isn't done with them just yet!

Please, please, please comment and tell me what you thought about the chapter!
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Hi all! Sorry it took so long to update. This chapter is longer than I planned but meh. Make sure you read carefully to pick up on the little foreshadowing bits!

This chapter is definitely lighter in the feels. A bit of a reprieve if you will. But issues are still abound.

It is important to note that while this is a crossover this story actually takes place in a different Universe to the MCU. The MCU Universe is Earth-199999 while this Universe is much farther away on Earth-588888 (since it intersects with the Teen Wolf Universe where the heroes are only comic book characters, movies, and cartoons)

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Steve's POV)

Sitting out on the balcony I had hoped that the fresh air would clear my head a little as I tried to get through editing another section of the Accords.

It wasn't like there were many other things to do besides reflect right now.

*Flashback*

Nobody said anything as the trio of FBI agents (trio of heroes) left the room.

What was there even to say after all of that?

“Well...This has all been incredibly insightful...and awkward. But I think it's time I get back to my daughter” Lang said, breaking the uncomfortable silence.

Rhodey nodded in agreement.

“I think it's time we all went home” Rhodey said, “Including you Tones”

Tony just shook his head.

“No can do Honey-bear. Steve, Wilson, and Barnes still have charges pending against them. Someone needs to convince the UN the best place to keep them is the Compound...Clint, Wanda, and Lang should be good to go though. The only thing Clint and Lang could be charged with is accessory or conspiracy if the UN is feeling particularly ambitious, but seeing as they never actually did anything the chances of any charges being pinned on them is low. And I'm not filing any charges on Wanda or Clint, though I don't know about Vision” Tony inquired, looking over at the android.

“I will not. The notion is meaningless, petty, and counterproductive in mending the relationships of the team” Vision declared, though he still wasn't looking Wanda in the eyes.
“Agent Stilinski’s report could be a big help, depending on what he puts in it” Agent Ross adds in.

“What happened to ‘let them rot’?” Tony said sardonically.

“I said 'if I were you’. Besides my job right now is basically that of a glorified parole officer for you lot. My advice to all of you, take advantage of the house arrest and join group therapy”

*End Flashback*

The charges weren't gone, but Tony's lawyers had enough evidence of extenuating circumstances to mitigate our sentences and get us a plea deal. We would be confined to the Compound for a while and barred from missions unless absolutely necessary, but otherwise our cases for now were put aside and considered closed.

One would think that with half the team on house arrest we'd have already worked through a good chunk of our communication issues.

If anything it was the opposite.

Everybody seemed to be keeping to themselves. And when any two of us were in a room together it was stilted and awkward.

I let out a sigh, giving my eyes a strong rub.

“Reading the Accords on the balcony? That's a waste of a perfectly good sunset”

I turned to see that Tony had walked into my room without me noticing.

Telegraphing his movements he strolled over next to me, looking out at the myriad of changing colors.

For a few minutes we just stood side by side in companionable silence.

It felt nice compared to the tension, hurt, and awkwardness with the others.

But that had always been us.

No matter the disagreement or conflict we always could come back to this.

“Listen Tony-” I began, wanting to apologize for not trying to listen to his side of the argument better, for not trusting him enough.

“Don't Cap. We both goofed” he said, cutting me off.

“But it's because I didn't listen-” I continued stubbornly.

“Communication's a two way street Cap. And I got off on that last exit too. If Stilinski hadn't intervened at the airport, who knows where we'd be right now” he said, giving me a grim look.

I knew.

And I knew he did too.

We'd have fought.

And the aftermath wouldn't have been pretty.
And the Team would never have been the same again.

Both of us turned back to face the scenery before us.

“Back when I retired again after Ultron...You remember what you said to me?” Tony asked, still gazing at the lowering sun.

“That the man who came out of the ice wasn't the same the man who went in” I answered, knowing full well he wasn't talking about our quips about Thor's hammer.

“I think you need to take some time to figure out who that person is Steve” he said gently, but seriously.

It wasn't a statement. Just a suggestion.

But it was one that brought anxiety bubbling to the surface.

I don't know how to be anything but a soldier anymore...I don't even know if I could be.

When he had come out of the ice he had been thrown into a world where everything and everyone he knew had been taken from him. Fast forward a year of untreated PTSD later and suddenly he was being brought in to fight an alien army threatening the planet.

On the hellicarrier he held out a small ember of hope that he and Howard's son would, click, or something.

Instead he had felt snubbed by the billionaire and admittedly a bit jealous when he and Dr. Banner 'clicked’ instead. In his jealousy and bitterness he fell back on Tony's file (which he now knows was set up by undercover Hydra agents to make him biased against Tony in the first place), taking his pent up frustrations and anger out on him instead.

He said a lot of things to Tony he regret. Doubly so when the man proved everything he said while under the influence of Loki’s staff wrong.

After the Battle of New York he had planned on taking a long cross country tour, but somewhere along the way he realized that he had no real idea of what to do with his life moving forward. So when SHIELD offered him the chance to become an agent he jumped at the chance, falling right back into the only role he had ever really known.

Even after SHIELD fell I remained Captain America full time.

I just didn't know anything else.

Suddenly a package was blocking my view.

“Are you gonna open it or leave me standing here like a rejected UPS driver?” Tony inquired, clearly amused he had caught me off guard a second time.

I took the package from him and ripped off the brown paper.

A sketchpad.

I looked at Tony in surprise, unable to form a sentence that would do my twenty questions justice.

“I know you went to Auburndale back in the day. Maybe I'd be good to get back to your artistic roots. Maybe do a little sightseeing. Actually ask Sharon out on a date” Tony casually suggested.
I couldn't help it.
I laughed.

It was low and wheezy. More like a hysterical chuckle than anything else. But I laughed.

It was all just so Tony.

For the first time in weeks I truly smiled.

“You okay there old man? I don't need to get life support in here do I?” Tony asked, sounding mildly concerned.

“Best I've been in a while actually” I replied, still smiling.

And that was the truth.

I've failed Tony a lot, as both a friend and a leader.

A leader was supposed to listen. To compromise where it was needed. And I haven't been. And that's going to change.

I remembered something Sam had said once:

“The hard part isn't the distance. It's taking that first step”

I gazed once more at the sketchpad. It was of the best quality paper an artist could buy.

It's taking that first step.

I looked back over at Tony.

“Thank you”

He looked at me in shock for a moment, like I had grown three heads during the span of our conversation, before gifting me with a soft upwards quirk of his lips.

“No problem Steve”

Yeah. Everything was going to be fine. I just knew it.

(Sam’s POV)

Thunk. Thunk. Thunk.

The beat of my sneakers against the tartan track was the only sound other than my heavy breathing.

I had hoped a run would clear my head a bit, give me some time to really reflect.

Minus the guards it was just me and my thoughts.

I kept going over the entire situation with the Accords over and over again. Thinking what could have, should have gone differently.

What I should have done differently.
Mostly what everything had come down to was trust.

Even though I knew Cap’s judgement had been compromised the moment Barnes came into play, I had still trusted his judgement over Stark’s since I hadn't considered him mentally competent and was unsure of what the other could or couldn't do while under both Ross’ thumbs.

Encouraging Steve not to call Stark was completely on me.

I really don't want to know what would have happened if the whole standoff at the airport hadn't been stopped.

Bottom line, no one had trusted each other.

We had let Zemo, Ross, and Ross Number 2 play us.

Zemo knew the Accords would divide the Avengers.

But it wasn't enough.

He had wanted to completely destroy us from the inside. Make it so the Avengers would never come together again.

So he framed Barnes knowing that it would further divide Steve from Stark and the rest.

Zemo had counted on Secretary Ross pressuring Stark and further enticing Steve away from his willingness to hear Stark out.

Add in Agent Ross’ comment about Barnes not getting a lawyer and you have Steve's paranoia over government control amped up to 200, ensuring that he wasn't bringing Barnes back to the JCTC.

Zemo had wanted Steve to track him down to Siberia.

But why?

According to Agent Stilinski's shortened report Zemo had wanted Steve, Barnes, and Stark in Siberia together, but the reason why wasn't listed in the report we were given.

When I had asked about it I was told that the information had been too sensitive to put in the shortened report, but that the parties concerned (Steve, Barnes, and Stark) would be informed soon.

That didn't sound good. *At all.*

Zemo was a smart man. A *very* smart man.

He had studied every one of the Avengers, creating scarily accurate psychological profiles that he used to manipulate all of us.

Of course he also based a lot of things on chance.

At any point things could have gone differently, a person choosing to do something Zemo hadn't counted on, or someone else he didn't expect intervening.

Which is exactly what happened.

Several people had exacerbated the whole situation, but the intervention of Agent Stilinski's Task-
Force threw a monkey wrench in his entire plan.

All I know is that whatever Zemo’s endgame was it couldn’t have been good.

And something told me we all almost played right into his hands.

That he would’ve been the first person to defeat the Avengers without having ever thrown a single punch.

If that wasn’t a scary thought he didn’t know what was.

“Killing yourself from overexertion isn’t going to change anything” a voice called out.

I turned to see Rhodes standing near the starting line.

“It just gives you a sucky engraving on your tombstone. Here lies Sam Wilson. The dumbass who took one too many laps” he said smirking.

I huffed out a laugh as I changed my pace to a slow jog, halting in front of him.

“I’m guessing this isn’t a courtesy call” I said, trying to catch my breath. Looking at my watch I realized that I had been running for almost two hours straight.

“Damn” I thought, “I really did get lost in my head”

“Unfortunately no” he confirmed, “This is me telling you to get your ass in gear”

I gave him an unsure look.

“As a superior officer?” I asked confused on where this was going.

“As a friend” he rebuked, his voice a bit softer.

My expression must have showed the confusion I was feeling as he gave out a sigh I usually only heard him use with Stark.

“You can’t run away from your problems forever Sam. Eventually you’re gonna have to talk to Steve” he said, sounding a lot like a parent who was lecturing their child.

I let out a sigh of my own.

“I’m a counselor Rhodes. You think I don’t know that? But I’m just so…so”

“Pissed off?”

“Yeah” I confirmed, grimly.

Everybody made a hell of a lot of mistakes. That was irrefutable. But I was still pissed off at Steve the most.

I know it’s not fair. I know it’s because I had held him at a higher moral standard then the rest of us, even knowing all his flaws that I did.

Steve was as human as the rest of us. It wasn’t fair that I was angry at him like I was, but that still didn’t change the fact that I was.

Because I was just starting to realize that Steve omitted facts a lot.
He omitted mentioning Stark’s deal to me and Barnes, he omitted the full situation to Clint and Lang, and he omitted a hell of a lot from Stark (with my backing) until it had almost been too late.

Realizing that made me very uncomfortable.

Not so much that he did it (though I am still mad about that too). But because why he did it.

He had judged that he thought it was better that we didn't know. And that was dangerous thinking.

Sure Steve's morals were generally fairly good, but I was starting to see that things like his view on collateral damage, and how he thought to do what he thought was best without consulting others was really skewed.

As a soldier I can understand Steve's view on collateral damage. In the military you have to accept that you just can't save everyone or else you would never survive the guilt.

But the Avengers aren't a military unit.

And I think that's where things starting going wrong.

That combined with the fact Steve doesn't trust outside government units, nor does he think they'd be capable of taking down people like Rumlow and you have a mess like Lagos.

That kid was right. It was arrogance. But it wasn't malicious. Steve did what he thought was right and stuck to it even if he wasn't. And like that kid, Scott, said, everyone does that.

If you believe that the sky is blue for reasons x, y, and z, and someone else doesn't for reasons a, b, and c, well then that's their right to disagree despite whether or not they are right. It's just most people don't have as much at stake when they remain unbending in their beliefs.

I got that. I understood that.

But that didn't mean I was okay with having my decisions made for me without me even knowing they even existed.

And if I felt that way I can't even imagine how Barnes is feeling toward Steve right now.

And that was probably the biggest blow to the man.

Barnes was one of his last connections to his past. His long lost (formerly) inseparable best friend.

He got him back only to push him away by his own actions.

I let out a heavy sigh.

Steve needed to talk to someone.

We all do.

Hell we all needed to get off our asses and talk to each other.

And it was high time we did.

“Take it from me. Stewing in your own anger over your best friend’s actions rather than just talking things out will only make things worse in the long run. Trust me” Rhodes said sagely.
“A lot of experience on that front?” I couldn't help but ask.

“Let's just say I'm used to Tony keeping things to himself cause he thinks it's for the best” Rhodes admitted, sounding both exasperated and annoyed.

Ultron was on the tip of my tongue, but now we all knew how exactly wrong that was.

“Anything like this?” I asked curiously, hoping he could impart some advice to me before I just plunged into the deep.

Rhodes looked hesitated for a moment. As if he were debating whether or not to tell me the example he was obviously thinking of.

“Less than a year after he became Iron Man Tony's behavior started getting really erratic. I thought he had finally gone off the rails. I had been so angry with him that I completely missed that he was purposefully pushing all of us away” Rhodes began, sounding like he was holding in an old grief.

“Why?” I asked, confused why Stark would do something like that...unless

“He was dying” Rhodes said simply, as if his eyes weren't screaming pain.

“The arc reactor, the very thing that was supposed to be keeping him alive, was slowly killing him from heavy metal poisoning. By the time he finally figured out a cure he was less than a day away from death” Rhodes stated, his face tight and teeth clenched.

“You didn't know, did you?” I asked (stated), softly.

“No one did. The dumbass figured he knew better and planned it so that he would piss everyone off so much that we wouldn’t go looking for him for a while...and by then he would've…”

“Already been dead” I thought to myself.

Did the rest of the Team even know about this?

“ Probably not” I thought irately. Stark struck him as someone who would keep knowledge of such an incident close to his chest (pun not intended).

Jesus he and Steve really did deserve each other. Those morons were two peas in a pod. It really was no wonder they both got along and couldn't stand each other.

“How did you forgive him?” I asked. That wasn't a small thing to omit, especially to a friend.

“Tony let me yell at him for a bit. Get my frustrations and fear out in the open. Let me vent. By the end of it I was clinging to him, calling him a dumbass and telling him never to do that again” Rhodes said with a fond (but sad) chuckle.

I wanted that.

I was pissed at him, but Steve was still my friend.

Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder.

“Go” Rhodes said, smirking a bit, “You have your own stupid white-boy to knock some sense into”

I huffed out a laugh.
“Yeah. Yeah I guess I do”

(Clint's POV)

“I'm sorry sweetheart. I'll make it up to you and your brother when I get back okay?” I consoled over the burner phone.

“When?” Lila asked sadly.

“Soon kiddo I promise. The grown ups made a few mistakes that we have to fix” I told her.

“Does that mean you're in time-out?” she giggled.

“Yeah daddy’s in time-out for a little while. But once I'm out I promise we'll all go water skiing” I said, chuckling a bit.

“Okay Dad! Love you! See you soon!” Lila said happily, ending the call.

I took the phone slowly away from my ear and just stared at it for a few moments as if it held all the secrets of the universe.

“You're not going to fix things by staring at a disposable phone” Nat pointed out, striding right up next to me.

I just shook my head.

“How did this happen Nat?” I asked, though about what specifically I wasn't sure.


“If it can even be called that anymore” I thought bitterly.

“A hell of a lot of misunderstandings. Mistrust that was never properly addressed” she suggested, taking a seat on the couch next to me.

“The Accords just brought all of it to the surface. Add in Helmut Zemo and both Ross’ and this is what we got. A barely diverted chemical explosion” she continued.

“I messed up”

“No. You thought we were compromised. And really, you didn't actually do anything” she pointed out, omitting my assault on Vision.

I had already apologized to the android, but still…

Tony had been practically spitting fire when he had found out that Wanda had sent Vision through several floors of the Compound.

Just the thought of that made me wince (again).

Vision for all intents and purposes was Tony's son.

If anyone had so much as put a hair out of place on Cooper, Lila, or Nate they would be deader than dead…no I'd make it so they were begging for death. Make it a reprieve from the endless torture...a reprieve I would never give.
“I left my family” I stated regretfully.

“Laura knew what she was getting into when the two of you got married. She went into this with her eyes wide open. The kids too. You never hid what you did from them. They understand that Hawkeye will always be a part of who you are” she stated assuredly.

“I was supposed to be retired”

“People like us will never truly retire”

She wasn't wrong.

SHIELD had recruited me straight out of the circus when I was in my early twenties, and then I spent the last several years as an Avenger.

I was getting older. Slowing down. I knew it.

Unlike a majority of the team Tony and I were still only baseline humans. And both of us were getting up there in years.

I thought I could do it. Retire.

But truthfully it was starting to make me a bit stir crazy.

I missed the danger. The action that had always been present in my life ever since my brother and I had run away from our foster home when I was sixteen.

As much as I loved my family with every fiber of my being, just giving that up cold turkey wasn't easy.

“I'm thinking about signing on as a reserve member again” I admitted.

Nat nodded, as if she had expected me to say that.

Knowing her she probably did.

“So. What are you gonna do about Wanda?” she asked, not holding anything back. I could tell she was sick of dealing with my avoidance of everything.

“I don't know” I replied honestly.

I still believed that she deserved a second chance...But she and I definitely needed to clear the air.

“You tell Cooper and Lila to face their problems. You do the same” she jabbed.

“This is an intervention isn't it?” I asked (stated), raising an eyebrow at her.

“Hill got sick of everyone’s moping. Don't feel special. Tony's got Steve and Rhodes is talking to Sam” Nat lightly teased.

“Aw. Are you saying that I'm not special?” I jested back.

“You're just figuring that out now? I guess you're eyes aren't as sharp as you claim they are” she countered back.

I huffed out a laugh, knocking my right shoulder to her left, savoring the feeling.
It was good to be back.

(Sharon’s POV)

“So we're all in agreement?”

“Yes. The current active Avengers have all agreed to the terms” Maria stated.

“But the Rogues have not?”

“They don't get a choice in the details of their sentence” Maria stated somewhat coldly.

The Agent nodded.

“Very well then. I will transfer you the details ASAP”

“If anything changes I will have Agent Carter contact you” Maria stated.

“Thank you Agent Hill. We'll be in touch”

And with that the screen went dark.

“I want you to schedule a non-optional meeting for all the Avengers tonight” Maria ordered turning to me, “They need to be informed of the updates immediately”

I nodded making notes on the StarkPad.

“You have a direct line to Agent McCall. If he calls or sends you anything you inform me immediately” Maria reminded, walking right past me as she spoke and out of the room. No doubt onto another ten tasks that needed to get done.

God. This is what my life has come down to.

All my hard work to prove that I was more than just a famous last name, and now look at me.

I was a glorified secretary.

But serving out a probationary sentence as the liaison between the Avengers and FBI was a far better alternative then going to prison for the rest of my life for spilling government secrets and aiding and abetting a criminal.

I didn't regret helping Steve.

I stand by my choices.

Even if I hadn't told Steve where we had located Barnes, T’Challa still would've gone after him, and Barnes still most likely would have attacked the Task-Force in order to escape.

If I hadn't subtly allowed Steve to see Barnes’ psychological evaluation then nobody would have known that the 'psychiatrist' was actually triggering Barnes.

If I hadn't given them back their gear then they probably would have found a more illegal way to get it back via more property destruction and assault. Not to mention they wouldn't have stood a chance against the other Winter Soldiers had they actually fought.
What I did regret was not telling Tony what I knew. Assuming that Steve would. That was my mistake.

And it cost me my job with the CIA and any future employment in law enforcement.

Now I was given a pretty little title that was just an excuse for the FBI and their little Task-Force to observe me along with the rest of the Avengers.

It was degrading and annoying, but that was the point of the sentence in the first place. If you were enjoying it then it wasn't much of a punishment.

But I wasn't rotting away in jail, so anything else was a plus.

As I walked into the kitchen hoping to grab a bite to eat after a long day of tailing Maria, I spotted Vision near the stove tops.

“I didn't know you cooked” I said, bringing his attention to my presence in the room.

Truthfully I didn't know him at all, but I suppose now is as good a time as any to learn since we'll be seeing a lot more of each other.

“Ms. Carter” he acknowledged, “I've found that cooking fascinates me. Though I admit that I am not very good at it”

“What are you making?” I asked curiously.

“Spaghetti and meatballs. Reviews said it was a relatively easy dish to prepare” he replied.

“Depends on if you're making the meatballs from scratch or not, and if you're adding anything to the sauce” I answered.

“From...scratch? I am not familiar with that ingredient I'm afraid” he said confused.

I giggled a bit at that.

“It's a saying. Basically it means making something yourself from base ingredients rather than just heating it up” I explained with a smile.

“Ah” he mumbled awkwardly, “It seems I still have a lot to understand”

Something about his words made me feel like he wasn't just talking about the food.

“You alright?” I asked, concerned for the android.

“I find that I am still...struggling to understand human emotions and...feelings” he admitted uneasily.

That made sense. He was still young. Still learning what it meant to be ‘human’. To feel. It was understandable that he'd have trouble identifying certain things.

“Maybe I can help” I offered.

He looked at me uncertainly.

“Try me. You never know. I promise I won't judge” I promised.
“Studies do show that talking to another person can be beneficial” he agreed slowly, “Very well then”

He then gestured to the stool at the counter, “Would you care for a seat?”

“Thank you” I said sitting down.

“I find myself...conflicted about my feelings for Ms. Maximoff” he revealed, sounding very unsure in his words.

Well that wasn't what I was expecting.

“When we first started working together I found myself drawn to her...At first I suspected that it was due to her powers being derived in part from the Mind Stone” he said, touching the gem lightly with his finger tips.

“Perhaps it was. But as we spent more leisure time together I found myself genuinely enjoying her company” he admitted with a soft barely there smile.

“Aw. He's got a crush” I thought sweetly. I ignored the pang in my chest at the thought of Steve.

“She treated me like a friend, was happy to explain things I did not understand...I thought we were getting closer...but”

I was confused by his pause.

Clearly something happened between the two of them. And if I had to guess, whatever it was is what is causing his confusion over his feelings.

“What happened?” I asked him, gently urging him on.

“When I had told her that it was in her best interest to remain in the Compound I thought she had understood that I had wanted to keep her safe” he began, a touch of hurt in his tone.

“But?”

“But then she sent me through several floors in order to leave”

“Damn” I thought wincing. So that's why all those holes are there.

Wow. This...I wasn't expecting to play counselor for something this complex today.

Especially considering my own crush troubles.

Regardless, I had promised to do my best to help.

“You're hurt” I began, getting his attention, “You're hurt that someone you have feelings for would betray you in such a way”

He looked at me and nodded a bit.

“Betrayal...I believe that is an accurate assessment of what I am feeling” he murmured, getting a far away look in his glowing blue eyes....which oddly reminded me faintly of Tony's old arc reactor.

“Yes, but what's confusing you is that you still like her” I said, his attention snapping back to me.
“You still like her despite the betrayal, even though you want to be angry and hurt” I continued, a touch of pity in my inflection.

“So...What am I to do about these... feelings?” he asked, sounding lost.

“I think you and Wanda need to talk. Neither of you can forgive or move forward until you do” I told him.

“I believe that is the...wisest course of action” he agreed, though I could hear the reluctance in his voice.

God. What do you even say to someone you liked who assaulted you in such a horrible way?

“Good” I said, happy I could at least help him a little, “Now you might want to take the meatballs out of the toaster oven before they turn any blacker”

(Third POV)

“At least things are minimally less awkward” Maria thought exasperatedly.

Truthfully she was fed up with the whole situation.

Fortunately everyone had gotten the meeting memo and had actually arrived on time. She did not want to have to send her agents after them like disobedient children.

“It was easier being the second-in-command of a spy organization” she thought irately.

When Stark had her and the other SHIELD agents he’d taken into SI transferred to the Compound to work as Security and Evacuation agents for the Avengers she had been picturing a job similar in some aspects to her old one at SHIELD.

Instead Steve rarely (if ever) used them as backup in any fashion.

They had basically been relegated to a glorified cleanup crew.

“At least now things will actually start changing around here” she thought, slightly hopeful but nowhere near relieved yet.

Steve was sitting comfortably next to Stark, and Clint (who was now apparently let out of the dog house) was to Natasha’s left.

Even with Vision sitting away from Wanda, and Sam sitting on the other side of the table away from Steve (though he was sitting directly across from him so that was something) it was still progress.

Barnes however was making a point of sitting as far away from Steve (and Wanda) as he could possibly get away with while still sitting at the conference table.

His body language made it very clear that he'd rather be almost anywhere but here.

Unfortunately for him he was involved with this too, and unless he wanted to be contained he needed to follow the terms of his sentence just like everyone else and not disappear into the night.

“Alright. Let’s get all this out of the way shall we?” Hill began, “We called you all here to discuss some very important matters”
“I’d better be important. I’m missing American Horror Story for this” Clint half-joked, earning him an elbow from Natasha.

Hill could only appreciate the attempt at levity so much. The situation at hand was far too serious for Barton’s typical antics, though it was good to see him joking a bit more again.

“The UN has ruled that the Avengers, Lang, and Barnes need to be temporarily monitored by an outside agency for the duration of their probation or until otherwise stated” Hill announced emotionlessly.

“What!?” (Steve, Sam, Clint, Wanda)

Barnes regarded Maria Hill neutrally. “An outside agency…” he thought critically.

It made sense. They were a bunch of either highly trained or enhanced individuals who recently caused a lot of trouble internationally. So being monitored wasn’t that much of a surprise. But for that to truly be effective the ‘outside agency’ would have to be strong enough to contain them if it came down to that, and he wasn’t sure there was a UN approved government agency that….

“No way” Bucky thought, smirking a bit. He really hoped that he was right about who he thought was their new parole officers.

“With all due respect, having an outside agency interfere with the Avengers is one of the major reasons I’m still in disfavor of the Accords” Steve pointed out honestly, making his disfavor of the situation known.

Hill just gave him an unimpressed stare.

“You don’t get a say in the terms of your sentence Captain Rogers. If you are uncooperative you are more than welcome to go to trial instead. Just know that you will be forfeiting your titles and advantageous position to alter the Accords as a result” she declared harshly.

Steve clamped his jaw shut tightly at that. He didn’t like it, but he’d just have to wait an see how much control this ‘outside agency’ could exert over them before making any final judgements.

“So, do we get a name for our new babysitters or what?” Sam inquired curiously.

“You’ve actually met three of them already” Hill stated plainly, waiting to see if they would pick up on the hint.

“You’ve got to be kidding me” Clint demanded disbelievingly, “The pee wees?”

“Are they even qualified to do that? I mean I don’t think any of us even knew they existed until Germany” Sam asked skeptically.

“The UN needed a group that was capable of fighting us if it came down to that. They proved that they had that potential, and apparently their past track record spoke for itself, so the UN ruled in favor of them being our new watchdogs. Though they didn’t give us any actual details on the group itself” Tony said dispassionately, and slightly annoyed.

“Who are they?” Wanda asked, since they still had yet to be given the name of this ‘Task-Force’.

“They’re what you were supposed to be” a familiar voice echoed.

Everyone turned to see Fury skulking out of the corner of the room.
“They’re called the Shadow Guard. They’re a specialized group that protect people from very specific atypical psychotics, and threats to and from the enhanced community” he continued as he strode his way over to Hill.

“There are now fifty homeland divisions stationed in the US. Each division is in charge of a state. And the crime in that ‘territory’ if you will” he said, making himself comfortable, folding his arms behind his back.

“Which division are McCall, Stilinski, and Martin from?” Tony asked curiously.

“The agents you met are primarily in charge of California, however they are also secondarily in charge of New York” Sharon answered, since she was in contact with Agent McCall the most.

“They also have branches out in France, London, and South America that they also partially oversee” she continued neutrally.

“How come they have more duties than the other divisions?” Rhodes asked. That was a lot of responsibilities for three twenty-two year olds to be in charge of.

“Because those three ‘kids’ you met were three of the founding members of the Guard. Forming it when they were nineteen years old when they were faced with the threat of potential global genocide” Fury stated in his usual looking-down-at-you drall.

“Genocide?!”

“Oh. Genocide. And that psycho is unfortunately is still out there” Fury stated, unphased by their reactions.

“Since they created the Guard and are primarily the ones who deal with the psychotic bitch and her neo-nazi global cult of followers, they’re the Head division, meaning they have more overall responsibilities than the rest of the other divisions who only cover matters state wise” Fury explained.

“If they're so wide spread how come we've never heard of them?” Natasha demanded.

“Because I didn't want you to know” Fury stated simply.

Natasha and Clint narrowed their eyes at him.

“The Shadow Guard are on a need to know basis. And none of you needed to know” Fury stated pointedly.

The only reason he even knew was because he had sent Coulson on an undercover mission to investigate the allegations of a nine-something foot tall monster in Beacon Hills. Since then the two of them have kept tabs on the budding young pack of heroes there. He and Coulson nearly had an aneurysm when they had heard about Monroe and Gerard through the grapevine.

The Monroe Republic was a mix of Hitler and Hydra. The next level genocidal maniacs.

Right now the only thing keeping the world from going into a state of apocalypse was the fact Monroe hadn't yet publically revealed the existence of the supernatural.

Beacon Hills knew, but for the most part things have settled down. While there were still tensions at least citizens weren't actively hunting each other anymore.
If Scott joined as an open representative for the Accords it would insight Monroe to reveal the existence of the supernatural to the world. As such Scott can only be a secret representative or a secret consultant so that supernatural beings have a chance to be more fairly represented when the time came for their existence to be revealed.

He wasn't about to risk the state of the world just because the 'boy-band' didn't like his secret keeping. They should know him better than that by now.

“Oh yeah? Why's that?” Clint demanded, irritation clear in his voice.

“What they deal with is well out of most people's area of expertise, let alone yours. Sending the Avengers in to deal with their issues would be like having a heart surgeon do a tonsillectomy” Fury stated sardonically.

“Specialized Task-Force of heroes or not, how do we know we can trust them?” Steve inquired skeptically.

Rogers was right in his concerns and suspicions. A secret Task-Force seemingly widespread that none of them have ever heard about? Only for him to come in and vouch for them while still being cryptic. Fury understood exactly where Steve was coming from, and he knew that Rogers wasn’t the only one to feel that way.

While he couldn't divulge the truth of the real purpose of the Shadow Guard, there was one thing he could reveal that may stop the Avenger's from thinking the absolute worst of the Guard.

“The Shadow Guard has a code that each and every member must honor to their dying breath” Fury stated, getting everyone’s attention.

“And that’d be?” Steve prompted.

“Nous protégeons ceux qui ne peuvent pas se protéger eux-mêmes” Fury answered with a flourish.

Tony blinked in surprise while Natasha gave a small consideratory hum.

“Appropriately fitting for a group of young heroes” Vision thought, thinking back to the three young adults they had met.

“What does that mean?” Sam asked, confused by the french.

And he wasn’t the only one. Wanda, Clint, Rhodes, and Bucky knew other languages, but french wasn’t one of them.

“We protect those who cannot protect themselves” Steve translated with a soft conviction.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoyed all the individual interactions! I tried to make them as canon as possible from what I have observed of each of the characters' interactions with each other in the movies (subtle things that most may not pick up on, but that are important none-the-less).

Steve and Tony are two of the biggest focal points in the MCU so I wanted to
highlight some more of there relationship a bit, especially since their friendship is very different from the comics, AA, and EMH.

Sam and Rhodes were implied to have gotten closer, however the movies never really show them interacting too much so I thought showing that friendship here would be good.

I wanted to give Clint a bit more depth and backstory then what has been shown in the MCU while still keeping canon to his MCU character. I wanted to show the different sides to him. The agent, the hero, the dad, the husband, the friend, the teammate. Hopefully his interaction with Natasha alluded to all that.

I hope you all liked the interaction between Sharon and Vision. I wanted to include an interaction that people wouldn't expect, but one that would work regardless.

And we learn a bit more about the Shadow Guard (the name hath been revealed!). The question is...How close are Fury and Coulson to the Pack? ;)

Comment please!
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Hi all! This chapter ended up being longer too....meh I give on short chapters for now

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Sam's POV)

5:31

“Perfect” I thought, “I’ve got plenty of time”

Steve would be leaving for his morning run in twenty-nine minutes.

Right now he should be in the kitchen polishing off a banana and a third of a loaf of whole-wheat bread with peanut butter.

On most days I would be too (though not quite that much bread), but I found myself dragging my feet this morning as I pulled on my sweats and underarmor.

Steve and I really needed to talk. I couldn’t keep putting it off.

I made my way through the open doorway, and sure enough I saw Steve taking a sip of what was probably orange juice from his Stars and Stripes Keep Calm and Watch Your Language mug (a joke gift from Stark).

“Sam” Steve acknowledged.

“So I hear Stark no longer has you sleeping on the couch” I teased lightly, trying to get the conversation started between us.

Steve just raised an eyebrow in amusement at the husband and wife joke.

Clint, Nat, and I have too much fun with them sometimes.

“The two of us just realized that we're better together” Steve replied, setting down his mug, “I still don't agree with the Accords, but they're not going away so…”

“So who better to tackle it than Iron Man and Captain America” I finished.

Steve nodded in confirmation.

The two of us lapsed in awkward silence as I poured myself some orange juice in my own mug.

I swear Stark gets a kick out of coming up with personal mugs for everyone. Mine had a picture of Blue Falcon and Dynomutt on it (Clint had Merida).

“I'm sorry for not telling you about the deal. You deserved to know” Steve apologized, finally
getting tired of the silence between us.

“Damn right. But that's not the problem Steve” I said firmly. “You can't decide that you know best in every situation. I chose to follow you and I stand by that. We both chose to keep things from Stark. Both. And it almost cost us”

Steve nodded, looking like he had already come to much of the same conclusions.

“I told you that you could count on me, that you could trust me to have your back. But I'm not sure any of us really trust each other” I admitted.

He looked at me in surprise. Actually...he looked mildly offended too.

“Now I know what your gonna say. But really think about it Cap. If we all truly trusted each other above all else none of this would have spiraled the way it did. Stark didn't trust you. You didn't trust him. I didn’t trust him or Nat” I continued, hoping he would understand my point.

“Nobody trusted anybody” Steve pointed out.

“And that's a problem Steve” I emphasized.

After a moment of stubborn consideratory silence he nodded, “I know”.

“Good” I thought. We were making progress.

“I think a large part of that is communication. We don't really know each other” I said, knowing Steve would be annoyed at the insinuation.

And when Steve got that firm set in his jaw I knew I had to cut him off before his stubborn ass even got started.

“You don’t have to know somebody’s favorite color to be able to fight alongside them. Being friends with someone and really knowing them are two different things Steve. You can be friends with someone without really knowing anything about them. It's easy, all you have to do is not ask any 'personal' questions. Which none of us do because we all know we've got things in our past that we don't want to talk about. So we don't” I explained pointedly.

I had spent a lot of time thinking about this. Trust was a major issue. That much was obvious. But after learning that little tidbit about Stark from Rhodes I realized just how much we all kept to ourselves. And that was detrimental.

I consider Nat a friend. I could tell someone how much of a badass fighter and agent she is, but not why or how she learned what she did (not outside the bare-boned basics anyway). I could say that she wants to make up for the red in her ledger, but not what haunts her. I knew she was smitten on Banner, but I was drawing a blank on the possible chemistry there on her end.

I consider myself her friend and yet even after spending so much time on our ‘Bucky-Hunts’ together I don't know anything about her.

As a whole none of us know each other's triggers, or fears. Likes, dislikes, or hobbies. Hell even allergies.

“I'm not going to force anyone to share anything they're not comfortable with” Steve said, sounding much like vibranium personified.
“I’m not asking for that. Just maybe….a team session or something where we can just get some stuff out in the open. Learn some other stuff about each other. Clear some of the tension fog in the air” I explained, hoping to make him more receptive to the idea.

“Team bonding” Steve echoed, as if testing the sound of the idea out loud, “Yeah...yeah I think we could use some of that about now”

“Team bonding” I thought, chuckling a bit.

“What?” he asked, giving me a curious smirk.


“With aerial trust falls and potlucks?” Steve joked after huffing out a laugh.

“Not sure if Vision’s cooking is safe enough quite yet for that last one” I said joking back.

Suddenly the alarm on my watch trilled.

6:00

“We good?” Steve asked gently, a hesitant smile on his face.

“On your right” I said, giving him a light pat to the back as the two of us made our way to the track.

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(Ross’ POV)

I can't say that I'm not relieved to no longer be the Avenger's 'parole officer'. They’re the FBI's headache now.

Fortunately I had gotten off with a warning from my superiors to work on my professionalism and to keep my personal viewpoints to myself.

Though I had only gotten a warning all my past cases were being reviewed to make sure everyone I had arrested was given a fair trial, and until further notice all future arrests would be too.

Even though I had never once unlawfully detained someone it was still my own fault for shooting myself in the foot with my wise-ass comment to Rogers.

Fortunately I still had my job.

“Speaking of which” I thought.

“Move-in Day” I sing-songed to myself lightly as I made my way through the containment floor.

Finally I reached the door I was looking for.

“I hope you like your new cell” I said mockingly as I entered the containment room.

There was something deeply satisfying seeing Zemo cuffed and restrained in a tiny reinforced containment cell.

Using the Winter Soldier’s former containment cell had been Secretary Ross’ idea.
While perhaps overkill for a baseline human I had felt it was appropriately ironic.

Besides, something told me that Zemo would be smart enough to escape out of most other cells if he wanted too.

“From here on out you will be detained here until after the conclusion of your trial. Meals are at eight and five. Toilet privilege is twice a day” I informed him, walking closer to the unit.

“Raise your voice. Zap. Touch the glass. Zap. You step out of line, you deal with me. Please, step out of line” I said mockingly, now directly in front of Zemo, even bringing my hands together in a mock prayer pose, a gratifying smirk on my face.

Not even a spark of emotion flickered in his stony expression.

“So how’s it feel? You spent all that time, all that effort, and you see it fail, so spectacularly” I mocked, trying to get something out of him.

There had to have been more to his plan. His agenda. What had been his ultimate endgame through all this?

Suddenly...a flicker. Quick like a blink.

“Are you so sure?” Zemo rasped lowly...ominously

An ember igniting in his eyes.

“Tell me. The Avengers. Do they know?” he asked, low, questioning, mocking.

“Know what? How much a nutcase you are?” I retorted sarcastically, I didn’t like this.

A soft mocking upward quirk of his lips. A raging fire.

“An empire toppled by its enemies can rise again. But one which crumbles from within? That's dead. Forever” Zemo stated in ominous satisfaction, the fire blazing even brighter.

My bravado dropped, my smirk along with it.

I didn’t like this.

I didn’t like this at all.

Zemo wasn’t done.

I immediately turned to walk out of the room, not caring that Zemo would have the satisfaction of ruffling me.

I really needed to make a phone call.

(Third POV)

“The trial for international terrorist Helmut Zemo is scheduled for the 10th of July. The Sokovian ex-special forces operative is allegedly the true culprit behind the bombing in Vienna, and the Mastermind behind framing the Winter Soldier in an elaborate plot against the Avengers. Thankfully he was arrested by a United States FBI Task-Force before his interference caused any more tragedies” Will Adams reported.
“That’s right Will. Once again the Avengers and their enemies have caused more undo harm to the very public they’re supposed to protect” Christine chastised with a smile.

“Which leads to more questions whether or not heroes should be allowed to operate independently or not” Will continued more lightly, “While oversight is important the Accords have already shown to have more than a few holes that assisted in Helmut Zemo’s alleged plot against the Avengers”

“Only time will tell then Will” Christine allowed, giving him a sharp smile.

Tony couldn't help but roll his eyes as he aimed another paper football at the wastebasket. Christine Everhart was a good reporter, never held back her opinion or facts from anyone. She was no doubt still plotting ways to convince her co-anchor that heroes should be regulated after he challenged her to try and change his mind on the topic.

“In other news, the new King of Wakanda has announced that he will be funding the reparations from the damages done to the overpass in Bucharest, and will be providing compensation to the families of the victims of the bridge collapse. Take a look” Will said, the screen changing to a clip of the young King:

“I stand here ashamed of the role in the harm of a great many innocent people I have played. I cannot change the consequences my actions have caused, consequences that the innocent people of Romania will be suffering the rest of their lives for. I am not looking for forgiveness, for that is not a right for me to ask of anyone. All I ask is that the families and government of Romania allow me to assist in any way that I can to repair in any small way the damage that has been caused” T’Challa announced, sounding both regretful and regal.

The screen shifted back to the WHiH news anchors.

“Humbling words from a King” Will credited.

“Humbling or damning?” Christine challenged, “Back to you Jackson”

Natasha half listened to her former SHIELD colleague turn tv reporter.

Jackson Norris, (ex) codename Nighthawk.

After SHIELD fell she had offered him and a few others the option of becoming Avengers, only to be turned down. Though she knew he still assisted the Defenders in Hell’s Kitchen every once in a blue moon.

Tony kept tabs on all the costumed heroes popping up (a tactical move she appreciated).

Before it had been for knowledge’s sake and possible recruitment. Now with the possible threat of the Accords it was more about potential protection.

She subtly surveyed the room again. The Avengers (and Barnes) we're waiting in the lounge room for the members of the Shadow Guard to arrive.

She'd be lying if she said she wasn't skeptical of the group’s intentions. They already made it clear that they do not approve of the Avengers.

While Scott was diplomatic enough he made it very clear that if it came down to it he would kill them if he had to.
Stilinski was openly hostile, and that Martin girl no doubt had a chip on her shoulder.

Frankly she couldn't blame her. If she had precognitive powers that revolved around death she'd be pissed off at them too.


With all the casualties in the last four years it really wasn't a surprise that she wasn't their biggest fan.

The two other agents coming with them however were complete wild cards. From the pictures Sharon showed them she recalled seeing both of them at airport, however, neither of them had said anything to them so their personalities and opinions on them were an unknown.

Tearing herself out of her mind she watched as Clint and Tony tried to outdo each other in shooting paper footballs into a wastebasket they had moved in front of them.

It was amusing to say the least.

Clint may be the best marksman on the team, but Tony was no slouch either. His genius allowing him to make “unfairly aerodynamic footballs” (according to Clint), and the fact that he could calculate the force, angle, and trajectory needed to get the football in the wastebasket made it so the two of them were consistently tied.

“Dammit you fucker miss” Clint cursed, though there wasn’t any heat in his voice.

“Remember Clint, Steve's ears are sensitive to that kind of talk” she teased, not being able to help herself.

“Don't make me have to get the soap” Steve teased right back, raising both an eyebrow and the corner of his lips in a half-smirk.

“Tell me it's at least lemon flavored” Tony said between laughs.

“Lemon? Dude, clearly you've never had soap shoved in your mouth. Two words. Mint soap” Clint countered.

Steve couldn't help but smirk as Tony and Clint went at their usual banter.

This is what he enjoyed.

It's been a long time since (almost) everyone was together in the same area that wasn't a meeting room.

He just wished it was under better circumstances.

“The Shadow Guard” Steve mulled over to himself.

He was torn. Trusting a secret government agency that worked in the shadows wasn't going to happen any time soon. But he wanted to give them the benefit of the doubt.

They were young ki-adults. Not only that, they were young heroes who just wanted to make a difference.

They stopped Zemo, freed Bucky of the bombing charges, and diverted what would've probably ended up an irreparable split between the Avengers.
While they still had a million issues between them things were still better than they had been two days ago. And Scott, Stiles, and Lydia were to thank for it.

While the three of them were for the most part critical (and hostile) they did seem to genuinely want to help too.

He just had to think of them as young heroes rather than agents.

He looked around at his team.

Natasha was sitting at the opposite end of the couch with Clint and Tony between them.

Vision was in the kitchen preparing a snack for their ‘guests’ with Wanda helping him here and there. Vision was still pretty stiff around her, but it was still a step in the right direction for them he supposed.

Rhodes had challenged Sam to a game of pool. From what he saw Rhodes looked to be winning.

Out of respect he tried not to linger his gaze too long on Bucky who had taken up a position near the back windows.

“Hopefully we can make the most of all this and show the Shadow Guard that we aren't so bad after all” Steve thought.

Bucky ignored Roger's (Steve's) gaze and continued to survey the room.

An open layout. Not too spacious but not small either. Comfortable. The wall-high glass windows let in a lot of sunlight, giving the room a cheery feel.

At the same time one could stand anywhere and still be able to see everyone occupying the space. There was only one exit door, small vents, and the windows were reinforced to withstand small explosions which limited escape options.

All-in-all it was a strategically well picked room.

The room was familiar for the Avengers and a good first meeting place for their new parole officers.

Truthfully he didn't mind the situation all that much.

He liked Scott, Stiles, and Lydia.

And for whatever reason they seemed to like him.

Or at the very least they didn't hold his time as the Winter Soldier against him.

They treated him as if he wasn't a psychologically unstable near one-hundred year old POW (which he was).

It was….nice.

He had no past connection to them so it was just...easier to relax the ingrained Hydra training around them. To be...whoever it was he is now.

After that day on the helicarriers he had spent the last few years trying to piece himself back together.
It had taken about a year for his enhanced healing factor to fix the fog across his mind caused by the years worth of damage from the Chair. Since then little memories had been popping up here and there (mostly memories of his victims).

In that time he made sure to hide from Rogers (Steve) just as much as much as he was making sure to avoid what was left of Hydra.

Rogers (Steve)...confused him.

He knew him. From before.

Which is why he needed to figure things out for himself first. Being around him...had hurt.

He needed his memories to come back naturally...Rogers (Steve), he could tell would've...pushed too much. Expected too much.

Wish for him to be someone he just wasn't anymore.

He needed to figure out who he was now just as much, if not more, than anything else.

His time in Romania had started allowing for that.

But fighting alongside Rogers (Steve), talking with him...felt right too. Like another part of him was slotting into place.

Which is why everything hurt all that much more.

How Rogers (Steve) could ever willingly let a Hydra agent on the team was beyond him.

He didn't care that she regret her actions.

He didn't care that Hydra orchestrated the riots she and her brother had gone to.

He didn't care that she joined under false pretenses.

It was Hydra.

False pretenses or not there was no way she couldn't have known the things they were doing.

Hill had let him see her record.

Torture. Mind manipulation.

She knew and she chose to stay.

Even if she and her brother were using Hydra as a means to an end she still willingly did everything they asked of her.

She may have wanted to purge Sokovia of war, but her anger and lust for vengeance blinded her so much that she didn't see what was right under her nose.

That Hydra was responsible for the war in Sokovia.

Though (reluctantly) he could see why even Stark would cut her some slack there.

Stark had been gaslighted his entire life by Obadiah Stane (he knew this as a fact because it had been his mission to watch all the Starks).
But even still.

Stark had known Stane since he was born.

Hydra was an infamous neo-nazi organization.

Only so much slack can be given.

Ironically out of everyone he related the best to Stark (and possibly Romanoff...who for whatever reason nagged at his memory too).

Said man was currently sitting on the couch on the other side of the lounge area away from the Witch, with Rogers (Steve) sitting next to him.

Seeing Rogers (Steve) sitting so casually near Stark grated on him.

“How can Stark just forgive him so easily?” Bucky wondered angrily, bitterly.

He still couldn't believe Rogers (Steve) invited the Witch to be an Avenger after she messed with all of their heads.

Even if he didn't know that she mind-raped Stark he still knew that she had set the Hulk on Johannesburg.

His own teammates, his (supposed) friends, left because of her and he still let her join.

He can get over Rogers (Steve) not telling him about Stark's deal. Things went to hell-in-a-handbasket too quickly for him to have been told about it anyway.

What he couldn't get over was that even knowing that he was brainwashed by Hydra for seventy years he still allowed a mind-raping Hydra agent onto the team.

And had expected him to be okay with her.

To sympathize with her.

He had actually thought that they'd bond.

Minor deception or not, there was nothing remotely similar about their situations.

Hill had said that Rogers (Steve) had sympathized with her and her brother.

That in itself worried him.

For a moment he actually considered the possibility the Witch had done something to his head.

But no.

It was just his stupid compassion and sympathies.

It made him want to punch the blonde in his stupid face...or smack him upside the head.

Oddly that emotion didn't feel out of place for him. And somehow that just irritated him more.

“Don’t do anything stupid until I get back”

“How can I? You're taking all the stupid with you”
It took a moment for him to process the new (old) memory.
Comparing the scrappy wise-ass midget to the tall disillusioned sarcastic man in front of him.
“Guess I left some stupid behind after all” Bucky thought with a scoff.

(Scott's POV)

“Chocolate covered strawberry?” Kira asked sweetly, holding one of the sugary fruits up to my lips.
I quirked a quick smile at her, taking a bite out of the strawberry in her fingertips.
“Hey Derek-” Stiles began.
“I'm not feeding you strawberries” Derek said, bluntly cutting him off.
“First, if I'm going to ask anyone in this limo to feed me strawberries it would be Lydia...or Scott, not you. Second I was gonna tell you to move over. You're blocking the curly fries” Stiles emphasized.
Derek rolled his eyes, stubbornly staying in place.
I ignored the two of them as Stiles tried to wrestle past Derek to reach his fried golden treasure.
At least it was temporarily taking Stiles’ mind off of our current situation.

*Flashback*

“No”
“Stiles”
“No”
“This is an order from the UN”
“F the UN. Maybe then those blowhards will finally get the sticks out of their ass”
“Can you tone down the usual level of sarcasm for just two minutes and be serious here?” Rafael demanded exasperatedly.
“Only if you start thinking without your usual level of stupidity” Stiles fired right back, intentionally mirroring their conversation back at the hospital when the Darack had captured their parents.
“Stiles. You don't have a choice in the matter. The UN near unanimously agreed to have the Shadow Guard oversee the Avengers until their probation is up” Rafael stated.
“We’re not babysitters! This isn't what we do! This isn't what we were created for!” Stiles countered angrily.
“Stiles isn’t wrong. The Task-Force was first created as a legal way for the Pack to combat the Monroe Republic” Argent said stepping in, “Now we’ve expanded our ranks and are in charge of monitoring any matter that is related to the supernatural and handling it. The only time we ever
intersect with the Avengers is when we scout out Hydra bases to make sure they stay ignorant of the supernatural and that they’re not working with Monroe”

“As far as the UN is aware you are an investigative and strike team that deals with unusual circumstances and unusual people” Rafael rebutted, “Since the supernatural is omitted out of any official record, to them it looks like the Task-Force deals with psychotics and enhanced criminals”

“Meaning we’re perfect babysitters for the out of control Avengers” Lydia finished, an exasperated frown settling on her face.

“And there’s no way we can argue against it?” I questioned, trying not to sound too hopeful.

“Unfortunately no” Rafael said, giving his son an apologetic look.

“They do realize we’re deployed on missions right?” Mason asked.

“Speaking of which, is there a reason I’m not already on my way back to France right now? I’m supposed to be meeting up with Isaac for another recon mission” Malia asked, thoroughly annoyed.

She and Isaac were informants and liaisons in the European-France sector, in charge of scouting and recon for their area. Isaac had been left in charge while she went with the rest to the airport after capturing Zemo.

“The UN wanted ten individuals, specifically from your division” Rafael reluctantly revealed.

“Ten!” I shouted in disbelief.

“One member per Avenger, current and old, and they want additional one-to-ones for Scott Lang, and James Barnes” Rafael detailed unhappily.

“That’s basically a third of our entire home division!” I stated, giving my dad an are-you-serious-right-now face.

A majority of our division of the Shadow Guard was comprised mainly of the members of the McCall Pack. Those that weren’t were allies we had made that had been interested in joining the Task-Force.

“They’re asking for the impossible” Argent stated, firmly but calmly.

“And I told them that. The best I could do was get the panel to agree to only have one-to-ones for those on probation, and that if a serious matter came up that you’d all be allowed to leave. However, others must be sent in your place in case the ‘Rogues’ try to escape” Rafael explained bitterly.

“For an Agency Representative you’re not very good at representing our agency” Stiles jabbed.

Rafael glared at Stiles, placing his hands on his hips.

“So how many in our division are they asking for now then?” Scott asked, trying to keep his headache at bay.

“Six. Including you, Stiles, and Lydia. The three of you were non-negotiable” Rafael stated, making it clear that whether they wanted to or not they had to go.

“This just keeps getting better” Stiles said sarcastically.
“So three more then” I mumbled, annoyed and exhausted.

“So who else is going?” Malia asked, getting impatient. If she had to go Scott better let her punch one of the Avengers in the face. It would be good catharsis.

While Stiles and Argent are the leaders on paper, and while on ops, I was still the Alpha. It was ultimately up to me to decide who of the Pack would go.

“Derek and Kira. Corey I want you to keep an eye on Lang” I decided finally.

Derek and I would be able to handle Rogers and Barnes, Stiles could subdue Wanda, and either Lydia or Kira could handle Falcon or Hawkeye.

“Why me?” Corey asked confused. He wasn't the best physical fighter, and a majority of his abilities weren't suited for combat purposes.

“He'll be at home not at the Compound. We need someone who won't draw too much attention while they're surveying him” I said, explaining my reasoning.

“But what if he tries to escape? He shrinks” Corey pointed out worriedly.

“The suit should have already been confiscated by Hank Pym. It was one of the reasons he was allowed to go home rather than being held at the Compound” Rafael explained.

“And if for whatever reason it wasn't I can go with him. I know it's a stretch, but I might be able to find him if he does shrink” Mason backed.

“You can take shifts” I agreed. We would need a backup for Lang anyway.

“If everything's decided, then you're expected to arrive at the Compound tomorrow” Rafael stated.

But before anyone could move Theo stepped forward.

“I'm going” Theo announced firmly, lifting his head up to look at me.

“Uh, no you're not” Stiles stated.

“I'm going. You know why?” Theo reiterated, making himself sound as if he were an impenetrable wall.

“Because of her” he said, pointing to the picture of Wanda Maximoff on the screen.

“She might regret her actions but she's still making the same mistakes” Theo continued, “None of you good-two-shoes can relate to her. You need my perspective in order to truly get through to her”

*End Flashback*

I shifted in my seat a bit as we waited for the limo to drop us all off at the Avenger's Compound.

Theo had been miffed about being left behind, but I promised him that he'd be on rotation if (and when) we had to be pulled away on a mission.

Theo wasn't wrong. Out of all of us he was the best equipped to understand the Scarlet Witch.

But Theo was naturally abrasive and had a talent for immediately rubbing people the wrong way.
The Avengers would already be wary of us as is, and we didn't end on the best note the last time we were in the same room together. If we wanted the Avengers to trust us then we needed to avoid instigating conflict as much as possible. And with Stiles (and even Derek) they would have enough problems as is.

Theo was our backup plan number one for her.

Hopefully that won’t be necessary.

(Third POV)

“When are the pee wees supposed to get here?” Clint asked, scoring his last paper football.

“Soon. Last I had Friday check the limo wasn't too far out” Tony answered, giving a victorious “yes” when he scored his last paper football too.

Clint groaned, flopping back against the couch dramatically.

“This is payback for the darts thing isn't it?” Clint demanded, still facing the ceiling.

“I have no idea what you're talking about” Tony replied sarcastically, feigning ignorance.

“Boss there is a missile headed straight for the Compound!” Friday declared suddenly, sounding worried.

“Where?” Steve demanded, immediately lifting himself off the couch.

The rest of the Avengers (and Bucky) grouped together near him.

“Less than a mile out due 4:00 in front of you Captain” Friday warned, sounding a bit frantic.

They turned to see a dot closing in on them fast, smoke streaming behind it.

“Wanda catch it!” Steve commanded.

Immediately following his order Wanda’s hands were surrounded by the scarlet red of her powers, halting the missile a good five hundred feet from the Compound.

Just as everyone breathed a sigh of relief a compartment on the suspended bomb opened up, releasing another smaller missile hidden inside.

“Get down!” Steve shouted right as the missile struck the side of the Compound in front of them.

BOOM!

Glass, rubble, dust and fire bit at the group. The concussion of the blast flinging them all backwards.

Vision who had been mostly unaffected due to his vibranium body surged forward, catching Wanda mid-air and using himself as a shield to protect her from the rest of the rubble.

Steve had grabbed onto Tony before he had the chance to try and dodge behind the couch like Clint and Natasha. As they were flung backwards Steve made sure Tony landed on him as they hit the ground hard, both of them momentarily stunned from the impact.
Natasha and Clint were recovering from being mowed down by the couch that had been pushed back and lifted up off the ground by the blast.

Fortunately for Bucky, Sam, and Rhodes they had been far enough away from the front windows that they were only knocked back two feet.

Bucky, recovering much quicker than the two baseline humans, immediately sat up after shaking his head to clear the momentary daze.

To his horror he saw two more missiles barring down on them.

“Shit” he cursed, looking quickly over at the Witch to see that she had taken a hit to the head (probably by some debris), “More incoming!!”

“Vision!” Steve shouted, getting the android's attention.

Vision removed his arms from Wanda, and lifted up off of the ground, soaring towards the incoming missiles no more than five hundred feet from them.

“There's no way he'll be fast enough to get both in time” Rhodes realized in a panic.

“Brace yourselves!” Steve called out again, adjusting his grip to shield Tony again.

“Shit!” Clint cursed, turning his head away to shield his eyes and potentially brace his head for yet another impact.

Only it never came.

Each of the Avengers cautiously turned their heads back to the last direction of the missile, only to see that it was suspended mid-air two feet from the ground.

Only it wasn't suspended by scarlet red.

It was suspended by golden yellow.

Vision slowly made his descent, curiously analyzing the energy surrounding the missile.

“What the hell?” Sam muttered.

“Really? We're not even here five minutes and you're already causing us trouble?” a voice behind them demanded.

Everyone's attention snapped to the front entryway.

But what they saw wasn't anything they had been expecting.

Chapter End Notes

Cliff-hanger ;)

Hoped you liked Bucky's POV!

There are multiple little foreshadowing bits in this chapter so make sure you paid
attention!

Please, Please comment!!!
Hey guys. Sorry I'm a day late! I had a lot going on so I wasn't able to update this last night.

I hope it's worth the extra day wait!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Third POV)

“Really? We're not even here five minutes and you're already causing us trouble?” a voice behind them demanded.

Everyone's attention snapped to the front entryway.

But what they saw wasn't anything they had been expecting.

Agent Stilinski was standing firm, poised in a similar manner to Wanda when she was using her powers.

But rather than scarlet red, a golden yellow illuminated his hands, giving them an ethereal glow.

While Wanda's powers were reminiscent of blood and fury, Agent Stilinski reminded them of the bright rays of the sun.

When he flipped over the hand reaching out closest to the direction of the bomb, raising his hand palm up ever so slightly, the Avengers turned back to see the missile lifting up and away into the air.

When it was about a mile up Stiles focused his energy on the missile.

“Crush” he thought assuredly, his magic reacting to the firmness in his belief and command, crushing the missile and causing it to detonate harmlessly in the sky.

Wanda watched in amazement at the effortlessness the Agent wielded his powers.

“So I was right” Natasha thought, “He’s an enhanced just like McCall and Martin…A powerful one at that”

“This isn't done” Stiles announced, sounding for the first time since the airport like the FBI agent in charge he was, “There are foot soldiers attacking different points of the Compound. The five of us split up to cover all the areas. The missiles were a preemptive strike”

Steve snapped out of his shock and back into soldier-mode.

“Do we know how many?” he asked, wishing he had his shield with him.

“Not as a whole” Stiles answered.
“Friday scan for the number of intruders” Tony ordered.

“On it Boss” Friday replied.

“Think we got time to grab our gear?” Sam asked, though he was pretty sure he already knew the answer.

“As much as I'd like my arrows I don't think getting our favorite toys is the priority right now” Clint replied, “Besides I got a few knives on me and I know Nat's got to be carrying on her too”

Steve knew Sam and Bucky could hold their own in hand-to-hand, Rhodes outside the suit had his military training, and Wanda and Vision had their powers. His only concern was Tony's safety.

His worry must have been apparent because Tony gave him an annoyed eyeroll.

“I've got my watch Spangles. I won't be weighing anyone down” Tony said.

Before Steve could comment further Natasha cut him off.

“Tony can fight outside the suit Steve. You've just never been around to see it” Natasha chastised lightly.

Steve blinked in surprise at Natasha's defense, though he couldn't really say that she was wrong. He'd only ever seen Tony fighting in the armor on missions.

“He disabled my gun and even landed a blow on me while I was in Winter Soldier mode Rog-Steve. He's a grown boy. He can take care of himself” Bucky joined in.

It took Steve a moment to fully process Bucky's words, but he nodded none-the-less.

“Maybe I should have been more insistent in Tony taking part in team sparring days” Steve wondered thoughtfully, his mind already making a few plans to be put aside for later.

“Boss there are seven on the quinjet pad, three in the radio tower, nine are on their way to the Hub, seven are headed to the labs, and ten are converging upon your location. Five from the southwest corridor, and five from the northeast. All armed with machine guns” Friday relayed.

“My agents are already split up at those areas” Stiles announced.

Steve nodded.

“Protecting the Compound and the people here are the priority. Split up and take'em out. Rhodes, you and Clint take the northeast corridor. Natasha, Sam southwest. Wanda, you-”

“The Witch comes with me” Stiles cut off, sounding like the matter was non-negotiable.

Steve glared at the kid for cutting him off and inserting himself into his team's play.

“My job is to make sure her powers don't go out of control, or that she uses them in a reckless manner that oh say, destroys more of the Compound unnecessarily. She Comes With Me” Stiles stated firmly, not giving an inch.

“Fine” Steve relented, they needed to get moving and it wasn't worth it to waste time arguing over a simple matter like this, he could adapt the plan easy enough to the change. Besides, Agent Stilinski’s powers seemed to be similar to Wanda's, so maybe it'll do her some good to see him fight.
“You and Wanda head to the lab” Steve ordered.

Stiles nodded, appeased enough.

Seeing Agent Stilinski’s approval Steve continued.

“Bucky you and Vision take the landing pad and radio tower. Tony and I will cover the Hub” Steve finished.

Tony fought the urge to let out a sigh in annoyance.

“You know what my agents look like?” Stiles asked, not fully trusting that the Avengers won’t attack them ‘accidentally’.

“We do” Steve answered assuredly.

Stiles looked to the rest of the Avengers for additional confirmation.

When each of them nodded he relented.

“Let's give these guys a warm welcome”

Natasha and Sam agreed that an ambush would probably be the safest option.

They had chosen the end of a corridor that opened up into two corridors going left and right. The two of them were waiting on opposite sides at the end of the corridor, Natasha on the left, Sam on the right, waiting for the enemy to come to them.

Sure enough they heard the shuffle of boots across the tile and the occasional clicks from hands shifting on the guns as the enemy moved about.

Nat held up a fist.

“Ten feet” she calculated mentally, listening and measuring the enemy’s distance by their boots.

One finger.

6 feet.

Two fingers.

3 feet.

Without even lifting up a third finger Natasha swung up her left arm in an arc, jamming the blade of her knife into the hand of Enemy #1, forcing him to drop the gun from the pain as she reached out with her right hand to grasp his left shoulder, using his body as leverage to lift herself up, bringing her legs up and perpendicular to his body and wrapping them around the neck of Enemy #2 beside him. Shifting her right hand to wrap around Enemy #1’s neck she twisted her body down, snapping both their necks as they hit the ground. Using the momentum she rolled into a crouch, quickly scanning her surroundings for both more assailants and Sam.

Working with Natasha as much as he had he learned pretty quickly that two fingers meant 2-3 feet incoming. As soon as he saw the nozzle of the machine gun he shifted sideways, using his left hand to shove the gun towards the tile and immediately moving his right arm into an elbow strike, hearing the satisfying crack of the man’s nose as he went down to the floor, stunned by the pain.
Still holding onto the machine gun the guy had let go of, he swung it up in an arc at the second guy's head, taking advantage of the man's startle from his comrade being knocked to the floor. As the second guy dropped he heard the tell-tale sound of a machine gun being loaded.

“One held himself back in case of an ambush” Natasha realized. They had been played.

But before the trigger was fully pressed down.

Before Sam and Natasha tried to scurry away.

A figure somersaulted over the enemy, landing to the man's right.

Before anyone could react Kira swung down her sword, slicing through the barrel of the machine gun as if it were butter.

Before the barrel had even hit the tile Kira rammed the hilt of her sword into the man's face, knocking him unconscious before he had even hit the floor.

Kira looked back to see Sam raising his eyebrows and Natasha analyzing her skeptically.

“Tough Asian parents?” Sam asked sarcastically.

“Quality mother-daughter time was a little different by most people's standards” Kira joked with a smile.

Clint and Rhodes both agreed to hide out in a widened section of the northeast corridor. Clint had hidden himself in the rafters, while Rhodes had take up position behind a couch that was facing the ceiling-to-floor windows overlooking the pool area.

Rhodes was grateful that Nat had lent him the Glock she had been carrying on her.

Hearing the shuffle of boots Rhodes cautiously peered out from the corner of the couch, taking aim and firing two rounds at the intruder heading the group. Immediately after he fired four more rounds, two in each of the two other intruders angled towards him.

The intruders stumbled, but his bullets were rendered ineffective against their (now confirmed) bullet-proof vests.

Dodging back behind the couch, the intruders aimed their machine guns in his direction, firing streams of bullets that shredded the couch, cotton and foam flinging everywhere.

Clint threw down his knives at the enemy, jamming the blades into the hammer of two of the guns just as the trigger was pressed, causing two of the machine guns to explode, the shrapnel and flames stunning two of them and giving the other three a nasty shock.

Before Rhodes could shoot the intruders in the face, or Clint drop down onto one of their shoulders, Lydia Martin rushed forward, kicking one of the intruders from behind and pushing him into the enemy in front of him, knocking them both onto the floor.

Turning her attention to the one intruder still standing she roundhouse kicked the machine gun out of his hands. When he went to grab her wrists she maneuvered them out of his grasp just like Parrish had shown her years ago and shoved them outward so that he couldn't block her kick to his stomach. As he bent forward from the pain she used his knee as leverage, lifting herself up, wrapping her legs around his neck and twisting her weight down to toss him unconscious onto the
From where she was crouched on the ground she flung her head up, her hair lifting up out of her eyes. The two men she had knocked over earlier had already gotten back up and taken aim at her.

She was preparing herself to *scream* when a bullet ripped into Intruder Left's neck and Clint took out Intruder Right with a flying knee kick between the shoulderblades, slamming him into the floor.

With the enemies defeated Lydia stood up, poised and looking like she was about to take command of a board meeting.

Rhodes moved out from his position behind the couch to stand by Clint.

Rhodes will be the first to admit that he hadn't thought much of the young woman. She was an enhanced and a part-time agent and consultant, but that didn't mean she knew how to fight...He should know better by now that appearances can be deceiving.

Clint was thinking much of the same, though his thoughts traveled to another red-head he was very familiar with.

“Just what the world needs. Another scary talented petite red-head” Clint mumbled sarcastically.

Lydia just gave them a smug smile, flipped her hair back at them and strut away. In. Her. *Heels*.

“Its as if Nat and Pepper somehow had a kid...” Rhodey trailed off.

The two men shuddered at the thought.

Stiles and Wanda stuck close to the sides of the hallways as they made their way down to the labs, Stiles taking point.

“How much further?” Stiles asked, keeping his tone neutral.

“It’s the floor below us. The elevator is-”

“No elevator. They'll hear us coming. Where are the stairs?” Stiles cut off.

“The stairs are near the elevator” Wanda replied, slightly annoyed at being cut off, but she supposed he wasn't wrong. If they took the elevator they'd be sitting ducks if those doors opened and the enemy was on the other side.

When the two of them arrived at the elevator section Stiles took a moment to look through the tiny window to see if there was anyone in the stairwell.

Seeing no one he turned the door handle so painstakingly slow Wanda thought she was going to end up shoving him aside and open it herself. Steve had never taken this long to open a door, even on stealth missions.

Unbeknownst to her Stiles was doing so on purpose to see her temperament level in high-anxiety and high-patience situations (Though it *was* actually necessary to turn the handle so slowly so the sound wouldn't give away their position. After all he didn’t have enhanced hearing to tell if there was actually anyone in the stairwell).

Stiles internally patted himself on the back when the door didn't squeak as it opened.
The two of them slowly made their way down the stairwell, checking and listening for any unfriendly company.

Reaching the doorway to the labs Stiles cautiously peered through the tiny window.

“They already reached the lab and rounded up the scientists” Stiles relayed, “Two are guarding the hostages, one is guarding the door and another is facing the elevator”

“That leaves three unaccounted for” Wanda stated.

“They're probably inside the lab” Stiles said, moving aside so Wanda could look as well.

“What is it?” Stiles asked when he saw her face scrunch a bit in confusion.

“Dr. Cho and Dr. Selvig are not with the hostages” she said.

“Which means whatever they're here for they need them, hence the three unaccounted enemy” Stiles muttered.

“What's the plan?” Wanda asked, ready to fight.

“Can you make a force-field?” Stiles asked her.

“I can” she replied.

“How many can you shield?” he asked, “Can you make a shield large enough to protect all the hostages and yourself without the size compromising the integrity?”

Wanda took another look through the window.

Eight.

“I can” she replied confidently. Steve and Natasha had trained her to be able to reliably shield up to ten under heavy gunfire.

“I can subdue the four guards on my own. I want you to stay by the scientists and guard them while I go look for Cho and Selvig” Stiles ordered.

“I can help you” Wanda stated, put out that he was brushing her off.

“I'm sure you could, but this isn't about who has the bigger stick” Stiles deadpanned.

“That's not a reason” Wanda stated through grit teeth.

“Fine. Your typical fighting style revolves around using your telekinesis to toss people and objects around. There is sensitive equipment in the lab and god-knows what else. You go in there fighting like you usually do you could end up accidentally releasing a toxic gas or destroy someone's life work” Stiles chastised.

Wanda blinked in surprise. She hadn't thought he had a legitimate reason in telling her to stay behind. She had thought it was his bias against her. She hadn't thought about how precarious their position was. One wrong move and something could blow up.

“Listen I get it. You're not used to thinking tactically like that. Truthfully it's Rogers fault for sending us down here. Your typical fighting style really isn't suited for delicate situations like this. My guess is that he thought our powers would be needed for whatever nefarious plans they had for
the lab...It also didn't help that nobody had their gear and everyone was stretched thin” Stiles explained, sounding like having to give Steve the benefit of the doubt caused him to swallow a lemon.

Wanda nodded slowly. Steve was usually pretty on point. Thinking a little more in depth about the situation for the first time she realized that Steve had probably sent them down here because of Stiles’ powers and FBI training, and the fact that if needed she had her mental manipulation as a backup if things got hairy.

“My advice for you going forward is to make sure you take in your surroundings and location so that you know the limits of what you can and can't do with your powers. If you're stuck, think outside the box. Use other facets of your powers. You do that and it limits the possibility of casualties from unintentional accidents” Stiles advised.

Wanda resisted the urge to wince at the obvious reference to Lagos.

“The scientists need to be protected. Innocent civilians are always the top priority above capturing the assailant” Stiles stated matter-of-factly.

Wanda nodded. She was ready to do as he ordered.

“Then let's get this party started” Stiles muttered, turning to look through the window again.

He took a deep breath and focused his magic, his hand glowing golden yellow. Focusing his belief he willed each of the guns to turn into rope and bind the enemy soldiers.

The soldiers startled as their guns twisted and transformed into black ropes, winding around their arms like vices.

Smirking Stiles opened the door, Wanda following close behind him.

Wanda looked around amazed at the struggling soldiers.

“Knock'm out” Stiles ordered, giving her a playful go-ahead gesture.

Summoning her powers into her hands she concentrated the energy in her palms, and then in quick succession she released the concussive force at the men, knocking them all backwards into the walls and unconscious.

Yes. She could see now how her powers would be inefficient inside the lab.

“I'm going to look for Cho and Selvig. Guard them” Stiles said, moving a bit more cautiously into the lab.

“Thanks for getting me the rifle” Bucky said as he made his way across the Compound rooftop.

“Your plan was sound. I saw no reason to not comply with your request” Vision stated, floating next to him as they made their way to the edge of the roof.

“Once I’m in position I’ll start picking off the ones on the tarmac, you take care of the ones who’ve hijacked the jets” Bucky stated, setting up the stand to lay the sniper rifle down on.

“I shall free the agents held captive within the radio tower after the jets have been cleared” Vision stated, sounding a bit more robotic in his tone as he pushed down his emotions so that he could more efficiently make decisions through logic during battle.
Bucky loaded the rifle, sliding down onto his stomach, feeling more at home then he’d like to admit.

*Looking through my scope I saw the tell-tale uniform of a Hydra shooter that had snuck up to higher ground, taking aim at Captain America’s unguarded head. The punk always did leave himself open to attacks from higher ground. Firing sure and true the scum didn’t know what hit’em until he was toppling over the rubble. Stevie giving me a two-fingered salute. Satisfied, I reloaded my rifle. Damn punk didn’t need to watch his rock-hard head so long as I was here.*

He bent his head down, angling through the scope as if it was an extension of himself.

One.

And like the mark of the gun starting a race Vision was off, soaring through the air as fast as any of his bullets.

Two.

Vision had already phased through the first quinjet, the screams of surprise from two soldiers reaching his ears. He changed the angle of his rifle.

Three.

Vision exited the jet and into the second. Another startled scream.

Four.

Targets neutralized. удовлетворение.

“I won't do it” Helen repeated firmly.

“I must confess that I don't know why someone like yourself would be so...resistant to our request” Miriam confessed curiously.

“You're asking me to take a part of someone away that makes them who they are” Helen condemned, sounding appalled.

“We're asking a fellow victim to cure the world of a plague that is killing it's true people” Miriam corrected.

“You're asking me to create a serum to remove powers from those that are enhanced” Helen countered scathingly.

Stiles eyes widened in horror at the implications as he sat crouched behind a lab table.

“History has never shown favorably on genocide” Erik advised pointedly.

“Don't you understand? They're the cause of all the destruction wrought upon the world...Everywhere they go they bring chaos...The more of those abominations that show up, the more that oppose them will come...And who at the end of the day suffers for it? Not them...But people like us” Miriam asserted.

Stiles closed his eyes in grief and regret, thinking of Monroe and all the innocent bystanders whose lives were destroyed because of the supernatural in Beacon Hills.
“Don't tell me that you aren't afraid of them?” Miriam questioned, eyeing both of them.

Helen sucked in an uneasy breath, while Erik looked to the floor for a moment before stubbornly meeting Miriam's gaze once more.

“Afraid that they'll use their powers to push you around because they can...And they will...You might be of use to them now, but the second you get in their way your life and autonomy mean nothing to them” Miriam concluded as if it were an unchallengeable fact.

Helen took in another shaky breath as she thought of the Scarlet Witch...of Ultron. Of how Thor held up Stark by his neck and nobody did anything.

“No matter my fears I will not give you what you want” Helen decided determinedly. If this was to be the hill she died on, then so be it.

“I see...And your answer Dr. Selvig?” Miriam asked (too) politely.

“You're asking me to try and undo powers from a girl who shouldn't have survived exposure to the mind stone to begin with, and to remove said stone from the body of a living being. Doing so could potentially kill both of them” Erik reiterated.

“I'm not hearing an answer doctor” Miriam prompted.

“No” Erik said simply, harshly. He may have been used as Loki's puppet in the past, but he was nobody's puppet now.

“Then I guess we have no choice but to take you with us then don't we?”

“What's going on out there!?” Marcus demanded, terrified as he watched his comrades were picked off one-by-one by an unseen force.

“What does it look like is going on you moron?! Somebody fucked up!” Pete shouted, furious at the incompetence of others.

“They're supposed to be dead!” Will exclaimed fearfully.

“If it were that easy the fuckers would've been offed a long time ago” Pete stated annoyed.

CLANG.

“What was that?” Marcus demanded skittishly from his seat at the control desk.

“You, check it out” Pete ordered, gesturing to Will with the nozzle of his machine gun.

“But what if it's one of the Avengers?” Will asked, sounding terrified.

“Then you do what we came here to do. Put a bullet in their head” Pete stated angrily, poking Will harshly in the forehead, “Now get moving!”

Holding his machine gun like a lifeline Will slowly made his way across the glass floor and towards the glass staircase going down to the ground floor.

The entire radio tower was an open concept with the upper floors and walls made of reinforced
glass and structured with a design reminiscent of scaffolding.

It was designed that way to make it easier for the agents running the radio tower to assist the jets for landing.

Meaning it *should* have been easy to spot anyone in the building that wasn't supposed to be there.

As Will shakily made his way down the first step an unseen force gripped his ankle, yanking him forward and throwing him down the rest of the thirty-four stairs. His startled high-pitched scream scaring Will and Marcus as they heard the harsh thud as Will hit the floor below them. Marcus shaking as he saw Will remain unmov ing through the near transparent glass beneath his feet.

“Stay here” Pete ordered, setting his machine gun in his shoulder. He was gonna get this son-of-a-bitch.

When he made it to the stairs Pete stood off to the side, peering down to the lower level with his gun at the ready. The bastard had probably been waiting on or underneath the top of the stairs where the scaffolding-like support pipes were.

Suddenly a heavy grunt sounded behind him.

Pete turned around in time to see Marcus hitting the floor unconscious.

Moving forward to the middle of the floor Pete started frantically scanning the control room, waving his machine gun out in front of his body.

“Show yourself you coward!” Pete roared, gripping his machine gun tightly, afraid for the first time since he agreed to the mission.

Pete turned around once more to watch his back at the stairs.

Before he could process what he was seeing the man in front of him effortlessly pushed his machine gun aside and knocked him to the floor with a palm strike.

Pete crabwalked himself a few inches further away from the unknown in front of him.

“Who the hell are you?” Pete demanded. The man in front of him wasn't an Avenger, nor was he wearing one of those SEA uniforms.

He had black hair, piercing green eyes, a five o’clock shadow, and was giving him a glare that made him look like a serial killer (Granted a good looking one).

“I don't really think that's the question you should be asking” Derek remarked calmly.

Suddenly, Vision phased slowly into the control room, landing on his feet behind Pete.

“Agent Hale. I see the situation here has been taken care of” Vision stated, assessing the situation quickly, “Am I to assume correctly that you were about to question him as to his reasons for being here?”

“I'm not telling you freaks of nature anything!” Pete shouted defiantly from his spot on the floor.

“Okay” Derek said simply, making Pete and Vision stare at him oddly.

Derek then bent down next to Pete, his calm and nonchalant demeanor making Pete very uneasy.
“Here's the deal, Pete was it? You tell us what we want to know...or I rip your throat out” Derek said nonchalantly, as if that was a typical ultimatum, even looking Pete straight in the eyes as he said it.

“You think you can scare-”

“With my teeth”

"......”

Pete just looked at Derek dumbly, as if he couldn't believe the words that had come out of his mouth.

After a moment Pete glanced warily back at Vision.

“Can he actually do that?”

Wanda's anxiety had been steadily increasing for every minute Stiles was still gone.

She hated it.

She hated feeling powerless in a situation.

It brought back memories of when she and her brother had been trapped and terrified for days as they waited to die.

There had to be something she could do. Some way to at least find out if Stiles was still alive.

Some way she could help.

Take in your surroundings and location so that you know the limits of what you can and can't do with your powers. If you're stuck, think outside the box. Use other facets of your powers.

“What can I do that won't jeopardize things. Think” Wanda contemplated.

The Hub was a shower of bullets. Guns raining down fire from both ends of the opposing sides.

Techs had already dove beneath their desks in a desperate attempt to cover themselves, leaving the returning fire to the agents charged with the security of the Compound.

Unfortunately a good number of both agents and support staff had already lost their lives to the machine guns aimed at them from the three separate front entryways.

Glass from shattering computer screens, and ricocheting bullets caught their fair share of victims as well.

“We've got to find a way to push them back” Maria shouted over to Sharon who was a bit closer by, “We're sitting ducks!”

Sharon ducked behind another desk as the enemy let off another round of bullets into the Hub.

She turned to Maria who had ducked down as well, signalling to her in SHIELD hand-code.

Vents. I can try to get around.
Maria took a moment to contemplate their options...which ultimately weren't very many.

Maria nodded, signaling Sharon back.

*I'll cover.*

“Take who you can” she shouted to her, standing up to fire back at the enemy.

As Sharon began army crawling her way towards the nearest vent the spray of bullets stopped.

An eerie quiet descended upon the Hub for a fraction of a second before they heard the frantic orders and screams of the enemy from outside in the halls.

“About damn time” Maria muttered exhausted.

“Alright you two get moving. You've already wasted enough of our time” Luke gruffed out, grabbing Helen harshly while Brian started pushing Selvig towards the entrance of the lab.

“As if I'll let you” Stiles thought, preparing himself to follow, “I'm gonna have to be careful though. One wrong move and those two doe-doe brains won't hesitate to start firing off their guns in here”

Suddenly, Stiles felt a shift in the energy of the room.

He looked around to see if anyone else noticed the shift...but they didn't. They just kept walking.

Except...Boss Lady, Doe-doe 1, and Doe-doe 2 were slinging their semi-automatics onto their backs, aggression gone from their body language.

“Wanda” Stiles realized in disbelief when he finally spotted the faint red haze lingering in the corners of the floor.

She was altering their emotions, calming the bad guys down without them even realizing it.

Despite his reservations Stiles smirked.

“Guess she can learn after all” he thought, slightly proud (*slightly*).

Focusing his magic Stiles used a facet of his powers he tried to avoid as much as possible.

“Sleep” he muttered, willing the trio's minds to calm and slow as he gently lulled them into REM sleep.

“Everybody in position?” Steve asked once more.

Scott, Tony, and Rafael nodded, Rafael loading his Glock with a determined force.

The four of them had conveniently met up on the way to the Hub.

A fact Steve was grateful for as it improved their odds of defeating the enemy more effectively, and efficiently. Lessening the chance of one of them getting fatality injured.

“Go” Steve ordered.

Tony immediately activated his gauntlet, sending a wave of disorienting vibration at the enemy
soldiers, halting their fire inside the Hub.

Taking advantage of their momentary disorientation Rafael started picking some of them off with direct shots to the neck.

He hated having to kill another human being, but their vests made non-fatal shots impossible and impractical.

By the time the first bullet had struck the first enemy soldier, Scott had already sprinted down the hall, leaping into a flying kick, and knocking the soldier straight into the wall.

Steve, not too far behind, followed suit, grabbing onto a soldier’s gun and kicking him square in the chest.

However by then the momentary daze had already worn off.

“Shoot them!” one of the soldier’s ordered furiously.

But just as the enemy began to take their aim Tony implemented the second phase of Steve's plan, activating his gauntlet's debilitating flash.

Scott and Steve immediately closed their eyes, knowing what was about to happen.

The enemy on the other hand were not so lucky.

Many of them screeched in pain, dropping their weapons as they tried (and failed) to cover their eyes.

Just as Tony had thought, their odd masks didn't protect them from that kind of attack.

Hearing the cries of pain Scott and Steve opened their eyes, chopping down on as many necks as they could.

Just as Steve thought they had knocked out the last of them, the sound of a gun went off.

Steve heard the whistle of the bullet as it flew past his ear...and into the throat of the enemy he had kicked earlier on in the ambush.

Looking back he saw that Tony had commandeered Agent McCall's Glock. His aim sharp and true as he shot down the enemy aiming a gun at his unprotected head.

A swell of conflicting emotions made their way through Steve's chest.


But this wasn't the time for any of that.

“Round'm up” Steve ordered.

Once the siege was overtaken, the remaining surviving intruders had been tied up, masks removed, and placed together on the tarmac, awaiting their prison transport.

“Ms. Sharpe” Tony addressed awkwardly, sadly.

“You know her?” Clint demanded skeptically.
“Charlie Spencer's mother” Tony said simply, silently threatening anyone who dare says “Who's that?”

“So it's personal” Natasha thought grimly. She wondered how many of the others were also here on a personal vendetta.

“So you joined the Watchdogs in order to get revenge on the Avengers” Stiles stated, completely unsurprised.

“Watchdogs?” Steve near demanded.

“An armed racial hate group that's been growing in popularity the last few years” Tony explained, a hardness in his tone.

“Racial hate group” Pete scoffed, “We ain't some conservative old time political party against gay marriage and women's rights. We're taking back the Earth to its rightful owners. Humans. Not you bunch of freaks”

“Who sent you?” Steve demanded, not liking the Nazi/Hydra-esc vibe from the man.

“Like we'd ever tell you lot” Pete sneered, “You're nothing but glorified murders!”

“Son that's enough” Steve ordered harshly, “I don't know why you dislike us so much, but it doesn't warrant such prejudice”

“On the contrary Captain” Miriam spoke out, grabbing everyone’s attention, “While my colleague may lack finesse, he is not wrong...Make no mistake. While the Watchdogs may not be bloodless at least we don't hide behind pretty titles pretending that we aren't killers”

“I'm truly sorry for your loss mam. But hurting innocent people just because you're angry with us doesn't justify your actions” Steve lightly chastised.

“Sorry” Miriam muttered as if that word had been a joke.

“You're sorry? My dear Capain, you expect me to believe your apologies mean anything when you've never once come forward to explain your actions?” Miriam challenged.

“I beg your pardon?” Steve questioned, trying to keep his confusion and defensiveness out of his tone.


Her words cutting into each and every one of them.

“Other than Tony Stark, never once did any of you come forward to explain the devastation. To tell us why those tragedies happened. To tell us why they were necessary...That you were sorry for our losses” Miriam knifed, cutting deeper and deeper into the wound.

Lydia struggled a bit to contain herself. Not trusting herself to speak as she felt the energy of these people's deceased loved ones haunting her.

“Because at the end of the day, the only people who suffered, who lost. Were us” she scorned.

Tony thought of all the people who had their homes and lives destroyed at the end of all their battles. They got to walk away back to their homes and lives while the regular civilians were the ones who lost their livelihoods. It was one of the reasons he had bought the Department of Damage
Control from SHIELD in the first place.

But it wasn't enough...It was never enough.

“And none of you had the decency to even apologize” Miriam accused, razors edged in her voice.

Sam winced at the accusation.

“Tell me Captain. Did you even once look back at the devastation of Sokovia before you welcomed that Witch into your little band of criminals?” Miriam accused, giving him a critical glare.

Wanda flinched, not able to look Miriam in the eye. Sokovia was on her. Her son's death, however indirectly, was on her.

“You're all rightfully angry. But that's what the Sokovia Accords are meant to do. To make sure that there is oversight on enhanced persons so that devastations like Sokovia no longer happen” Rhodes explained calmly, hoping to reach some form of understanding.

“The Sokovia Accords are a joke! We don't need registration and regulation. We need extermination!” Pete declared viciously.

His fellow Dogs rallied behind his words, grunting in tandem, their volume steadily increasing.

Steve was stunned by such a collective passionate display of hatred against them.

It was like seeing a group of Hydra soldiers (though wilder, less reserved).

Only these people weren't Hydra.

They were civilians.

Civilians they had hurt.

“You all realize that you're just a bunch of hypocrites right?” Stiles declared, cutting off the chant of grunts, “I mean you say that you want to purge the world of all those enhanced, but the only people that died here because of you, were humans”

Silence.

“I'm failing to see how any of you are any better than us so called abominations when you literally just did the exact thing you're accusing us of” Derek deadpanned.

“Cue awkward shifting” Kira thought unamused as she watched some of the Dogs squirm a bit from their spot on the tarmac.

Miriam and Pete however sat stubborn and unrelenting.

Seeing that they were getting nowhere Scott stepped forward.

“You were hurt...You were hurt and nobody told you why...Nobody came forward and apologized as you were left behind struggling in the rubble” Scott began, his mind jumping back to the moment Monroe had started on her path to becoming Hitler Number 3.

Miriam zeroed her attention on him.
“And when the tragedy was ‘taken care of’ it felt like everything was being swept under the rug for the benefit of those that participated in the destruction...Even though they were credited as heroes you were the ones still left in the wake, still picking up the pieces even as they moved forward with their lives” Scott continued, regret and sympathy laced within his voice.

Miriam clenched her jaw, refusing to let her welling tears fall.

“I'm not asking you to forgive them” Scott said, bending down to look at Miriam eye to eye.

“I'm asking you to understand that not all of us are a threat...That each and every one of us are someone else's Charlie”

Chapter End Notes

удовлетворение - means satisfaction (according to Google translate)

I hope you enjoyed all the fight sequences and the foreshadowing!

As this chapter shows, the Avengers still have a lot to answer for and a lot of bumps still ahead. Especially for Steve, Bucky, and Tony (hint hint).

Please please please comment!!!!
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Hi all. Sorry I haven't posted. A lot of things have been going on in my personal life.

This chapter is a chapter building up to some things that are going to eventually blow up in the Avengers' faces. It deals a lot with relationships.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Rafael's POV)

“The only reason I am returning your calls now is so you stop blowing up my phone with unanswered messages” I stated mildly annoyed.

There was a million and seventeen things that needed to be handled right now, this not being one of those priorities at the moment.

“And I'm telling you Zemo isn't done. Whatever he's plotting, it isn't over” Ross emphasized from his end of the phone.

“As far as we know Zemo didn't have an accomplice, and his endgame was finished before it even got that far” I reminded him.

“You didn't hear that smug bastard. It's not over. Zemo isn't stupid. For all we know he planned an alternative measure in case things didn't go his way” Ross countered.

“I won't deny that possibility, but right now there are more important matters to deal with then an incarcerated man hell-bent on revenge” I stated pointedly.

“I was under the impression that anything threatening the Avengers was a matter of concern for you” Ross demanded.

“And while that may be true, Zemo's threats are just that, threats. We're dealing with a much larger issue right now” I countered.

“....Someone attacked them” Ross inferred (knowingly).

“The Watchdogs attacked the Compound...I'm sure you'll be hearing about it on the news soon enough” I said.

“This can't be a coincidence” Ross started in again.

“The Avengers have no shortage of enemies, especially these days. Just because the timing was slightly coincidental doesn't mean that Zemo had them waiting as backup plan number one” I retorted.

“How can you be so sure?” Ross demanded.

“Because I know what Zemo's endgame was in Siberia. And I'm telling you this was just a
coincidence” I assured him.

I didn't want to think about Siberia….What it could mean.

I truly hoped that Zemo's full psychological report on Steve Rogers was wrong.

If it wasn't….If it wasn't then Zemo might still win after all.

“Must be nice being an insider” Ross commented bitterly.

“Look, I appreciate the heads up, but for right now just keep an eye on your prisoner. Zemo's a high profile criminal. We can't have anything happening to him right now” I reminded him.

“Yeah yeah I got that already. Just remember what I said Agent McCall. Zemo's not done with the Avengers just yet” Ross concluded, hanging up so I couldn't get in any final words.

I resisted the urge to pinch the bridge of my nose.

Ross wasn't wrong.

Zemo might be in lock up but we still have to talk to Stark, Rogers, and Barnes.

“Hopefully the Avengers are strong enough to survive what's coming their way” I thought grimly.

(Third POV)

Stiles took in a deep breath.

“As you were” he thought, channeling his belief into his magic, willing the lounge to return to as it had been before the missile had blown it apart like a jigsaw puzzle.

Wanda looked on amazed.

Broken fixtures and furniture were moving back as if someone had pressed a rewind button.

The billiard balls lifted up and back onto the pool tables.

The shattered dishes pieced back together without so much as a crack.

The couch slid back into place.

And a gentle tinging sounded throughout the room as the shards of glass lifted high into the air like a reverse waterfall, laying back into the window panes like a puzzle, the cracks dissipating once every shard had once again found its place.

“Now that’s a party trick” Clint muttered.

“Ever consider hiring yourself out as a one man clean up crew?” Tony asked, consideringly.

“Once” Stiles admitted.

They all had been pretty strapped for cash with all the home damages, medical, and college bills they had wracked up (with ⅔ of that being Monroe's fault).

“If I were to pay you-”
“No” Stiles unhesitantly cut off.

“You don’t even know what I was going to offer you” Tony said, somewhat offended.

“And yet the answer’s still no” Stiles retorted in a light-hearted teasing tone.

“What if I told you it was six figures, potentially more depending on the level of damage?” Tony offered, hoping to entice the young man.

Where the Avengers went damage tended to follow. It would be strategically and economically beneficial to have someone who could reverse at least some of the damages caused by villains and/or them.

He was also curious if Stilinski would be able to fix the several Vision-sized holes in the floor that were currently still being worked on…

“Admittedly tempting, but still no” Stiles replied.

“Okay. Now he's just trolling me” Tony thought, mildly amused (and slightly annoyed).

“Why?” he asked, curious why the young agent would be turning down good potential income. He couldn't be getting that much on an FBI agent salary.

“Because a.) I’m busy, and b.) Lydia would kill me with her six inch stiletto heels” Stiles noted in a voice that left the three Avengers wondering whether he was actually kidding or not.

“Why would she do that?” Wanda asked curiously.

“Because if my boyfriend is going to be working for Tony Stark it’s not going to be as a glorified maid” Lydia stated, strutting over to the group with a confidence and self-assuredness Wanda was admittedly jealous of.

“What, you think he’s good enough to work in R&D or something?” Clint questioned with a mocking skepticism.

Lydia just turned to give them a smug grin, looking very pleased with herself.

“I guess you didn’t look into us after all” Lydia mocked teasingly, flipping her hair back at them and strutting away like a boss, looping Stiles’ arm into hers as she went.

Stiles immediately followed her lead, only looking back to give them a mocking one-shoulder shrug.

“…”

“Friday I want background checks on the members of the Shadow Guard overseeing the Avengers. Academic records. Police reports. Anything you can find”

“Sure thing Boss”

If he wasn't curious before (and he was), they had his attention now.

These kids weren’t the typical overachievers.

Politics. FBI. Heroics. The only reason he hadn’t already had Friday look them up is because he’s been so busy with the UN, Accords, the ‘Rogue’ Avenger’s sentencing, PR, SI, Zemo’s trial, and
the couple of criminals he actually had to be called in to deal with.

It might take a bit of time with his workload, but eventually he would know all of what those kids were hiding.

“Maybe I’ll have Natasha look into some things too if she hasn’t already. Nothing like bonding over mutual distrust and suspicions” Tony considered thoughtfully as he exited the lounge.

(Maria’s POV)

“I want maintenance at the Hub as soon as possible” I radioed in on my comm.

I looked around at the devastation before me.

Blood and glass.

Chunks of metal and broken monitors crunched beneath my feet.

The deceased had already been collected and stored in the Compound's morgue.

“What else can I do to help” Steve asked, coming up beside me, back from keeping guard over the prisoners as they awaited transport.

I resisted the urge to growl in frustration.

With everything going on my patience was wearing thin.

I was exhausted, my shoulder was sore from where I had gotten clipped by a lucky shot, and I did not feel like dealing with Steve's incessant need to help.

“I can assure you that we've got everything under control Steve. This is what the Security and Evacuation faction of the Avengers were created for” I stated tightly, trying not to clench my jaw, “Besides, right now legally you can't really do anything. But you and the rest of the Avengers are needed in the conference room, now”

Without even giving him a chance to answer I turned around and walked away so that I could head back to my office in order to try to organize some of the chaos that had gone down.

With the assailants en route to Seagate Penitentiary I needed a report made up of those injured and deceased, the families of the deceased needed to be notified, a list of the equipment destroyed and the figures for the replacements needed to be created, the victims in the lab needed to be questioned more thoroughly (particularly Cho and Selvig), the Department of Damage Control needed to be notified….

“I need coffee. Black coffee” I thought grimly, not looking forward to the next week.

(Third POV)

Steve grudgingly accepted the dismissal.

He wanted to do more to help, but his hands were tied because of his parole sentence. The fact that it was a surprise attack on the Compound itself was the only reason he had been allowed to participate in the fight at all.

Accepting things as they were he turned his attention to Sharon.
The two of them had yet to even speak since their kiss.

“You alright?” Steve asked, giving Sharon a quick once over for any noticeable injuries. Fortunately there didn't seem to be any.

“Not exactly the first fire fight I've been in” Sharon stated, a soft (barely there flirtatious) tone to her voice, though her confidence was obvious in her words.

“I don't doubt it” Steve replied back with a light smile.

“Though I guess I should be counting myself lucky that using a fallen gun in self-defense doesn’t violate my parole” Sharon commented, sounding more exasperated then bitter.

Steve's expression changed to one of guilt.

“I’m sorry I got you roped into this. I should never have involved you in our problems. It wasn’t fair to you” Steve said apologetically.

“True. But you’re forgetting one important thing” Sharon said with aplomb.

“Yeah. And what would that be?” Steve asked, sounding amused.

“I’m my own woman Steve. I’m fully capable of making my own decisions” Sharon pointed out, lightly chastising him in a teasing way.

Steve nodded, amused that such an obvious fact needed saying, though it still didn't help with the guilt.

“Do you have any idea what you’re going to do once your sentence is completed?” Steve asked curiously, trying to change the topic slightly.

“I don’t know...Sure working for SHIELD gave me varied skill set, but law enforcement is all I’ve ever known” Sharon said, trying hard not to sound too lost or uncertain.

“Nurse?” Steve recommended in jest, hoping to lighten the conversation.

“I wouldn’t count on it. I’ve been told my bedside manner leaves some things to be desired” Sharon said, rewarding him with an amused smile.

“So you politely threaten everyone to stay in their hospital bed. Good to know” Steve jested sarcastically.

“Only the particularly stubborn ones” Sharon teased, clearly poking metaphorical fingers at Steve.

Steve let out a huffed of amusement. He couldn't deny that particular accusation. Heaven knows he left the hospital as soon as he was able to so he could start tracking down Bucky.

“You know I never did get that coffee you offered me” Sharon pointed out teasingly, bringing Steve out of his thoughts.

“I'm pretty sure I never got my coffee maker back from SHIELD when they ransacked my apartment...Left the stereo though” Steve remarked, light amusement (and exasperation) in his voice.

“Not entirely surprising. You would think a secret spy organization would be able to get better coffee makers” Sharon said, replying with her own jest.
“Agent Carter” a voice called out.

Steve and Sharon turned to see an SEA agent jogging over to them.

“Agent Hill forgot to give you this. She wants you to start on the report for the FBI” he said, handing her a Starkpad.

“I guess that's my cue” Sharon said, turning back to Steve.

“Rain check?” Steve inquired, sounding a bit apologetic.

“Keeping a list” Sharon quipped back, her soft tone back (though there was a light note of disappointment).

Steve watched as Sharon walked away, swiping furiously across the Starkpad in quick succession.

Even as he heard footsteps behind him he continued watching as Sharon made her way out of what was left of the Hub.

He didn’t need to turn around. He knew that smell of Armani, and metal anywhere.

“Can I ask you something? Man to man?” Tony asked, pausing at Steve's side.

“Sure” Steve replied distractedly, curious what Tony could want to ask him.

“Is there something there? You and Sharon?” Tony asked, trying his best to sound cool and casual.

“What’s the fascination with my dating life?” Steve evaded skillfully.

“I think you mean the lack there-of” Tony teased lightly, “But seriously. If there's something there it can't hurt...You don't wanna end up like me after all”

“Tony” Steve said, giving his friend pitying eyes.

He still felt bad for not knowing that Tony and Pepper were taking a break. He hoped that whatever their reasons were they could work through them. Tony was always happier with Pepper.

“Don't. I'm trying to be real here Steve. No sarcasm, judgements, or pity” Tony cut off, he didn’t want to talk about him and Pepper any more.

Steve nodded, taking a moment to really think about things between him and Sharon.

“I don't know” he said finally.

“You don't know what?” Tony lightly prodded on.

“I don't know exactly how I feel. I mean there's something there obviously, but I don't know if it's more than just...an interest. It wasn't like what I felt for Peggy. It's more…”

“An interest that could either grow to be more with time or die out completely” Tony finished understandably.

Steve nodded.

“Do you want to see if it could be more?” Tony inquired curiously.

“I don't know if I'm in a good enough place to try right now. I've realized recently that there are a
lot of things I never properly dealt with” Steve admitted, a note to his voice Tony couldn't entirely pick apart.

“Besides. A friend told me that maybe I need to find out who I am these days” Steve said with a light smile, giving Tony a light pat on the back before walking away.

(Tony’s POV)

I watched solemnly as Steve walked away in the direction of the conference room.

I knew I wasn't exactly the poster-child for healthy relationships, so I didn't really have too much room to criticize anyone along that vein, but I couldn't help but feel that Steve's...whatever he felt for Sharon, wasn't what it had been before Aunt Peggy's funeral.

Before the revelation that she was a spy I knew there had been a genuine interest there on both ends. During the whole Shieldra thing Steve had a hard time trusting anyone, including her, since he didn’t know who was Hydra and who wasn’t.

But Sharrie had proven herself and Steve had actually taken the time to ask if she had survived the whole ordeal. According to Sharon they parted on good terms with their quiet interest still hanging around in the background.

I had offered her a job after SHIELD fell but she refused. She was never one to accept anything she hadn’t felt that she’d earned on her own merit.

When she was little we had gotten along like a house on fire, her little toddler self finding me the coolest person ever. But when she got older she started becoming a bit more bitter and resentful towards me and Aunt Peggy.

She was stuck in Aunt Peggy’s shadow and she just wanted to prove that she was more than a famous last name, that she had worth too. And of course she didn’t want any help from her famous wealthy ‘cousin’ either.

By her teens she had a chip on her shoulder and we had drifted apart due to her hatred of my devil-may-care attitude, saying I was “wasting my life”. It hurt, but until after Afghanistan I can’t really say that she was wrong.

As distant as we were she had sent a teasing voicemail saying she was “glad [I] was still as hard to kill as always, and that Aunt Peggy [had] a few choice words for not coming to visit her sooner” (the little shit).

Even after SHIELD fell we remained distant, though I did coerce her into telling me about her little ‘thing’ for Steve. What I didn’t expect was to receive a message from her telling me not to come to Aunt Peggy’s funeral. She didn’t want an issue between Steve and I to ruin the service. And that...severely hurt.

Learning that she had been the one to tip off Steve about Barnes, that she was the one to get them back their gear...that stung along a familiar vein (betrayal). I should have realized from her dismissal of me at Peggy’s funeral that her ‘thing’ for Steve would have her playing double agent, but then I started noticing a few things in the surveillance footage that was used as evidence against the ‘Rogues’ that got me wondering.

Had Steve intentionally used Sharon’s interest in him for his own benefit?

If someone had said that to me two years ago I would have laughed in their face….But from just
looking at the facts, that’s exactly what it looked like.

Nat and I are the best at manipulation on the team. I’ve spent over thirty years learning how to put up a mask, use my ramblings as distractions, play the media, and manipulate the political and business playing fields. I know what using someone looks like (though I apparently suck at noticing when those ‘close’ to me are doing it).

Not once after the fall of SHIELD had Steve ever reached out to Sharon (though the reverse was true too). Then suddenly there is a warrant out for Barnes’ arrest and Steve needs to find him before the JCTC, and who does he go to thinking he can get information from?

Sharon.

His team needs their stuff back, who does he go to?

Sharon.

And they kiss.

Now most people think Steve is this wholesome old-fashioned guy and that he didn’t have it in him to be manipulative, but what they forget is that Steve used to be an agent of SHIELD, and seduction is taught as a part of the general interrogation training program for new recruits (not to mention he was on a team with Nat).

And while he had hated it, the USO tours had taught him how to use his name and charisma to his benefit.

Personally the whole thing reads ‘using-you’, but I really do hope that Steve does in fact genuinely still have some interest in Sharon and wasn’t just using her as a means to an end.

(Fury's POV)

“How are the puppies?” the voice asked as I flipped open the phone.

“They're fine” I stated first off, making sure to keep my speech as vague as possible in case Stark had his AI recording the audio of all the transmissions in the Compound.

“Dog fighting is illegal. The Fight Leader needs to be caught” the voice stated.

“The Dogs need to be put on a leash so they don't go after the puppies again” I agreed.

“I'll keep a close eye out” the voice assured.

“Make sure you do. We don't want other Dogman joining in” I stated, closing the burner phone.

This attack, while a failure, could be the spark igniting something far worse if they're not careful.

“Let's hope we can cut the ignition coil while we still can” I thought, grimly.

(Third POV)

Together again, in yet another conference room, the Avengers took up similar positions they had been in the night before, only this time Sam was sitting on Steve's right.
“Alright, let's get formal introductions out of the way. I'm Agent Rafael McCall. I'm the Agency Representative and liaison for the Shadow Guard. I'm here to help explain how things are going to work with the Shadow Guard at the Compound” Rafael began.

“Real quick question. McCall. Any relation between the two of you?” Clint asked, pointing his finger back and forth between Rafael and Scott.

“I'm his father” Rafael stated, placing his hands on his hips, clearly not impressed that he was being interrupted already.

“That's interesting” Natasha thought, “Family legacy?”

“Back to the matter at hand” Rafael continued, “You all already know Scott, Lydia, and Stiles. This is Kira Yukimura and Derek Hale”

“You’re Talia's son aren't you?” Tony asked, ignoring Rafael's annoyed glare at being cut off again.

Everyone looked at Tony in surprise.

“And?” Derek questioned, sounding somewhat stony.

“Haven't seen you since you were a snot-nose at one of my charity galas...I'm sorry about your family” Tony said awkwardly (sadly).

Derek gave him a stiff nod.

“I'm sorry, how do you two know each other?” Clint asked, sounding both skeptical and suspicious.

“The Hales are a family of old money and were big stockholders. They frequented the Maria Stark charity galas and a few of them even worked in the Stock Market, so I saw them occasionally at meetings” Tony explained.

“Rich boy to agent?” Sam pondered, “Wonder if it has to do with his family? Stark did give him his condolences”

“How's Laura? Last I saw her was the Christmas gala back in 2010” Tony asked curiously.

“Murdered” Derek stated blandly.

Tony reeled back a bit in shock.

“Like the rest of my family” Derek continued as if everyone's heads weren't spinning from such a blunt statement.

Tony snapped out of the shock first.

“I thought the fire was ruled an accident?” Tony demanded tightly, a dangerous note to his voice.

“The inspector was paid off” Stiles coined in.

“The arsonist ever caught?” Tony asked (demanded), the anger in his eyes still burning.

“Don't bother. She was killed by her own father three years ago” Derek deadpanned.
“Now there's a story” Clint muttered.

“And I'm going to cut this off here. If the two of you want to catch up do it on your own time. Right now we have other matters to discuss” Rafael said, bringing everyone back to the matter at hand.

Although from the look on Tony's face it was clear the matter was far from dropped.

“The five of them are here to act as one-on-one guards. Deterrents to anything you may do, or attempt that may not be in your, or other people's best interest or safety” Rafael explained.

Rafael noticed an immediate change in Rogers’ demeanor after he finished speaking. The man looked like he was preparing himself for a (verbal) war. And if he was as stubborn as Scott said, then he needed to cut him off now and re-explain things a little differently or this whole arrangement was going to fall apart before it even began.

“The Shadow Guard isn't here to be your jailers Captain Rogers. They are here as an outside point of view in planning, both tactical and PR. They are here to make sure you do not break the conditions of your house arrest, and to keep you all safe from outside hostile parties who aren't your biggest fans right now...A fact you've already seen” Rafael laid out like he was lecturing a particularly stubborn child.

The tick in Roger's jaw loosened a bit.

“We don't have control over the Avengers Captain. Think it more as additional voices on a delegation committee. The only time we have the ability to veto anything is if we think your actions will have dire repercussions for either your team or innocents. Besides that we don't have the power to tell the active members where to go or what to do. Our job is only to make sure that you stay under house arrest and get the help you need under the terms of your sentence so that you can return to active duty” Scott explained gently, hoping that his explanation would smooth things over for now.

Steve nodded, his defensiveness evaporating at Scott's words, appeased that the Shadow Guard didn't actually seem to have control over the Avengers in the way he had feared.

“Trust me. We don't wanna be here any more than you want us here” Stiles stated, his annoyance at the whole situation very clear.

“So how's this gonna work? Are you just going to be following us around or what?” Sam asked curiously.

“More or less, though you will have your privacy. We were told that Mr. Stark's security system would be able to alert the five of them if you attempted to leave the premises” Rafael stated, looking to Stark for confirmation.

Tony nodded, “Friday will be the perfect little tattle-tale, won't you baby-girl?”

“As it is already my job to report to Colonel Rhodes and Mr. Hogan when you aren't eating regular meals or are endangering yourself, I find the request to be an applicable extension of the already existing parameters of my Snitch Protocol” Friday snarked.

“Wise-ass” Tony smirked.

“Who was that?” Kira asked, looking up curiously at the ceiling.
“Is she one of your AI’s?” Lydia asked, speaking for the first time in the conversation as well, getting a familiar gleam in her eye the Avengers usually only saw in Tony or Bruce when they were ‘sciencing’.

“She is” Tony said proudly, “Say hi baby-girl”

“Hello Ms. Martin. My name is Friday. If you, Mr. McCall, Mr. Stilinski, Mr. Hale, or Ms. Yukimura have any questions feel free to ask and I will assist you to the best of my ability” Friday stated.

“That's awesome” Stiles muttered, looking amazed. He hadn't had the time earlier to truly appreciate the AI.

It was also the first time since he had shown up at the lounge that the Avengers really saw something other than annoyance or distaste in his expression. The softness reminding them that four of the agents in front of them were only about twenty-two.

“While any of them can follow you around, technically there are assigned one-to-ones” Rafael began again.

“Scott and Derek are interchangeable between Rogers and Barnes, though Scott will mostly be with Rogers. Stiles is in charge of Maximoff. Lydia and Kira are interchangeable between Wilson and Barton, however Lydia will primarily be with Wilson, and Kira with Barton. Though like I said the pairings are not set in stone, and technically they have to keep an eye on the active members of the Avengers as well” Rafael detailed, plowing through everything before he was interrupted again.

Natasha eyed each of the agents critically. They now knew part of what Stilinski was capable of. That he could probably subdue Wanda if he needed to. And since he was her ‘technical’ one-to-one that meant that the others had the ability to go toe-to-toe with their one-to-ones, and were confident enough in their skills that they could win if necessary.

And if Stilinski was any indication then that meant the others either had similar powers to the ones they were assigned to, or abilities that enabled them to counter their charge's.

Steve observed Scott for a moment. Despite his threat to kill him Scott seemed reasonable enough. Wise beyond his years. Surprisingly the two of them fought well together. And since Scott was going to be his one-to-one, hopefully it will give them the chance to work out their differences.

Bucky on the other hand was slightly disappointed that neither Stiles or Lydia was his one-to-one. He still wasn’t really sure what to make of Derek. The guy obviously had a lot of layers to him, but he couldn't be sure how their personalities would mesh just yet. Right now it just seemed like the two of them would spend most of their time silently brooding in a dark corner somewhere....

“Hopefully we'll at least be able to tolerate each other” Bucky thought.

Wanda glanced uncertaintly at her ‘guard’. He didn't like her, and he was overly blunt to the point of being unnecessarily harsh...but he was honest where he stood with her, and regardless of whether he liked her or not he had given her good advice on how to use her her powers.

He also seemed a bit less...frigid to her after he had returned from rescuing Dr. Cho and Dr. Selvig, so maybe things wouldn’t be too bad.

Clint was feeling a bit conflicted over the petite young woman that was to be his main charge. He sure as hell didn’t want a babysitter, especially one so young. It was both insulting and mildly concerning. He knew she was a young adult, but she was still only twenty-two. She should be in
college not working out a contract to act as a prison guard for the Avengers.

Likewise, Sam didn’t know what to think about Lydia. She was an enhanced, and obviously trained, but he didn’t really get a soldier vibe from her...or any of them really. The whole group seemed to just march to the beat of their own drum.

“What about Lang?” Sam asked, feeling responsible for involving the man in their mess.

“He will have two agents alternating shifts. Keeping their distance” Rafael assured.

Sam nodded, appeased enough for now.

“Now that has been settled we're going to move on to another matter. Sergeant Barnes” Rafael addressed, shifting his attention to the POW.

“Yeah?” Bucky acknowledged curiously.

“Among the stipulations of your sentence you are to receive both psychiatric assistance, and assistance in removing the triggers placed in your mind by Hydra” Rafael reiterated.

Bucky nodded. Stark's lawyers had made an airtight case that the safest place to contain him was the Avengers’ Compound, and during his house arrest here he was required to undergo treatment so that the Winter Soldier could never be triggered again...But up until now no-one had mentioned treatment to him.

“We can start looking for good psychiatrist and/or psychologist now. As for your brainwashing that is going to be left to a team of experts including Mr. Stark and Dr. Helen Cho. King T'Challa has also expressed his desire to assist in your recovery” Rafael informed him.

“No offense but do you know why? Cause last time I checked it wasn't too long ago he wanted to claw my face off” Bucky asked, curious what the King's motives were.

“He feels guilty for trying to kill you” Scott answered.

“Repeatedly trying to kill you” Stiles noted unhelpfully.

“He wants to make amends. That is, if you'll let him?” Scott inquired, letting Bucky know the choice was entirely his to make, a fact he greatly appreciated.

“If he can help find a way to get the triggers out of my head than I'm fine with him helping so long as I don't end up a scratching post” Bucky replied.

He didn't care who came up with the 'cure' so long as he was free from Hydra's control.

“Good. And of course the offer for a psychiatrist or psychologist is extended to the rest of you as well. It's not a requirement, but getting the clearance of a professional would assist you in getting cleared for active duty again” Rafael said (insisted), hoping to tempt them a little bit.

“It also means we can leave sooner” Stiles muttered, though everyone heard him.

“Sam already suggested that we set aside some time for some team sessions. Bonding. Training” Steve mentioned casually, seeing this as the perfect opportunity to work the plan in with everyone's schedule now while they were all currently together.

“Great. Do you have a counselor in mind to oversee it?” Rafael asked.
“Counselor?” Steve questioned, confused what they would need a counselor for during team bonding.

“I have a few people in mind” Sam cut in, reaching for a list he had placed in his pocket.

“Why would we need to bring someone in?” Steve asked, facing Sam.

He hadn't mentioned anything about bringing somebody in to help them when they were talking about making up some team bonding days.

“Steve, I know I've been making a few suggestions, but I can't be the unofficial official Avengers’ counselor. That's unethical. There's a reason you can't counsel your own friends and family. A counselor has to be unbiased. Someone outside of the situation so they'll have an outside view looking in. A fresh pair of eyes” Sam explained carefully, finally understanding why Steve was so confused. Steve probably just assumed that he would handle the ‘counseling’ stuff due to his experience at the VA.

“No offense but I don't know if we can trust just anybody with this” Steve pointed out.

He didn't like the idea of bringing in someone entirely new within the Compound. Zemo had easily disguised himself as a psychiatrist after all.

“Cap's not wrong. A colleague of Wilson's or not, whoever we choose is gonna need an extensive background check so that we know they aren't some spy, enemy, or easily paid off to reveal our secrets to the press” Tony backed.

Distrust had been a huge reason why he’d never gotten professional help for his PTSD.

“Actually...I think I might have somebody in mind...That is if she'll do it” Scott cut in slowly, looking over to Stiles and Lydia, hoping they'd get his subtle suggestion.

“Morrell?” Lydia questioned skeptically, immediately understanding who he was referring to.

“Seriously?” Stiles said in part disbelief.

“She gives good advice, and she wouldn't be intimidated by them” Derek reasoned, “...I think she'd be good for Barnes too”

“Who's Morrell?” Steve asked (demanded), echoing much of the same thought in the rest of the Avengers.

“She’s the counselor at our old high school” Stiles stated blandly.

“I think this would be a little outside her area of expertise” Sam pointed out gently. He didn't want to turn them down too harshly, they were just trying to help after all.

“I think you'll find that she's oddly very qualified to help all of you” Lydia noted cryptically.

“And just what experience does she possess that you find allows her to assist us?” Vision inquired, speaking for the first time.

“She used to work in a asylum that not only cared for the severely mentally ill, but it also doubled as a prison for the criminally insane” Lydia replied casually.

“...”
“Slightly more qualified” Rhodes commented, not having expected that answer.

“It also tripled as a secret prison for dangerous and/or insane...enhanced” Stiles piggybacked.

“What asylum was this?” Natasha inquired skeptically. These kids just kept getting more and more...atypical.

“It was shut down after the Chief of Medicine killed all the patients” Lydia replied morosely.

Scott and Stiles looked just as grim.

Meredith had been among Dr. Fenris' victims.

“Okay. I'm speaking for everyone when I ask: Where the hell did you grow up?” Clint all but demanded.

“Another time” Scott deflected, “You mentioned training as well?”

It was a poor transition. Everyone knew it. But the Avengers could see they were wandering into touchy territory.

“Yes. It won't do anyone any good if we get out of practice. Besides it would be good for the team to work on it's cohesion now that Clint and Tony are around again” Steve said, explaining his reasoning.

Clint had already explained his choice to join back in as a reserve member, and Tony had to join back in as a part-time combatant since more than half the team was out on house arrest.

The Shadow Guard glanced cautiously, uncertainly at each other.

“You've already been approved for individual training with us” Scott said cautiously, “But not collectively...or with your gear”

“They're worried we'll attack as a group and make a break for it” Steve inferred.

Scott nodded in confirmation.

“Do you know when we'll be allowed to train together again?” Steve inquired.

“We can make a case for it once some time passes” Scott said, sounding both apologetic yet not.

Letting out a breath Steve nodded.

He wasn't happy, but they'd just have to deal with it for now.

“You know there's nothing saying that you can't all train together in the same room” Kira added in carefully.

“Loophole. I like the way you think kid” Clint complimented, a smirk adorning his face.

“So until then I'm going to assume that we're supposed to train with our one-to-ones?” Steve surmised.

“Got it in one” Stiles replied.

“Can we train with the five of you as well? Or is it exclusive?” Natasha asked curiously.
Derek narrowed his eyes at her.

The Widow was planning something. Probably ways to figure out more about them and their powers.

“Agent Daddy said they had to babysit all of us. So I think it's safe to say they can play with the rest of the grown ups too” Clint teased.

“Only if you can keep up old man” Stiles teased back.

Clint's easy-going expression fell.

“*Keep up old man*”

Smelling the drastic change in emotion Scott continued.

“How about we start training tomorrow? That is, if that's good for everyone?” Scott inquired.

Once everyone nodded Scott continued once again.

“Alright. Then the first spar will be Stiles and Ms. Maximoff” Scott announced.

The Pack had decided that dealing with the Scarlet Witch would be their first priority alongside helping Sergeant Barnes.

Steve rose an eyebrow at the proclamation, but otherwise said nothing.

Wanda was a bit surprised that she'd be first, but nodded regardless. Oddly enough she wasn't too worried about training with Agent Stilinski.

“Alright then. If no one else has anything to say then consider the meeting adjourned” Scott concluded.

As everyone was getting up Rafael spoke up.

“Actually, Mr. Stark if you could stay behind a moment? There’s something I need to talk to you about” Rafael stated, though Tony knew saying no wasn't really an option.

Tony narrowed calculating eyes at Agent McCall, but nodded none-the-less.

In the meantime the Pack gathered together a moment before they scattered off after their charges.

“Are we sure this is a good idea? The last time we saw Morrell she was threatening to kill me” Stiles reminded, speaking low so that the super soldiers wouldn't hear him (especially Rogers).

“She's dealt with the Alpha Pack *and* she's worked at Eichen House. She might be morally gray but her advice is sound, and she tells people how it is without holding anything back” Derek reasoned.

“Frankly the fact she's more gray makes her a better fit with some of the Avengers” Lydia remarked.

“That doesn't mean she'll do it” Kira pointed out.

“Can't hurt to ask” Scott said, trying to be minimally optimistic.
(Tony's POV)

“How can I help you Agent Papa?” I snarked, dancing internally when I saw the look of annoyed constipation on his face.

“Spiderman” he said simply.

I immediately tensed, giving the Agent my frostiest glare.

“What about Spiderman?” I demanded, the warning evident in my tone.

If this yahoo thought he could so much as threaten the kid in front of me, or use him as blackmail, well, he'll find out first hand why I was called the Merchant of Death.

“Look. I don't think I have to tell you that the kid is your responsibility now. The fact that you already had a custom made suit for the kid before he even arrived at Lezipig means that you've been keeping an eye on him for a while” Agent McCall observed.

I resisted the urge to roll my eyes.

“A kid swinging around queens in sweatpants? Yeah. Like I wouldn't notice that” I mentally scoffed.

“The UN may not have known about his existence before, but now thanks to you Spiderman is definitely on their radar. If only for his 'connection' to you” Agent McCall pointed out, not holding anything back.

“I didn't carbon-date him okay? I'm aware I messed up” I said angrily, though I was pissed off at myself and not him.

“It's not just him” Agent McCall noted sharply.

I gave him a skeptical look.

“You listed Spiderman as your mentee under the excuse that he was underage and new, so that he didn't have to sign the Accords” Rafael continued.

“The Accords need a few amendments for underage heroes before I'm comfortable with him signing himself” I admitted.

Mentorships allowed the Mentor to take responsibility for a young new hero without the Mentee having to sign the Accords until they were deemed experienced enough by the Mentor.

The Mentor in turn took responsibility for any mistakes the Mentee makes and bares the brunt of the consequences so the Mentee didn't have to.

“And what about other young heroes?” Agent McCall questioned, “According to the Accords the Avengers are allowed to train young heroes and enhanced, but I don't see anything in place that would allow for that”

I paused at that.

When I had that part included in the Accords it was as a way to help protect as many young heroes and enhanced from discrimination as possible…

But just as Agent McCall said, we don't actually have anything in place to train a mini-school of
heroes.

And it wouldn't be fair to just pawn them all off on Xavier.

Not to mention there was still the issue of the Inhumans...Though if my hunches were correct Blackager Boltagon was already making a move on that front.

“Trust me when I say that even if you try to persuade them otherwise, these kids that have taken it upon themselves to place their lives on the line to defend others aren't just going to stop...No matter how much you beg them to” Agent McCall exhaled, swallowing a knot in his throat.

Somehow I got the feeling he was talking from personal experience with his own son.

“If you're going to say that you can take in these kids then you need plan....I'll leave it up to you to decide on how things need to proceed” Agent McCall stated, walking out of the conference room.

“Yeah just another thing to add to the list. Not like I'm busy or anything” I muttered bitterly.

I took in an exhausted breath.

It was time to get back to work.

(Wanda's POV)

“Viz. Can I talk to you for a minute?” I asked, trying to catch him as he began to make his way down the hall.

He paused slightly before turning around to address me.

“Yes....I believe it it time we conversed” he said, though he sounded slightly reluctant.

“I wanted to apologize for what I did to you. I should not have used my powers on you in such a way. You weren't even using your powers to actively restrain us” I apologized regretfully.

Even if I had been bitter at Stark for basically locking me in my room, I knew that Vision had my best interests at heart.

“I acknowledge your apology as sincere...however, I must admit to still feeling betrayed that you felt the need to attack me so viciously at Clint's...goading” Vision said disheartened.

I nodded regretfully.

“I'm sorry. I was just so frustrated at everything. Myself. The world. My whole life fear has been a constant companion...Same with anger...When I first got these powers I felt unafraid for the first time in my life. But now I'm what people fear. And that makes me feel powerless again” I admitted, opening up to him in ways I just never felt I could with anyone else. Not even Nat, Clint, or Steve.

“And Clint...reminded you that you were strong enough to do as you pleased” Vision stated, a note of disappointment in his voice.

I nodded again.

“People fear what they do not understand” I said dejectedly, echoing Scott's previous words, “And the world does not want to understand me”
“You have not given them a chance to” Vision stated exasperatedly, “You have kept yourself away from the limelight because of the very guilt you kept to yourself....After all, those cannot reject what they do not know”

It was true. I became an Avenger to make my own amends. But I stayed away from interviews and press conferences. I couldn't afford someone dredging up anything from my past. Nobody would accept me as a hero if they knew what I had done....So I kept away.

I won't deny that seeing little girls wearing Scarlet Witch attire and talking about the mysterious new badass female Avenger only encouraged my avoidance of the press.

Now even without the world knowing my past I was a pariah.

“If you truly wish to make amends then you should publicly apologize for your actions. It may have been an accident, but not publicly responding to your mistake is what cost you...Though Captain Rogers is partially to blame for that as well since he too should have made a statement regarding the Avengers’ actions in Lagos” Vision reasoned logically.

I knew Vision was right.

I knew he was right but it did nothing to subside the fear threatening to drown me.

“You cannot make amends until you first acknowledge responsibility for your mistakes” Vision concluded sagely, turning to once again make his way down the hall.

“Vision wait” I frantically called out once more.

Before he even had the chance to turn around I continued.

“What about….us?” I questioned to him, trying not to sound too hopeful...or brokenhearted.

“Beyond working towards repairing a friendship I believe that there is much that we need to understand about ourselves before that...topic is broached again” Vision stated crestfallen, immediately continuing his path down the hall, though perhaps at a slightly faster pace.

I continued to stand there for a few moments, willing my welling tears not to fall.

(Third POV)

As Tony walked out of the conference room he took out his phone to message Happy for an update on Parker.

“Vision wait”

Tony's fingers paused mid-sentence at hearing Wanda's plea.

“What about….us?”

The question urged Tony to lift his head slightly in the direction of her voice.

“Beyond working towards repairing a friendship I believe that there is much that we need to understand about ourselves before that...topic is broached again”

Tony didn't dare to even breathe as Vision damn near speed-walked away.
Part of him felt bad for the young woman.

But a larger part.

A louder part…was glad that Vision didn't just forgive her so easily.

“Note to self: Talk to Viz about abusive relationships” he thought, finally breathing once Wanda had walked a good distance away.

*That* was going to be a fun conversation.

“Stark”

Tony flinched violently, spinning around to see Bucky emerging from a shadowed corner of the hall behind him.

“Seriously. Manchurian candidate you're killing me here...literally. I have a heart condition” Tony breathed in exasperated sarcastic annoyance.

“...Sorry” Bucky apologized awkwardly.

“Was there something you needed or was it your goal to give me another heart attack scare today?” Tony questioned (semi) sarcastically.

“I just had a few questions I wanted to ask ya...If you've got a moment?” Bucky asked, sounding very unsure.

Tony appraised the soldier for a moment, his eyes floating from his face to the man's ‘advanced’ metal arm. His gaze eventually moving up to rest on the man’s left shoulder.

According to Barnes’ mandatory medical examination there was some irritation where the shoulder mooring met skin. Barnes hadn't let any of the medical staff near the arm so they couldn't assess whether or not there had been any damage.

But if he had to guess, his money was on the mooring not being correctly fitted onto his body.

“Got a metal kink?” Bucky asked, breaking Tony out of his inner monologue.

Tony smirked.

“The suit wasn't a give away?” Tony joked.

Bucky snorted in amusement.

“Ever have any maintenance done on that?” Tony asked curiously, quickly gesturing to the arm.

“Hydra maintained it” Bucky replied tightly.

“And since you hightailed it?” Tony inquired, raising an eyebrow.

“I've made do. Fixed up some of the plates and that myself” Bucky answered, sounding slightly less tense.

“You dabble in engineering? I was under the impression that you'd been an art student back in the day” Tony asked curiously, the ‘with Steve’ being implied.
“Why? Where are we going?” Steve asked.

“The future” he said, trying to contain his child-like glee behind a straight face as he handed Steve the newspaper.

“I like cars. Mechanics” Bucky admitted, trying to ignore the flashes of memories.

Science fascinated him. And from the bits and pieces he was getting here and there it seemed like it was an interest he'd always had.

“Really? I’m pretty sure Cap would have a flip-phone if he knew I wouldn't trash it on him” Tony stated amused.

“I'm not Rog-Steve” Bucky retorted, resisting the urge to fold his arms in front of him.

“I can see that Robo Cop. What'd you say I take you down to the lab, get that arm of yours checked out? See if there's anything I can do” Tony offered.

“You'd let me in your lab?” Bucky inquired skeptically.

“I've got a few top-secret energy efficient cars I'm working on here” Tony mentioned, hoping it would be enough to entice the soldier.

“Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Howard Stark!”

Said man made his way on stage, top hat and a fresh pressed black suit, kissing the lovely showgirl who handed him the mic.

“Ladies and gentleman. What if i told you that in just a few short years that your automobile wouldn’t even have to touch the ground at all?” Howard questioned, immediately grabbing the audience’s attention.

The showgirls proceeded to remove the tires off of the hot-rod red vehicle.

“Yes. Thanks Mandy” Howard acknowledged.

“With Stark Gravitic Reversion Technology you’ll be able to do just that” Howard regaled.

Howard proceeded to turn a switch, slowly pushing up on the lever in front of him. The car slowly lifting itself off of the ground, only suspended by air.

“Holy cow” he said, starstruck at the marvel in front of him.

“This is what the future will hold” he thought wondrously.

Unexpectedly the technology replacing the wheels began to spark, shorting out and toppling the vehicle back down to the hard ground with the rest of us.

He couldn’t help but laugh at the humorous misfortune of it. The technology was great, but there was still a long ways to go.

“I did say a few years didn't I?” Howard covered smoothly, despite his apparent embarrassment.


Bucky didn't know how long he had been lost in the memory. But clearly it had been long enough
for Stark to notice.

“Any flying cars?” Bucky asked, ignoring his zone out. Fortunately Stark let it go too despite the curious gleam in his eyes.


Bucky gathered that whoever had owned the car had meant something to Stark if the grief in his eyes were any indication.

“So, lab?” Bucky inquired, trying to draw the man back out of his mind again.

“Lab” Tony agreed.

Chapter End Notes

As usual a lot of continued foreshadowing! Things are going to start blowing up soon! Like I mentioned earlier this chapter is focused on various types of relationships. I hope you liked how I meshed the Hale Family in with the MCU! PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE comment!!!
Hi all.

This chapter ended up much much longer than I planned on. I just kept writing and writing. I almost considered splitting the chapter but I ultimately chose not to.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Tony's POV)

“All things considered you did a fairly good job bending the plates back. Although I have to say that I'm insulted for you if Hydra thought this was advanced technology ahead of its time. I mean seriously! The lack of flexibility alone is appalling!” I ranted as I assessed the arm's full capabilities and limitations.

Make no mistake. For the World War II era it was top of the line.

But from what I was seeing it didn't seem like Hydra had updated the tech at all since it was created.

There was no additional combat features.

The mobility and flexibility were subpar.

It was only made of titanium.

There was no sensation.

At all.

Like none.

It was literally a hunk of metal attached to his stump of a shoulder.

They didn't wire in the arm to his nerves, or give it the capability for him to feel pressure, heat, cold. Nothing.

What it did undoubtedly cause him was pain, particularly at his shoulder where they had attached the anchor so that his body could support the damn thing.

His nerves had to be on fire.

Frankly I was surprised he was letting me anywhere near it.

“You think you can do better?” Barnes challenged, sounding almost teasing.

I paused to give him my best 'You're-kidding-me-right' look.
“You do know who I am right? Tony Stark. Genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist” I listed assuredly.

“The Da Vinci of our time” Barnes included nonchalantly, sounding vaguely amused.

“I see you've done your research of the twenty-first century” I observed, frowning at the rigidity of the shoulder joint.

“I already knew of you...from Hydra” Barnes said hesitantly, his words pausing my movements momentarily.

And damn if that didn't send a chill up my spine.

“Hydra kept tabs on me?” I inquired, trying not to sound like I was perturbed by his statement.

“You're surprised by that?” Barnes inquired dubiously.

There was something in his inflection I couldn't identify. Almost like he was searching for something.

“Frosty my company is the largest tech conglomerate in the world, and I'm a former weapons manufacturer. Everybody keeps tabs on me” I stated matter-of-factly.

“And it doesn't bother you...having me here?” Barnes inquired, sounding very apprehensive.

“What you did was Hydra's fault, not yours” I said firmly, pointing my screwdriver at him to emphasize my point, “You had no choice. Those deaths aren't on you”

Barnes nodded slowly. The tension that had been building, releasing from his body. His eyes lighter. Relieved. Almost as if my words had lifted just a tad bit of that guilt off his shoulders.

It was...odd that I could give him that relief.

But hey, the guy was tortured for over seventy years. Recovery needed to start somewhere.

I decided to keep my mouth shut about how even knowing that you were mind fucked doesn't completely make the pain go away.

When I went to reach for my mini wrench on the table I discovered it to be suspiciously gone.

“One of the AIs took it over to Derek” Barnes said, gesturing over to said man.

Looking over I couldn't help but raise my eyebrow at the scene.

Dum-E was waving the wrench in Derek's face, obviously trying to get his attention so that he could show the other male his dexterity with the tool.

Derek on the other hand was ignoring him in favor of reading a novel he had somehow procured.

If the cover was any indication it was probably one of Peppers…

“Got experience ignoring kids?” I asked him curiously.

“Something like that” he replied blandly, not even looking up from the page he was on.

“You just gonna sit there the whole time or will you be joining our little powwow?” I inquired.
“I was an English major. Unless reciting Shakespeare is suddenly critical in fixing a mechanical arm I don't think I'll be too much help” Derek retorted, turning to the next page.

“Fair enough” I relented.

I really wanted to talk to him about his family, but even I can take a hint when someone was blatantly trying to avoid a conversation.

“Dum-E get over here. I need that wrench you're shoving in Grumpy Cat's face” I ordered. Derek just gave me an exaggerated eye roll at the nickname.

Dum-E made a sad whine at having to give up his pursuit of Derek's attention, but complied with the request nonetheless.

“So. I'm just realizing that you never asked me whatever it was that you wanted to ask me” I said, closing up some of the plates.

Barnes shifted awkwardly for a moment.

“How did you forgive him?” he mumbled quietly.

“Forgive who?” I asked confused.

He wasn't exactly being specific. Frankly he could be talking about literally anyone.

“Rog-Steve” Barnes clarified.

“You're going to have to be more specific there Snowflake. Steve and I tend to disagree on principle” I commented, raising an eyebrow at him.

I knew he and Steve were...going through a rough patch right now but I hadn't thought it was this...rough.

“How did you forgive him for letting the Witch into the Avengers after everything she did?” Barnes questioned bluntly.

I froze at his words.

I turned my head to gaze at the hurt, anger, and confusion in his eyes.

I let out a huge huff of air, setting down my tools.

This was not a conversation I wanted to be having.

As a general rule I was allergic to expressing my feelings, only ever opening up to a few select people, and even then I still basically keep everything to myself until I self-destruct….

But Barnes needed legitimate help...And me brushing things off with sarcasm and humor isn't gonna give him the answers he's looking for...And it's not like Derek would judge with his own history of personal traumas (I think).

Coming to a (reluctant) decision I finally relented.

“I never really did” I admitted painfully, “Forgive him I mean”

Barnes’ expression went blank, obviously conflicted, and I felt an irrational urge to explain myself
to the ex-assassin.

“After Ultron when I retired again, sure we were joking around. Said we'd miss each other. All that sappy crap...But nothing was ever the same after that...He never really...trusted me like he did before the whole Ultron thing...And the fact that he welcomed Wanda unconditionally without holding any of her actions against her only rubbed more salt” I admitted sadly, bitterly.

It also killed me inside to cover up her fault in Johannesburg. Even now I regret letting Steve guilt-trip me into doing that...I had stopped talking to him after that.

“He never said it, but it was obvious that he didn't trust me. Even when I was found not guilty of creating Ultron things never went back to the way they were between us...any of us” I said, continuing to ramble on.

I didn't understand how I could suddenly be so chatty. I didn't even mention any of this to Rhodey...But even as I was staring at Barnes’ feet (I couldn't even meet his damn eyes), I couldn't help but feel that maybe…Maybe that of anyone Barnes would understand where I was coming from.

Or maybe his presence was just the last crack the dam needed to break.

Either way, everything was coming out now.

“But you were cleared” Barnes stated certainly, his voice sounding tight.

“Yeah. They know that. They all kept a close eye on the trial” I stated, starting to fidget anxiously with the screwdriver.

“Then why?” Barnes demanded, as if it were some foreign concept he couldn't understand.

“Because I was still deemed negligent. He may have been called Ultron but it wasn't actually my program that went rogue. Hydra was trying to use Loki's scepter, specifically the mind stone, to create something like an artificial intelligence. For what purpose I don't know, but whatever their experiments did spawned something sentient within the scepter. The problem was they couldn't get it to interface. When Bruce and I were working on the Ultron program we had the same problem. We couldn't get it to interface. We were nowhere close. However something activated the mind stone and caused the intelligence spawned by Hydra to reach out. And this time it did interface with something. The Ultron program, and it completely took it over” I explained, summarizing almost verbatim from what the investigation and trial had concluded.

“And you proved all that?” Barnes asked, sounding like he was looking for some kind of clarification on something.

“Yup. It was pretty easy since I had the data to back it up. Even as pissed off as the world was, no expert brought in could dispute that ‘Ultron’ wasn't actually my program. It was a sentient spawn from the mind stone that happened to steal my tech and merge itself with the Ultron program. Hence the name. So was Bruce and I responsible for his creation? No. But I was deemed negligent for keeping the scepter longer than I should have, and having it in the same room I was running tests in. Even then my culpability was brought into question since the scepter has the ability to influence a person. Since they couldn't prove or disprove whether the scepter played a part in me keeping the scepter in my lab, or how much it fed into my panicked need to build due to what we had thought was my PTSD at the time, I wasn't given jail time, but I now have limits on what I can do with AI's now. Outside the ones I've already created pre-Ultron I have to limit the learning capacity of any and all UI's I create so that they don't really have the capacity to grow beyond a
language interface” I concluded, hoping I cleared up any confusion he had on the trial.

“That's not fair! Ultron was never your AI!” Barnes shouted, his outburst almost startling me out of my stool.

“It makes people feel better” I justified weakly, bitterly.

“That's bullshit! You were deemed negligent, so what?! They were wrong! You were mind-raped! Can't you get the ruling overturned?” Barnes demanded, the fury in his eyes dangerously cold.

“I can make an appeal with the new evidence that has been brought to light” I conceded.

“But you won't” Barnes stated, sounding sure and even more furious.

“If I do Wanda will be deported faster than we can blink. And Sokovia has the death penalty” I pointed out.

“I'm not seeing the problem” Barnes stated darkly.

Shit. We were getting close to Winter Soldier territory.

“She's made a hell of a lot of bad mistakes-”

“And she keeps making them” Barnes cut off, getting right up in my face, bracketing his arms around me as he gripped the table behind me hard, making the metal creak.

Something in my brain was telling me that I should be afraid, concerned at least, that Barnes (who was straddling the line between Winter and Bucky) was so damn close he might as well be pinning me to the table...But I wasn't afraid.

Hell I wasn't afraid to stand directly in front of the Hulk and pat the damn green-bean on the leg and make jokes.

Was I uneasy? Yes.

But not for my own stake (I wasn't the object of his ire after all).

Barnes was spiralling. Slipping into his fight or flight mode. Allowing his instincts to reign more freely.

And that was dangerous.

We've already seen in Bucharest that when Barnes’ fight or flight instincts were pushed he would subconsciously fall back on his training and instincts as the Winter Soldier.

“She keeps making mistakes because nobody is holding her accountable. They just keep sweeping things under the rug and telling her it's not her fault. That she's a good person” Barnes mocked, “Well newsflash, just because something is a mistake or an accident doesn't absolve someone of responsibility for what they did. And a hell of a lot of her actions sure as hell weren't accidents”

He wasn't wrong. God he wasn't wrong.

He was saying was everything I was trying to tell everyone. Trying to get everyone to understand.

And yet here I was falling in with everyone else. Protecting Wanda from things she shouldn't be protected from. Things she should be made to face.
But hell. I've been solely responsible for the PR for so long, covering everyone’s ass was second nature.

“The fact you're telling me that Rogers distrusts you for something that you proved hadn't even been your fault, and yet he has the gall to trust a Hydra agent to watch his back only proves to me that there's something wrong in that punk's head” Barnes declared furiously, his face a mere five inches from mine.

I didn't know what to say to that.

This wasn't how I pictured the conversation would go.

Though truthfully if I wanted a different result I probably should have lied…

“And don't even try to tell me that you don't agree with me. I can see it in your face that you do” Barnes challenged, narrowing his eyes at me, almost daring me to try and deny it.

But I couldn't.

And he knew it.

I knew it.

“I think this is a conversation you should be having with Rogers” a voice cut in.

I looked over to see that Derek had gotten up off his spot on the couch and come up next to us without me even realizing it (truthfully I had forgotten that he was even down here with us). Though Barnes didn't seem surprised to see him that close.

Damn observant assassins. Go figure.

“All of you keep walking on eggshells around each other. Nothing’s going to change if you all just sit around in your own little pity party clubs and rant about it. You have a problem with someone confront them head on and address it” Derek advised harshly, sounding fed up with everything (and he hasn't even been here a full day yet).

Silence reigned.

Barnes and Derek had some kind of blank stare down.

As if they were silently arguing their feelings and points to each other without words.

And since Barnes had not yet moved his arms I was still bracketed between them as their silent battle lasted several minutes.

“Fine” Barnes eventually said, sounding oddly resolute in whatever conclusion he had come to.

“Just like that?” I questioned in disbelief.

“Derek’s right. I’ve been avoiding the punk. I was afraid that if I talked to him now I wouldn't be able to keep myself from punching him in the face...But maybe that's exactly what I need to do” Barnes explained, sounding miles calmer and no longer like he was plotting Wanda's murder.

“Punch him in the face?” I questioned incredulously.

“Spar” Derek corrected, sounding exasperated.
How someone could sound like they were rolling their eyes was a talent in itself.

Barnes nodded in confirmation, finally moving his arms away, though there was still only about five inches of space between us.

“Somehow I think this spar might end up a little one-sided” I pointed out.

Steve tended to make the poor choice of holding back whenever Barnes was throwing punches at him.

“If the punk knows what good for him he'd better punch back” Barnes stated with an annoyed edge to his voice.

“You know I'm all for catharsis but-”

“He needs this” Derek said, cutting me off.

I turned to regard him for a moment.

“If there is one thing I understand it's anger. Keeping it contained, not letting it out, and using it as a focal point to drive you? That's not healthy. But until you let it go, until you release what's burdening you, you won't be able to find a better way to cope” Derek advised.

I couldn't help the pity in my gaze.

I knew there was no way he couldn't be speaking from experience.

“I need to get my anger out. Otherwise it's just gonna keep build'n and I'm gonna end up beat'n on him anyway” Barnes stated as if it were an inevitable conclusion.

And maybe it was.

“Except there's the little issue of who's allowed to train with who” I reminded him.

“We already told you we’re not here to be strict disciplinarians. If Barnes needs this Scott won’t say no” Derek stated as if it should have been obvious.

And bingo was his name-o.

“I thought Stilinski was the co-leader of this faction of the Shadow Guard? Shouldn’t he be the one deciding things?” I inquired slyly.

Derek directed a frigid gaze my way.

“The Guard isn’t a dictatorship. We all get a say” Derek covered smoothly.

Too bad for him.

“But Scott makes the final decisions” I stated, probing for a reaction.

“Scott and Stiles make the final call” Derek emphasized, an almost threat was evident in his tone.

That was enough pushing for now.

“Right” I said agreeably (sarcasm cough sarcasm).

Looks like there was more to the Guard’s hierarchical structure than we all thought.
As I was sifting through something to say as a distraction my stomach conveniently growled.

“Have either of you ever tried shawarma?”

(Steve’s POV)

“This would only be a few times a week at most” Scott said.

I focused my enhanced hearing to listen in to Morrell’s reply.

“And I work five days a week until three PM” Morrell reminded him.

This Morrell didn’t sound too enthusiastic about helping them, but she wasn’t outright saying no either.

“Not on the weekends. And with the technology here you could attend sessions during the week via hologram” Scott argued.

“A good counter” I thought.

“True. But what makes you so sure I will agree to do this at all?” Morrell inquired curiously.

She reminded me a bit of Natasha. Using her words to prompt an answer that she already knew herself.

“Because this is what you swore to do. Keep the balance. If the Avengers are torn apart it gives groups like the Monroe Republic and the Watchdogs free reign. And that can’t happen” Scott replied assuredly.

I was beginning to truly like Scott. His views seemed to be very similar to my own.

“I’ll concede to that point” Morrell allowed, “I won’t make any promises...But I’ll agree to help on a trial basis for now”

Which means an extensive background check starting now.

“Thank you” Scott said, sounding genuinely grateful.

“Don’t thank me just yet. Remember. Change only comes to those who want it” Morrell replied, hanging up her end of the phone immediately after.

At the sound of the ended call I pulled back my focus on my hearing.

“You know if you wanted to know the outcome of the call you could’ve just asked” Scott pointed out.

“Sorry” I said, apologizing instinctively.

“No you’re not” Scott replied, though there wasn’t any heat in his words.

I resisted the urge to huff out a laugh.

How was it that he could already have such a sharp read on certain aspects of my personality?

“You’re right. I’m not” I conceded.
“I’m not offended. Heaven knows I’ve listened in to more than my fair share of conversations. Especially when the safety of my friends and family were at stake” Scott sympathized.

“It’s nothing personal. But with everything that’s gone on, I can’t be too careful” I said, explaining my reasoning.

“Believe me I get it. But honesty goes two ways. If trust is going to happen then you’re going to need to be up front about everything” Scott pointed out.

The vehicle screeches as it crashes into the tree.

Sometimes my teammates don’t tell me things.

You knew about this and didn’t tell us?!?

That wasn’t your decision to make Steve! It involved both of us, and Barnes!

What the hell Steve. I spent the last seventy plus years having my choices taken away from me. You don’t get to decide things like that on my behalf.

“Yeah. I’m learning that maybe a lot of what I think is better left unsaid isn’t exactly the best choice” I admitted, feeling downcast.

“The truth always has a way of coming out...In my experience the harder you try to keep something a secret the worse it’s going to end up backfiring in your face” Scott replied, sounding like he was speaking of something in particular.

I gazed at him critically for a moment.

His eyes oddly knowing. Prodding. Expectant.

……As if he knew.

But it wasn’t possible.

He couldn’t know could he?

“You’ve lost a lot. I get it. You’re trying to keep from losing anyone else. From feeling like you have to choose between two people who are each a significant part of your life, though in different ways. You think that you’re protecting both of them” Scott spoke with such a knowing awareness that his words couldn't be mistaken for anything else.

He knew.

“But in reality...you’re just being selfish” Scott declared, his soft tone both sharp and accusing.

“You can’t tell him” I stated (ordered), a desperate panic seeping into my voice even as I silently threatened the young man in front of me.

Scott didn't even flinch.

He just continued to look at me in pity.

“I already told you Captain. Secrets like this have a way of coming out on their own”
“Your majesty” Argent addressed as T’Challa made his way into the center of the lobby of the hotel.

“Agent Argent. To what do I owe the pleasure?” T’Challa addressed back.

“Please, just Argent. And I’m here as a...follow up if you will” Argent said, keeping things vague.

“The UN tasked you to keep an eye on me then?” T’Challa easily surmised.

“Unofficially. Your...capabilities peaked their interest” Argent admitted.

“Of that I have no doubt...But that is not why you are here is it?” T’Challa guessed.

“No it’s not” Argent agreed, holding up a thumb drive.

“Am I to presume correctly that is the evidence I was promised?” T’Challa inferred.

“It is” Argent confirmed, handing the drive to the young King.

T’Challa gripped the small tool like a lifeline.

“If I may be so bold?” Argent asked, bringing the King's attention back to him.

“You may” T’Challa allowed, recalling the last time another young man had requested similarly of him.

“I know you may think that it’s your fault for not being fast enough. But I’m telling you as a parent myself, that your father would choose to be blown up a thousand times if it meant that you would be the one to live” Argent declared knowingly, painfully.

“How the man could speak of such grievances with both pride and sorrow, T’Challa did not know, but his daughter sounded like a warrior of the highest honor.

“A parent should never outlive their child” Argent emphasized.

And finally T’Challa understood now how his father was so at peace on the other side.

“Your majesty” Okoye addressed, cutting in-between their silence.
“What is the matter?” T’Challa inquired, curious at the more urgent note in her voice.

“News reports are saying there has been an attack on the Avengers Compound”

(Scott Lang’s POV)


“We had dream that we’d go travelin’ together. We’d spread a little lovin’, then we’d keep movin’ on” I sang as I rocked out to Get Happy on my guitar hero drums, killing my solo of course.


“Somethin’ always happens whenever we’re together”

Ding-ding-ding dong.

“We get a happy feelin' when we're singin' a song”

Ding-Ding-Ding-Ding-Ding-Dong

“Travelin' along, there's a song that we're singin'. Come on, get happy. A whole lotta lovin' is what we'll be bringin’”


“We'll make you happy. We'll make you happy. We'll make you hap- AHHHHHHHHH!!!!” I screamed (definitely not high pitched), chucking both my drumsticks at the two intruders in my apartment.

“Oh shit” the young pale male proclaimed as they both dodged the projectiles.

“Hey hey. We’re not robbing you! We’re a part of the Shadow Guard. We were sent to keep an eye on you!” the darker skinned kid exclaimed as I righted myself up in a fighting position.

I observed them skeptically.

Neither of them were wearing gear, not to mention they didn’t even look old enough to be finished college!

“This is a joke right? Did Luis put you up to this?” I demanded confused.

“We don’t know who that is” Pale boy replied sounding wary. Funny considering they’re the ones who broke into my house.

“I’m Agent Mason Hewitt and this is my partner Agent Corey Bryant” Mason said.

“Okay. This has to be a joke. How old are you two even?” I asked dubiously.

“Twenty” Mason answered, making my eyebrows hit my hairline.

“And you?” I asked, pointing to kid number two.

“...Nineteen” Corey answered hesitantly.

“Nineteen?!” I reiterated in disbelief.
Well, now I'm going to have to call NASA cause I've officially lost my eyebrows in orbit.

“I’m turning twenty” Corey clarified, as if that was any better.

“And you expect me to believe that the two of you are actually FBI agents at your age?” I demanded, scoffing at the notion.

“How else would we know the name of the group sending agents over to watch you?” Mason countered.

I narrowed my eyes at him.

“Touche” I allowed, “But you still can’t expect me to believe that the FBI actually sent two kids to be my new parole officers?”

“You can call our boss if that’ll make you feel better?” Corey recommended.

“Oh no. I’m not falling for that one. Calling your ‘Boss’. Kid I’m an ex-thief, you’re gonna have to do better than that” I mocked.

“You got a better idea?” Corey challenged blandly.

“Uh” I refuse to admit that I actually blanked for a moment.

“I um...I can call...I can call...uh...Woo! Woo. I can call Agent Woo” I declared proudly, a smug grin on my face that I refused to let fall even when the two smart-alecks looked at each other like they couldn’t believe they had to put up with my antics.

I pulled out my cell and quickly scrolled through my phone to hit Woo’s name.

I kept my eye on both the boys as I waited for the Agent to answer his end of the line.

“Well well well. Mr. Lang. You are the last person I’d ever expect to call...Actually that’s not true, the last person I’d expect to call is my ex-wife” Woo declared, answering his phone.

“Good to know Woo. Um I have two kids in my apartment that are saying they’re from the Shadow Guard. Would you be able to confirm their names for me?” I asked.

“Sure” Woo agreed easily.

“Mason Hewitt and Corey Bryant” I told him, trying not to sound too smug about getting them caught.

“Yep that’s them” Woo confirmed.

“What?! You’re serious?!” I demanded in disbelief.

“I know they’re young, but recruitment into the Shadow Guard isn’t up to regular FBI regulations” Woo explained nonchalantly, making it clear there was nothing he could do about it.

“Who the hell would ever allow kids into a FBI task-force?!” I demanded.

“Young or not they’re very qualified, and whether you like it or not they’re now your new parole officers so you might as well get used to it. Chao” Woo declared, hanging up without hesitation.

“Wai-”
I glared down at the ‘end call’ on my cell phone.

“Believe us now?” Corey asked, sounding unimpressed.

“...So how long have the two of you been partners?” I asked awkwardly.

“About four years” Mason answered, a beaming smiling on his face.

“You’ve been in the FBI since you were sixteen?” I demanded horrified.

“No. We’ve been partners since we were sixteen” Mason said, as if that was some kind of clarification.

“...?”

“We’re gay” Corey clarified better, realizing my confusion.

“...Ohhhhh” I breathed out.

“That—that was a very misleading statement” I coughed awkwardly.

Silence.

“....So uh. You're my new parole officers?” I asked, trying to start up the conversation again.

“Looks like it” Corey stated blandly.

“And you broke into my apartment?” I questioned (the irony not lost on me).

“We knocked...And rang the doorbell” Corey stated.

“Besides you didn't exactly lock the door” Mason pointed out.

“Huh” I muttered.

Did I lock the front door?....

Before I could continue that thought my stomach growled. I looked over at the digital clock and saw that it was in fact dinner time.

“Leftover Chinese food?”

_____________________________

(Argent's POV)

At hearing of the attack on the Compound I agreed to allow King T’Challa and his guards to accompany me to the JCTC.

Though if we were being technical I was accompanying him since I was the one riding in his limousine.

Regardless, it gives me the chance to bring up another matter entirely.

“You can look over the drive now while we're en route” I suggested.

“Unfortunately I do not have the technology to look at the drive now. At a more convenient time perhaps” T’Challa rebuked.
“I'm fairly certain if anything in this vehicle the thumb drive is the only technology that's out of date” I pointed out, letting my hand be known.

The atmosphere of the vehicle changed immediately.

“Are you implying that Wakanda, a third world country, has standard technology more advanced than the technology that is used everyday in other flourishing countries?” T'Challa covered smoothly.

“With all due respect your Majesty. You and I both know that Wakanda isn't exactly the third world country it pretends to be to the rest of the planet” I countered, debating how much of his game I should play along with.

“Really now? Then tell me Agent. What is your basis for such claims?” T’Challa challenged.

I took a glance out of the corner of my eyes at each of the Dora Milaje that had poised themselves in case they were given the signal to slit my throat.

“My family has a unique history of its own...A history of dealing with things many would consider to be myth and fable” I relayed, seeing if that would incite the reaction I was looking for.

“As interesting as that is, I'm not seeing how that connects with Wakanda” T'Challa questioned, uncertain at the direction I was taking.

No dice then.

“Myth often intersects with religion and spirituality” I explained.

“You are speaking of our Panther Goddess” T'Challa realized, “Most would scoff at such an idea”

“I'm not most people” I countered coolly.

“So believe that our Goddess is real?” T'Challa inquired skeptically.

“I believe that mythology, and stories that have been passed down have to come from somewhere...My family happens to specialize in dealing with the truths between myth and reality” I explained further, knowing that I would have to now.

“And discovering these truths brought them to Wakanda?” T’Challa questioned.

“Let's just say we're not the only family in the world that deals in mythology...People talk” I revealed.

“You don't strike me as the type to believe everything you hear” T'Challa observed.

“No...But when said King is physically on par with super soldiers, and possesses a high tech suit of vibranium weave...Well you can see how I would think those...rumors would have some merit” I pointed out.

“A logical deduction” he conceded.

“Look. I'm not here to blackmail or threaten you. Nor do I or the Guard want anything from you” I made clear.

“Then what was it that you were hoping to gain by this conversation?” he asked inquisitively.
“Call it curiosity. We wanted to see just how... aware you were considering Wakanda's... religious beliefs” I explained, knowing I would peak his curiosity.

“Aware of what exactly?” he asked (near demanded).

“Do you honestly believe that your Goddess is the only supernatural entity out there?” I alluded.

“You have my full attention Agent”

(Scott Lang's POV)

I stuffed another fork full of lo mein in my mouth as I sat down on my couch. Mason and Corey not far behind me.

“So. Did you two even go to college or did you just hop right into the FBI?” I asked, forking more noodles.

“I'm halfway to my degree in archeology at UCLA” Corey replied, dipping a slice of Chinese pizza in soy sauce.

“Really?” I asked surprised.

“What about you?” I asked, gesturing to Mason.

“I'm working on my Master's in biophysics” he replied, mouth full of wanton.

“Master's?” I reiterated. There's no way I could've heard that right.

“He started at UCLA as a sophomore” Corey explained, seeing my confusion.

“So you already have a degree?” I asked, stunned.

“Two” Mason replied, taking a gulp of water.

“Two?!?” I damn near shouted in disbelief.

“Bachelors in biophysics and anthropology” he answered, an amused smile on his face, “I get that reaction a lot”

Well, if I didn't feel like a loser before, I did now.

Here I was, jobless, and under house arrest. With a degree I'll probably never (legally) get to use because of my criminal record, and two of my friends, Hope and Pym, still weren't talking to me.

The only solace I had on that end was the fact Pym hadn't taken back the suit.

Though he did tell me to destroy it so that Stark couldn't get his hands on it…

Buuutttttt…..I couldn't.

It was his life's work, and I couldn't help but maybe, possibly feel that his judgement on Tony Stark was skewed.

So I hid the suit instead.

Not that anyone would ever find out.
Especially not the two kids in front of me.

“So you have a daughter?” Mason inquired, gesturing to a picture of Cassie and I that I had on my side table next to the couch.

“Yeah. That's my Peanut” I said, a genuine wide smile on my face.

“How old is she?” Corey asked, picking up the frame.

“She’ll be nine in July” I replied.

Hopefully I wouldn't still be on house arrest then.

“Will she be coming by at all?” Mason inquired curiously.

“Yeah. But I’ll give you both a heads up when that happens. There isn’t much room here but I can get a futon or something. I’m assuming that since you're dating you won’t mind sharing” I replied.

GoodWill might have a cheap one I can buy.

“We’re not staying here…” Corey stammered lightly in confusion.

“What do you mean? You are here to keep an eye on me right?” I asked, becoming confused myself.

“Well yeah” Corey confirmed.

“But we weren’t planning on living with you” Mason said, finishing Corey's sentence.

“Did you rent one of the apartments around here then?” I asked.

“No” Mason replied slowly.

“Then what? Were you planning on just standing outside with a pair of binoculars and reporting my high score on guitar hero?” I joked, chuckling a bit.

When they didn’t laugh with me I stopped.

“Please tell me that wasn’t your plan” I pleaded.

“Well not the standing part” Corey stated.

“Yeah that’s not happening. There is no way I’m gonna allow two kids, FBI agents or not, observe me from outside. What if it’s raining and you get sick? I do not feel like explaining to either of your parents why the two of you are in the hospital with pneumonia” I said firmly, my parental voice coming out.

“I don’t get sick...And even if I did my parents wouldn’t care” Corey noted matter-of-factly.

“…”

“Concerning...The parents part I mean. But not the point...Point is, the two of you, or whoever is on shift, will be staying with me. Indoors and away from all the vicious squirrels” I declared.

“Squirrels?” Mason uttered, sounding as if he were still processing the word.

“Yes squirrels. And they’re very mean and territorial of their trees and nuts” I affirmed.
“Do we look like your nine year old daughter to you?” Corey questioned in disbelief.

“I’ll call your Boss” I threatened.

“Tattle-tailing really? We’ve downgraded to five year olds now?” Mason stated in exasperation.

I just gave them one of my immovable parental glares.

“Fine. You win. Sleepover it is” Mason caved.

“Good” I said approvingly, relaxing back into the couch with a smile, “TV?”

“Best suggestion you’ve had all day” Corey ribbed.

I ignored him as I clicked the On button.

You are looking at images of the destruction at the Avengers Compound from earlier today.

“What?!” I exclaimed almost choking on my cola.

“Turn that up!” Mason demanded.

Preliminary reports indicate that eight Security and Evacuation Agency members were killed in the invasion of the Compound.

From what we understand the attack on the Compound was led by the organization the Watchdogs in an assassination attempt on the members of the Avengers.

The assailants were apprehended and sent to Seagate Penitentiary where they will await trial.

“Call Scott” Corey just about ordered.

“I am” Mason affirmed, already having his phone out.

Their words breaking me out of my shock, I took out my own phone and pressed on Sam’s name.

“Come on. Come on. Pick up” I mumbled to myself frantically.

Hey you’ve reached Sam Wilson-

“Damn it” I cursed, ending the call.

I immediately went back in and started typing out a text.

The news said the Compound was attacked. Everyone okay? Send.

“You get anyone?” I asked hopefully.

“No” Corey said grimly.

“Lydia! Oh thank God!” Mason exclaimed relieved.

“Who's Lydia?”

(Sam's POV)
“This is about as awkward as I thought I'd be” I thought.

I didn't have a clue as to what to do or even talk about with Lydia.

And somehow I didn't think she'd appreciate an offer to go to the track when she's wearing heels.

Fortunately both of us were hungry so I decided a tour of the main cafeteria was the best plan of action (the construction outside the lounge would be too disruptive).

It was about dinner time anyway.

If she was any good at cooking maybe the two of us could talk while we made some food for the rest of the Avengers (Within reason though. Steve ate a hell of a lot).

“So uh, you allergic to anything?” I asked her as I opened the fridge, hoping that once we got started the conversation would flow a little better.

“Ms. Martin. Boss is ordering Shawarma for everyone so there is no need to cook at this time”

“Thank you Friday” Lydia thanked.

“Hey Friday is Stark ordering drinks as well?” I asked, trying to gauge if we had enough in the fridge for everyone.

Of course my question was met with no answer.

“And it would seem that Stark's AI still does not like me” I muttered. Or the other 'Rogues' if I had to take a guess.

Then again Friday only really spoke to Stark so it wasn't too much of a surprise.

“Friday would you be able to tell me the answer to Mr. Wilson's question” Lydia inquired.

“Boss is in fact ordering drinks for everyone as well”

“Thank you” Lydia said again.

“It is no problem Ms. Martin”

I resisted the urge to roll my eyes.

“Kids” I thought with a scoff.

“You don't seem too offended by Friday ignoring you” Lydia inquired curiously.

“Friday only really answers to Stark. She's basically a robotic kid. She'll only answer to who she feels like” I replied, closing the ginormous fridge and moving over to the plate dispenser.

“You seem to have a measure of understanding of AIs” Lydia observed.

I shook my head.

“No really. But Stark outfitted my new Falcon suit with a drone equipped with its own rudimentary UI so you could say I've got some experience on that front” I explained as I started stacking a bunch of plates.

“Really” Lydia asked, suddenly sounding very interested, “What’s the UI’s name?”
“Redwing” I said chipperly. I don't care what Nat says, he's adorable.

“I'm able to communicate and control him via my wrist mounted device” I explained, placing some utensils on top of the two stacks of plates, “He's not like Friday though. He can only do the commands I give him. He's not really capable of thinking for himself”

When I turned around to hand Lydia a stack I saw that she suddenly looked very angry.

“Um. Was it something I said?” I asked, very confused.

“Nothing I'm angry at you for” Lydia said shortly, grabbing the stack of plates from my hands and walking towards the exit.

“Okay…”

“So according to your file you have a degree in aviation engineering” Lydia said, changing the topic.

“I do. I'm nowhere near Stark's level, but I'm good enough to maintain the suit in a pinch. It was one of the reasons I was picked to pilot the Falcon Exo-suit to begin with” I answered as we made our way through the halls.

Lydia nodded, though I could still see the frustration in her eyes. Apparently her topic wasn't enough of a distraction.

“So what about you? You have any particular schooling or degree?” I asked curiously.

“Actually-” she began, but was cut off by the ring of a phone.

“Here” I said, balancing my stack on my left palm, holding the right out to her.

“Thank you” she said, carefully settling down the plates on my palm.

Afterwards she immediately reached into her pants pocket for her cell phone and answered the call.

“Hello” she addressed.

“Relax everyone's fine” she assured to whoever was on the line.

“Scott and Stiles’ phones were busy because they were probably making a phone call” Lydia said, sounding exasperated.

“Well you can tell him that all the Avengers are fine” she replied, sounding like she wanted to roll her eyes.

“Who's asking?” I asked curiously. There wasn't many people outside the Compound who would be asking about us. And the number that knew Lydia was even less.

“Scott Lang. He says he tried to contact you but you didn't answer” Lydia replied.

I would've heard my cell if I had it on me. I never turn my ringer off.

“My phone's probably still in the lounge” I speculated.

I had set it on the edge of the pool table while Rhodes and I were playing, and I hadn't thought to grab it when everyone had taken off to deal with the intruders.
“I promise everyone's fine. I'll have Scott and Stiles call you both later for a report” she reassured, “Yes yes bye”

“Who was that?” I asked as she took back her stack of plates.

“Mason and Corey. They're the Guards watching over Lang. They saw a report on the news just now about the attack on the Compound and they were worried” she explained.

“Tic-tac wasn't attacked too?” I asked, just to make sure.

“Not that they told me” she reassured.

The two of us then lapsed into (slightly less awkward) silence as we waited for the elevator.

“You know you never did finish telling me whether or not you have any schooling” I realized.

For a moment Lydia said nothing.

Then all of a sudden an impish grin made its way onto her face.

Ding.

“I guess I didn't” she replied teasingly, walking into the elevator.

(Stiles’ POV)

“How's MIT?” I asked into the speaker, crossing my legs on the lounge chair.

“Good. We still doing the thing? I'd like to have my PhD already by this time next year” Danny said.

“I don't know. After the whole Project Insight thing I don't know if it's the best idea to go with” I pointed out.

“It won't be like Zola's algorithm. It'll be fundamentally different” Danny argued.

“Yeah. Different. Right up until someone hijacks it” I countered bitterly.

“Really? You're having second thoughts now?” Danny asked, sounding exasperated.

“How are you and Bobby?” I asked, changing the topic.

“There is no me and Bobby” Danny deadpanned.

“Technically it’s Bobby and I” I wise-cracked.

I could almost hear him glaring at me through the phone.

“I'm just saying there's something there. It can't hurt to get back in the saddle a little bit. And besides, with Monroe it would be good to have a boyfriend that can defend themselves” I pointed out.

It was depressing that had to be on the list when considering potential romantic relationships.

My boyfriend/girlfriend must be:

Funny
Employed
Attractive (to me)
A good fighter

“The whole reason I broke up with Ethan was because I couldn't handle dating someone who's life was constantly on the line” Danny countered pointedly.

“Yeah well, you're a little more involved now than you used to be. Plus you're just as much a target now as the rest of us sooo” I pushed back.

“I don't know” Danny said, sounding really unsure.

“YOLO dude” I commented sagely.

“You and I both know that's not necessarily true” Danny reminded.

“Touche” I agreed, “But still. Seize the day. The dude's a superhero and his ass looks good in that spandex suit”

“That it does” Danny agreed.

“Do you mind?” Wanda inquired, sounding annoyed.

I had followed her down to the lap pool after she had run off trying not to cry after her talk with Vision.

She was currently glaring at me from her spot next to the pool as she soaked her feet in the water.

“Do you? I'm trying to have an adult conversation over here” I countered sardonically.

Wanda just glared frustratingly at me.

“Hey Spangles is the one who called you a kid” I pointed out, happily throwing Cap under the proverbial bus.

“Well I'm not” she emphasized.

“Then stop acting like a petulant teenager” I countered.

“I'd appreciate it if you would stop talking about relationships in front of me” she stated, sounding both hurt and annoyed.

Frankly I was surprised that she had stayed silent as long as she did.

“I'm sorry. I must not have gotten the memo that the world now revolved around you” I said sarcastically.

“It's called common courtesy” she ground out.

“Yeah well I call it growing up. The world isn't gonna stop moving just because your hurting” I stated harshly.

“Stiles cut back on the you-ness” Danny scolded from his end of the phone.

“Why? Obviously sugar-coating things isn't working for her” I replied, ignoring Wanda once again.
“You know what they say: You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar” Danny advised.

“Did you seriously just quote Cinderella at me?” I stated in disbelief.

“She's only gonna shut down if you're your blunt self. Sympathize. Give her examples. Heaven knows the Pack's got enough of them” Danny said.

“Fine. But if I take your advice you're gonna have to take mine...And you're over the Mansion every week so you don’t have an excuse not to have a date planned by this weekend” I brokered.

“...”

“Deal?” I asked.

“...Deal”

“Then wish me luck... I'm gonna need it” I breathed, making it sound like I was walking to my death.

I shut my phone and made my way over to her.

“Don’t bother. You couldn’t possibly understand the damage my actions have caused...How I feel about them” Wanda said obstinately.

“Honey you have no idea the damages some of our choices have caused” I emphasized, Monroe's name on the tip of my tongue.

She gave me a glare that clearly scoffed 'yeah-right'.

“You know I once held up Derek in a pool for over two hours because a homicidal lizard wanted to kill us” I commented, sitting down indian-style next to her.

“Why?” she asked, raising an eyebrow at the supposed random topic change.

“Because he was paralyzed from the neck down from the toxins...Horrible feeling” I said cringing.

“I meant why was it trying to kill you?” she corrected.

“That's a complicated answer” I replied.

Wanda just looked at me, curiosity peaked.

Perfect.

“An asshole once said: It’s never just a single moment. It’s a confluence of events...People making choices. And the consequences of those choices” I said, trying not to throw up in my mouth as I quoted Peter fucking Hale.

Now she definitely looked confused as my speech bounced around.

“You asked why right? It starts ten years ago...The high school swim team had just won the championship. An eleven year old goes over to his friend’s house to trade comics not expecting the coach to have the team there drinking” I began, her eyes expressing their interest.

“His friend's brother, drunk off his ass, throws the eleven year old into the pool even though the kid is screaming that he doesn't know how to swim” I state grimly, seeing at her horrified
expression in the corner of my eye.

“And they laughed” I breathed.

“He was dying...And they were laughing” I reiterated grimly, turning to look at her.

“Right as he thought he was about to die, the Coach, his friend's dad, saved him” I told her, though she looked unsure whether she should be relieved or not.

“Now you would think the Coach would apologize. Ask him if he was alright” I said sardonically.

“He didn’t” her uncertainty made it sound more like a question than a statement.

“He blamed him...Said it was his fault...Said what little bastard didn't know how to swim. Threatened him if he ever said anything...And he didn't” I replied.

“His own parents thought he had asthma when he was suffering from PTSD and panic attacks...And that fear. That trauma. That anger. Grew and grew. Festered...Not a day went past that he didn't desire a chance to get back at every single person on that team” I said, knowing that I was purposefully hitting home for her if her twisted expression was anything to go by.

“Fast forward to our sophomore year in high school and suddenly someone else made a choice that gave him that chance” I continued, my tone heavy.

“He made a choice to become something more so that he would have power” I detailed, her gaze shifting away from my accusing stare, “Only he didn't get the results that he wanted...He became something else”

“Because of the unresolved issues of his past his transformation went wrong and he was turned into a homicidal lizard...Except there was a catch to his new powers” I clarified.

“...What?” she inquired hesitantly.

“He couldn't control his own actions. He was a conduit for revenge. Seeking out those who desire it so that they become his Master, controlling everything that he did...And he had no choice in how they used him” I explained darkly.

Her eyes widened in realization, “The boy”.

“Bingo” I confirmed mirthlessly.

“What did he do?” she asked uneasily, not sounding like she really wanted to know, though from her eyes I knew she had already correctly guessed what exactly had happened.

“He killed them all...And then some” I replied, confirming her thoughts.

“Was he stopped?” she asked with an expression I couldn’t name.

“He was drowned...By someone who wanted control over the lizard” I revealed dismally.

“...And the lizard-person?” she inquired, sounding a bit depressed.

“We found a way to help him...Resolved the issues of his past that were keeping him a lizard” I replied, hoping that would lift her spirits a bit (of course I won’t tell her how Jackson had to die first...).
“So he’s free?” she asked hopefully.

“If you're asking if he's no longer a homicidal lizard then the answer is yes...But if you're asking whether or not he’s free of the guilt? No” I answered unmercifully (I’m not here to baby her after all).

“But it wasn't his fault. He didn't choose to kill those people” she stated firmly, raising her voice a bit for the first time since I started my little tale.

“No he didn't...But he still chose power...And that choice is what gave Matt the ammo he needed...Would Matt have still gone off the rails and become one of those school shooters if Jac-the lizard-guy hadn't chosen power? Probably. But he still has to live with the fact that because he chose power, he was used to kill all those people. Whether he had a choice or not doesn't erase the guilt that it was still *his* body that was used because of a choice *he* made” I emphasized sternly, hoping she would get the whole point of this story.

“You knew them. The killer and the lizard-man” she said, sounding certain.

“Small school. For the most part everyone's been in the same classes since elementary” I replied blandly.

“They were your friends?” she asked curiously (pityingly).

“Matt? Nooo….The lizard? More like frenemies back then. But we weren't just gonna leave him like that” I said.

But now we were getting away from things.

“The point is, there’s a consequence for every decision you make...And if more of your decisions are making you feel guilty than not, then I think it's time to change up something that you're doing, cause obviously you're not doing something right” I stated bluntly (Danny sooo owed me for doing this).

“...That was a horrible pep talk” she said mirthlessly after a moment’s consideration.

“Yeah well, I'm not Scott or Captain America. I don't have the ability to pull an amazing speech that makes you feel empowered out of my ass” I retorted.

“Thank you...For trying” she replied with a small smile, light amusement in her eyes.

Suddenly she turned to look behind us.

I followed her gaze to see the Black Widow observing us critically, an...interesting gleam in her eyes.

“Enjoy story-time?” I commented sarcastically, because I had no doubt that she'd been there basically the entire time.

“I came to get you both for dinner. Tony ordered shawarma” she replied evenly.

“Where's Clint?” Wanda asked curiously.

“Probably still playing hide-and-seek with Yukimura. Friday keeps tipping her off to his location” Romanoff answered, sounding mildly amused.

“Hide-and-seek?” I questioned incredulously.
“He’s testing her?” Wanda inquired.

“In his own way” Romanoff confirmed.

“Huh. Well that explains why most of your vents are people sized” I muttered.

(Third POV)

Everyone had began gathering in one of the additional lounge rooms that was typically occupied by the SEA agents at the Compound.

Lydia, Sam, and Vision had already set out the plates in the dining area.

When Stiles had walked in flanked by Natasha and Wanda he saw that Rogers was making a point to avoid Scott as much as possible while staring warily at Stark and Barnes. The two of them had commandeered the left side of the sofa and looked to be chatting amiably. Frankly Rogers looked almost amazed and relieved that the two of them were getting along.

And if his hunch was right he had a feeling that he knew why.

“So what happened between you and Captain Crunch?” Stiles asked Scott as he approached him from the side.

Natasha had gone over to Rogers, obviously noticing his odd behavior too. Wanda had followed after her once she realized that there was nothing she could do help to set up, and that there wasn’t anyone else in the lounge who would really want to talk to her (besides maybe Scott - because he was nice like that to everybody).

Clint and Kira were still AWOL.

“We talked about honesty and secrets” Scott explained vaguely.

“I’m guessing he didn’t listen” Stiles assumed.

“Nope” Scott confirmed, popping the ‘p’.

“Boss you have an incoming call from Secretary Ross” Friday informed.

Silence.

Nobody wanted to answer that call.

The reluctance would’ve been comical if it weren’t so potentially serious.

“Well he’s a persistent bastard so you might as well patch him through” Tony said, sounding like he’d rather pull out his own teeth.

“Stark” Ross greeted gruffly.

“Mister Secretary” Tony addressed, “You’re on speaker”

“Then that makes things easier” he stated.

“Is there a problem that needs the Avengers?” Rhodes inquired calmly.
“The Avengers are the problem Colonel. There is so much civil unrest it's driving the President bananas” Ross declared sternly.

“I already have SI working on PR” Tony stated tightly.

“I figured. But it's not enough and you know it Stark” Ross pointed out.

And as much as Tony wanted to deny it, Ross wasn’t wrong.

“What do you mean?” Steve demanded. He hated how Ross always seemed to be trying to undermine and control Tony.

“Stark is always the public face of amends. The People know he’s sorry and willing to stand up for them, but what about the rest of you? I’ve never seen anyone besides the Widow make a public appearance...And we all know how that turned out don’t we?” Ross mocked, “Doesn’t seem like the world wants you defending them anymore now does it?”

“The Avengers aren’t unfeeling robots Secretary Ross. They regret their actions, and believe me when I tell you, all the Avengers will be taking a more active role in PR” Scott declared, sharply cutting into the conversation. He was not in the mood to deal with Ross’ BS right now.

Silence.

“I’ll hold you to that Mr. McCall...I hope you know that you’ve got your work cut out for you” Ross warned before he ended the call.

Nobody said a word after the call had ended. The atmosphere now tense and awkward.

Suddenly a clang of metal sounded as Clint and Kira jumped out of the vent above the dining area.

“Dinner is served” Clint declared joyously, he and Kira holding up the brown paper bags as if they were prized spoils of war.

Of course Clint quickly picked up on the morose atmosphere.

“What happened?” he demanded.

“Secretary Ross made a house call” Natasha deadpanned.

“Well” Clint began, “There goes my appetite”

(Third POV)

“And this is accurate?”

“Affirmative. We have several reliable sources all indicating the same thing” former deputy Vargas confirmed, “How should we proceed General?”

“By extending an olive branch” Monroe replied, “It would seem we may have found some new allies”

Chapter End Notes
Phew that was a lot!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE comment!!!!
Chapter 10: Training part 1

Chapter Notes

Hi all!

Chapter ten is the pivotal point for many of the Avengers! Because of that the chapter ended up way way too long. So I split up the chapter into two parts so everything would get the recognition it deserved!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Third POV)

7:56:11 AM

“Your job is to feed him his meals” Agent Ross informed the guard behind him as they walked towards the containment floor.

Perfect

“Not a very glamorous job, but a necessary one” Ross continued as they made their way into the recently fixed elevator.

Necessary indeed.

“You shouldn’t be too concerned about him biting or spitting the food back at you” Ross tried to assure.

He wasn’t concerned.

Ding.

“The guard usually on choo-choo duty recently came down with a case of food poisoning. Nothing Zemo did” Ross explained as they neared the containment cell.

He knows. It was him who poisoned the guard after all.

“So far he’s been the exemplary prisoner” Ross mocked, swiping his card against the reader.

Finally.

“Breakfast time Zemo. Plain eggs. No salt or pepper. Two slices of toast without butter, and a large glass of water. Can’t have you dehydrating after all” Ross snided, leaned against the back wall.

Technically he didn’t need to remain since he was just there to escort the newbie, but he wasn’t taking any chances with Zemo.

The Guard walked up to the small containment cell, waiting for the tell-tail sound of the catches releasing to allow for entrance into the box.

Even with the cell open Zemo was still heavily restrained and wouldn’t be going anywhere.
The Guard dutifully, patiently fed Zemo each bite. Leaving the center of the eggs for last.

As he fed Zemo that last bite he saw the interest and curiosity flicker in the man’s eyes as he likely came to the correct assumption why it was a new guard was feeding him his meal.

8:14:47 AM

Expressionlessly the Guard turned and walked out of the cell, hearing Ross immediately press the controls to reseal the prisoner back into containment.

10...9...8

“See you in a few hours. Until then, try not to think about leaky faucets and waterfalls” Ross taunted, closing the outer cell door with a snide smirk.

7...6...5...4

The Guard resisted the urge to smirk.

3...2...1

Zemo heard the audible click of the video camera turning off, the red light no longer blinking.

Carefully using his tongue to maneuver the slip of paper to the front of his mouth, he stretched his right hand out as far as he could and spat the object into his palm.

Using his dexterity he unfolded the paper and craned his head down as much as he could, curious to find out just who could be attempting to contact him.

_We have a shared enemy_
-
_Monroe Republic_

“All according to plan” former deputy Haigh thought smugly.

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(Third POV)

Incited by Secretary Ross’ unwanted phone call the day prior, the Avengers and the Shadow Guard agreed that arranging a meeting to discuss the necessary PR would be their top priority.

The Avengers took their seats at the rectangular table while the Guard decided that it would be best for them just to sit in the chairs around the edge of the room. They were only to jump in if it was deemed strictly necessary anyway, or if they needed to add in a point the Avengers hadn’t thought of.

“The end goal is to obviously win back the trust of the public” Tony stated plainly, steepling his fingers.

“Yeah. But how? None of us have really done this before so we're kind of at a loss here” Sam pointed out.

“It's not as complicated as you're making it out to be” Rhodes said patiently, “What does the military do when something happens?”

“They make a public statement explaining the situation and apologizing if there was an error on their part” Sam replied, suddenly understanding things a little better.
“This is basically going to be the same thing...It'll be late, but I think having Steve explain the situation in Lagos, and Wanda apologizing for her mistake would at least remove a little of the negative backlash” Tony proclaimed.

“What about Bucharest?” Natasha inquired.

Bucky tried hard not to wince.

“Same thing. Although the speech would have to be carefully worded...And it might be a good idea to speak with T'Challa beforehand as well” Tony replied.

“You and Steve then?” Natasha assumed.

“Might have to include Agent Ross in there too and hope he won't be a dick” Rhodes pointed out grumbling.

Steve's head was already spinning.

He understood the basics of the plan, but why they would have to consult King T'Challa and include Ross was baffling him.

Agent Ross didn't like them. Having him with them during the press conference would only hurt their situation further….Right?

“What about me?” Bucky asked hesitantly, confused why he wasn't included.

“Not a good idea Snowflake. You're supposed to be in protective custody and busy getting psychologically evaluated since you're not supposed to be sound of mind right now” Tony explained, trying not to sound like a dick.

“But I caused the bridge collapse” Bucky pointed out firmly.

“Technically Kitty King did. He already publicly admitted to being the root cause behind the bridge collapse, claiming that if he hadn't pursued you the way that he did the incident wouldn't have occurred” Tony asserted, “And can you really say that he's wrong?”

Bucky clenched his teeth.

No. No he couldn't say that it was a wrong assumption to make.

Even so, it still didn't make him feel better.

“Once the triggers are taken care of you can still publicly apologize if that's what you want” Rhodes reminded him.

Bucky nodded reluctantly. He would just have to bide his time until then.

“When will the press conferences be?” Steve asked, trying to gauge how much time they had to prepare.

“Preferably sooner rather than later” Tony replied.

“Before Zemo's trial would be best” Natasha coined in.

If Zemo had any kind of surprises waiting for them at the trial then it would be best for them to try making amends with the public as soon as possible.
“Logically speaking a press conference on the incident in Lagos should be completed first” Vision deduced.

Wanda clenched her hands under the table, fear curling up in her stomach.

“You sure Nat and I shouldn't go to the conference too? It was a team mission” Sam inquired.

Rhodes shook his head.

“Steve was the team leader, and Crossbones’ suicide bombing only really involved him and Wanda. Remember, it's usually only the one in charge making the apologies, but it would be best if Wanda did too so that the public knows she's sorry” Rhodes explained.

Wanda clenched her teeth, breathing in uneasy breaths through her nose.

“Got it” Sam nodded.

“I don’t” Wanda blurted out, causing everyone to turn to her.

“Is there even a point in doing this anymore? So much time has past. What's done is done. Can't we move on and focus on other things rather than continuously reopening old wounds?” Wanda exclaimed irately, not meeting anyone’s eyes.

Tony clenched his teeth in frustration while next to him Rhodes’ expression grew tight and furious, his patience for Wanda’s avoidance running thin. And frankly she had no idea how lucky she was that he’s been far too busy to confront her on her actions towards Tony.

Steve, Natasha, Sam, and Clint just gave her a sad pitying gaze, knowing that she was just afraid and that she didn’t mean for her words to come out so callous.

Wanda was a bit hurt to see that Vision's expression had turned blank and robotic...But she didn't regret her words (she didn't).

She pointedly tried her best to ignore the icy malice directed at her by the Winter Soldier.

“Wow” Stiles exclaimed, sounding very unimpressed, “You've literally ignored everything we've ever said to you since we all but arrested your ass in Leipzig haven't you?”

“Take it easy on her she's just scared” Steve defended firmly.

“Good” Stiles retorted sharply, “She should be”

“Look your little story before was introspective, but talking and putting things into action are two different things” Natasha advised, trying to find a middle ground.

“That's not the point!” Stiles argued, raising his voice.

Without waiting for Natasha’s retort Stiles got up out of his seat, facing Wanda directly.

“How hard is it for you to just say that you're sorry? Because I don't think you ever actually have...For anything. In your entire life” Stiles challenged maliciously, jabbing a finger at the air in Wanda’s direction.

“Not for working for Hydra...Not to the people of Johannesburg...Not for being the cause behind Ultron....Lagos...Do you want me to keep going? Because I can” Stiles mocked, listing offense after offense with zero mercy.
“You may be sorry for your actions but the world doesn't see that. You just hid away. And part of that is Stark's fault. You're all so used to him and SI handling the PR that none of you have ever taken the podium and just explained things. Apologized. If any company or government agency fucks up they go on TV and explain their actions. They publicly apologize. After Lagos nobody said anything!” Lydia pointed out fiercely.

“Not you” she said, pointing at Wanda.

“Or you” she continued glaring at Steve.

“Or even you two!” Lydia reminded Sam and Natasha harshly.

“You may be sorry for fucking up, but the world doesn't know that! Nobody went and explained what the situation had been. Nobody!” Stiles near shouted, “And because of that, as far as the world is concerned you're not a hero. You're a threat!”

Bucky couldn’t help but grin satisfactorily at the Witch’s flinch, happy that someone was finally calling her out on her BS.

Clint remained oddly quiet as he took in each side to the argument.

“It's reactions like this, saying 'Why should I apologize? I'm a hero just trying to help' that made the UN come together to create the Accords” Scott cut in far more calmly (even though he was starting to get just as frustrated).

“The UN took advantage of the public's fear and used it as an excuse to create a document they could use to control us and others” Steve pointed out sternly.

“We've been over this Captain” Scott reminded stonily, “The public has a right to be afraid. The Avengers have operated with unlimited power and no supervision. Nothing holding you accountable for any of the damages you cause, indirectly or directly. You've broken international laws and invaded other countries for missions they never approved of. Lagos being one of them”

“So what then? We just let people die because countries don't want to accept our help?” Steve demanded.

“Yes” Scott replied resolutely.

Steve reeled back a bit in shock, trying to reconcile the man speaking to Morrell on the phone, and the man speaking to him now.

“As hard as that may be to do, that might be what it takes to show the world that they do need the Avengers. That the Accords have flaws. Proof over words. They won't listen otherwise” Scott pointed out firmly.

“You would let people die just to prove a point?” Steve demanded angrily.

“I get no enjoyment out of it Rogers” Scott retorted, narrowing his eyes at Steve, his patience dangerously reaching its end at the other man’s accusations.

Seeing Scott’s anger Stiles immediately cut in.

“Just remember that before there were heroes it was the police and military who handled these issues. Is their oath to protect and serve worth any less than yours?” Stiles challenged.
Steve bit back any retorts.

No. Their oaths weren’t any less. But that didn’t mean that they had the training or capability to handle the kinds of situations they dealt with.

“People have a right to feel safe Captain. We all do. And in order to do that you need to show them that you are not the monsters they think you are” Scott reiterated firmly.

“And that, ultimately, is what it all comes down to” Steve thought, clenching his teeth together, “Compromising our morals and rights because of others seeking to control us out of fear and personal agendas”

“Show them you are not a threat. That you can follow the law” Scott implored.

He wanted to do that. He did. But he didn’t know if he could agree to compromise their morals and rights to do it. There had to be another way.

“We’ll fix this Steve” Tony assured softly.

“How?” Steve questioned, imploring Tony to see things his way.

“Weren’t you the one who told me?...Together” Tony reminded, hoping Steve wasn't changing his mind about working together to change the Accords.

“We shouldn't be caving to government pressure. Not with so many things we need to fix within the Accords. We shouldn't bow down and compromise our rights like that!” Steve challenged, his voicing raising slightly.

“A poll was taken Steve. Twenty-seven percent for the Accords and seventy-three against” Tony revealed, the statistics surprising Steve, “Of course that was before Secretary Asshole showed up with the packets, but we might still have a majority in our favor...People are angry, pissed, but even they know that what the UN wants may not be the right plan...If we do things right, if we apologize and make some organizational changes then we can get rid of the Accords faster”

Steve narrowed his eyes at Tony, looking furious.

“If you don't agree with the Accords then why aren't you fighting against them?” Steve demanded, the ‘with me’ being implied.

“Because despite what you all may think I’m not God! I don't have enough political connections to just make something like this go away!” Tony roared, slamming his hands down on the table, his frustrations and anger with everything finally reaching their boiling point.

Steve's anger dropped at Tony's outburst.

“Unlike the rest of you I have thousands of employees replying on my Company as their livelihood! Negative backlash on Iron Man effects SI stocks! After Ultron all SI international contracts were in threat of being cancelled, stocks took a larger blow then when I first came back from Afghanistan and cut weapons manufacturing! Countries wanted to stop using SI products! Even products like Intellicrops which provided food to areas suffering from shortages! Life-saving medical equipment almost tossed away! And that's not even getting into the subdivisions of Stark Industries both in the US and internationally! I have millions upon millions of people relying on my Company! And that's not even getting into the financial and political pressure placed on the Stark Relief Foundation and the Department of Damage Control for handling all the aftermath of the Avengers’ battles!” Tony ranted, twisting his hand on his left wrist, his breathing now starting to
come out in huffs and small gasps.

“Tony you need to calm down. This isn't good for your heart” Natasha advised, suddenly looking very worried.

She knew very well that Tony hadn’t been kidding with his heart attack inquiry back at the JCTC, even if he had worded it to sound like a joke.

“What about his heart?” Rhodes inquired dangerously, glaring at Tony.

Tony just waved the both of them off.

“We've made too many mistakes for things to just stay as they are” Tony proclaimed, speaking more calmly so that he could ease his racing (irregular) heartbeat.

“So until we prove to the world that we can be trusted again we amend...We get things more in our favor until we can get the Accords removed” Tony declared resolutely, looking at Steve with almost pleading eyes, begging him to just listen.

Steve though was pissed.

But not at Tony.

He was pissed off that his friend was so stressed his heart was actually in arrhythmia.

Tony could wave it off all he wanted, but he could hear it.

The familiar unhealthy palpitations and irregular beat he used to have once upon a time.

Stress from the UN and politics forcing him to compromise himself.

Of course before he could even counter Tony’s argument with his own he was cut off.

“Does that flag on your chest actually mean anything to you anymore? Because if you're so against governments then you really shouldn't be wearing a suit that portrays you as the embodiment of American ideals” Stiles chastised, when he saw the burning anger in Steve's eyes.

“You could have the power of the gods! Yet you wear a flag on your chest and think you fight a battle of nations! I have seen the future, Captain! There are no flags!” the Red Skull declared.

“No my future!” he retorted back fiercely.

Steve reeled at the memory.

Saying that you think you know better than 117 countries…that’s not arrogance. That’s dangerous...And history’s shown us people that believe they know better than the rest of the world end up like Hitler and the Red Skull

Steve paled as the realization smacked him in the face.

No. He he didn't trust governmental systems anymore.

He agreed that they had amends to make with the public.

But he still believed that the safest hands were their own.
Could he really keep being Captain America if he believed that?

(Fury’s POV)

I observed Dr. Helen Cho critically from behind the two way mirror.

She was a liability.

Her experiences with Maximoff and Ultron left her loyalties in question.

Sure she had refused the Watchdogs’ demands now, but what about later?

What if someone else was more persuasive?

Selvig was less of a concern.

Unless he was mind-whamied again he wouldn’t turn on the Avengers.

One thing however was very clear.

And that was the both of them needed twenty-four seven monitoring.

Which means I’m going to have to convince Scott and Stilinski to spare some more of the Guard to watch them outside the Compound.

I can feel the headache already.

(Steve’s POV)

I slowly sketched another line on the paper, short, slow strokes as I tried to get the expressions just right.

After the meeting everyone agreed that a small recess before the spars was needed.

And I definitely needed some time to...decompress.

I had all my stuff ready to ease my tensions at the gym (namely the punching bags Tony designed to be less breakable), when I spotted the new sketchpad and colored pencils Tony had given me that I had yet to use.

After a moment's debate I dropped my gym bag and grabbed the art supplies as I headed out of my room to find a quiet place to sit.

I ultimately chose a spot under one of the trees on the edge of the property.

With the internal war caused by my latest personal revelation it had actually taken me a while to calm my mind enough to decide on what I had wanted to draw (I wasn’t quite ready to delve into those personal identity issues just yet).

In the end I started working on an image of all the Avengers together out of our uniforms in our designated lounge room.

Wanda was cooking with Vision in the kitchen. Rhodes and Sam were playing pool. Tony and Clint were in the center of the couch playing Mario Kart, with Natasha on Clint's left, and me
sitting on Tony's right with Bucky sitting beside me.

A family again.

That's what I wanted.

Or rather I wanted us to really be a family this time around.

“Mind if I join you?” Lydia asked, holding a sketchpad and pencil of her own.

I had heard her approaching for a while.

“Of course” I said, gesturing to a spot on the ground beside me.

Lydia immediately took a seat atop a large root sticking out of the ground, flipping her sketchpad open.

It was unusual to see her in such casual clothes, but it was also kind of refreshing.

“Switching shifts today?” I inquired curiously.

“Scott’s not avoiding you if that's what you're asking. He's just not much of an artist. He didn't want to ruin the atmosphere...Besides, he's more of a musician anyway” Lydia explained nonchalantly, beginning her own picture.

I nodded almost absentmindedly.

“And he's okay with you being alone with me?” I asked.

I heard a soft scoff and turned to glance at her from the corner of my eye.

“Captain if I wanted to I could blow your head apart without moving from this very spot” Lydia declared confidently, looking at him with smug, unconcerned amusement.

I gave her a measuring look.

It was things like this that reminded me that we still didn't know the full extent of the Shadow Guard's powers.

“Hopefully the spars will give us some insight into that” I thought.

The two of us lapsed in comfortable silence.

The only conversation being when Lydia inquired about a stenciling technique she had read about, and me showing her the technique in practice.

It felt good to be sketching again.

To teach someone else.

It gave me a sense of peace that hammering my fists against the bags didn’t.

“Tough critic on yourself?” Lydia asked, leaning her head in the direct of the scrapped ideas I had pulled out of the pad.

“Something like that” I said, reaching for the papers.
“Well I doubt they're as bad-” she began as I crunched up the papers into a ball.

I froze when I realized that she never finished her sentence.

My concern only grew when I heard her pencil strokes increasing rapidly in speed.

“Lydia?” I inquired, turning around to address her.

But what I saw had me on my feet in a second, my supplies dropping to the floor.

Lydia's eyes were blank and unseeing as her hand moved with almost a mind of its own across the paper, her body hunching more and more as if it couldn't keep up with the speed her hand needed to move.

“Lydia” I called out gently, though I was very confused and starting to panic internally, “Lydia”

Nothing.

“A trance?” I wondered when no recognition even phased her at the sound of my voice.

“Lydia” I tried once more, this time gently placing my hand over the one that was scribbling furiously across the page.

Almost like flicking a switch she snapped back, looking around in a daze, before her eyes fell upon the picture she had drawn.

Her expression went blank as she tried to school the horror in her eyes.

She immediately closed her sketchpad, her hand splayed across the front of it protectively.

“Are you alright?” I asked softly, very concerned for the young woman……..no.

She might be a young woman by social standards, but bravado or not she was still only twenty-one years old.

Twenty-one with the weight of the world on her shoulders and the burden of having powers she had never asked for.

And I had no doubt that this little episode was a result of her powers.

“I'm fine…That happens sometimes with my powers...It's nothing to worry about right now” she said awkwardly, trying (and failing) to reassure me.

I knew that Lydia was trying to hide it for my sake.

But I had already seen the picture.

*I am able to sense the dead, the dying and those who will potentially die.*

Tony lying on his side, surrounded by sharks, a knife in his back...his right hand reaching up towards a shredded heart.

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**(Bucky's POV)**

“You're pretty handy with cars” Tony complimented, though I knew he was actually just fishing for
“Our town's mechanic was murdered, and with our bad luck in high school Roscoe was damaged more often than not, so it was cheaper for me to start doing the maintenance and repairs myself...Duct tape is amazing. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise” Stiles replied, joking slightly at the end.

Lydia had all but shoved Stiles at me and Tony. Not that he didn’t look like he was trying to keep from jumping for joy about going with us down to the lab.

The three of us decided to work on the one of a kind Acura that Tony had commissioned that ran entirely on palladium.

“Roscoe?” I questioned.

Didn't guys usually name their vehicles after women? Or had that changed in the last seventy years too?

“It was my Mom's Jeep. She wanted me to have it when I finally got my permit...Drove it right into a ditch the first time I took it out for a spin” Stiles explained, sounding nostalgic and amused at the memory.

Was.

“Well now I know not to let you drive unless you're a crash test dummy” Tony commented.

“Hey I've gotten better. Car chases do wonders for improving driving skills” Stiles retorted, looking up from the car's engine.

“Been in a lota those?” I asked curiously, raising an eyebrow at him (though I could already guess his answer).

“First day of FBI Drivers Ed I beat their best record...backwards” Stiles replied smugly, “That should tell you right there”

“Prefer chases when I'm on a motorcycle myself” I commented flowing the flow of the conversation (I can't avoid talking about everything even remotely associated with my time as the Winter Soldier).

“And if someone's shooting at you?” Tony challenged, pointing his screwdriver at me.

“More maneuverable” I countered simply, wiping a grease smudge from my face.

“You and Cap” Tony scoffed, sounding amused, “Looks like I'll be fashioning you your own ride too”

“You don't have too” I retorted, “S’not like I'm gonna need it any time soon...Besides you're already working on my arm...and triggers”

There was an awkward silence for a beat, both of them having stopped tinkering.

Tony looked like he wanted to ask me something, but didn't seem sure if he should.

“Just ask” I prompted, knowing full well what he probably wanted to ask.

Which was fine. I wanted someone to talk to me about this already instead of tiptoeing around it.
“You know Helen and I are supposed to be working together to remove your trigger words…” he began slowly.

“Yeah. You got an idea?” I asked, trying not to sound too hopeful.

“Well... I'd need to take a scan of your brain, run some tests to see how it...reacts to certain stimuli” he explained slowly.

I froze.

“You want to use the words” I guessed fearfully.

Tony winced.

“We don't have to go full on Winter Soldier mode, but whatever Hydra did to you conditioned your brain that whenever you heard those words it would trigger a reaction in your brain. Kind of like Pavlovian principles...But in addition to that they intentionally used the...Chair to damage parts of your brain so that when it healed during the conditioning process it would almost...rewire itself. Making the conditioning more effective...And I'm no psychologist, but trauma like that probably also caused some disassociation to occur in order for your mind to protect itself as much as it could” Tony explained.

“You think he has DID?” Stiles asked curiously.

DID?

“In my personal opinion? No. Just repression due to brain damage and trauma, and years of conditioning on how to react in certain situations. Namely ones that affect the fight or flight response” Tony replied, almost sounding too clinical, as if he was trying to force himself to remain unbiased in his judgments and observations.

“For not being a psychologist you sure know a lot” Stiles pointed out.

“I couldn't exactly trust a random shrink with my PTSD, so I basically became an expert in neuroscience and psychological theory when I was creating BARF” Tony answered.

“BARF?” I asked, unsure if I had heard that correctly.

“Binarily Augmented Retro-Framing” Tony clarified, walking over to one of his work tables to pick up a pair of glasses.

“The implant in the glasses hijacks the hippocampus and allows you to find certain traumatic memories and alter them before projecting it onto an external infrastructure. Using the altered projection the person is able to re-experience the memory and work through that traumatic experience so that it no longer has the negative association that it did” Tony explained, sounding more at home explaining his tech.

From what I've observed so far Tony's inflection changed whenever he was explaining something to someone who seemed interested. Happier almost.

His eyes also get a kind of twinkle in them whenever he was 'sciencing' as he called it.

“You're a moron!” Stiles blurted out of nowhere, abruptly snapping me out of my thoughts.

Tony and I turned towards Stiles sharply in surprise.
"I have ten PhDs that say otherwise" Tony countered raising an eyebrow at the sudden emotional whiplash.

Stiles just gave Tony an 'are-you-kidding-me-right-now’ look.

"You have a device that can alter traumatic memories and remove their negative association!" Stiles near shouted, flinging out both his arms in my direction.

"..."

"Huh" Tony muttered in realization, looking like he knew Stiles' assessment of him was right, but refused to admit it out loud.

"So that's it?" I asked calmly, though the hope in my voice was betraying my real feelings, “We can use that to get rid of the triggers? Can we test it now?”

“Hold your horses there Snowflake. Yes this could be a very real possibility. But we still haven't taken any brain scans so we don't know for sure if this will help...Besides, it's good to know all your options before you put all your plums in the same basket” Tony advised.

I nodded reluctantly.

I wanted to get started now, but his words (unfortunately) had merit.

“Plums?” I questioned, mildly amused as I tried to change the conversation topic, “I thought the expression called for eggs?”

Tony shrugged.

“I had Friday order some plums for you since you didn't get to eat any at the stand you were at in Romania” Tony replied nonchalantly, as if it was a normal thing to do.

“Trying to woo me Doll?” I teased flirtily.

“What can I say? I have a thing for those who can boss me around” Tony jokingly flirted back.

“And as much as I would like to continue learning both of your preferred kinks in the bedroom, I'm gonna have to ask that you remember this isn't a threesome. Flirt on your own time” Stiles stated, hilariously beat red.


“You do remember I have a girlfriend right?” Stiles reminded.

“And how did you and Lydia get together anyway?” Tony inquired curiously.

“How did you convince Pepper Potts to date you?” Stiles challenged right back.

“Touche” Tony conceded.

“So...When can we start running tests?” I inquired not so subtly.

“I think I can get Helen on board for tomorrow” Tony replied.

I nodded, slightly relieved, though I had hoped we could start today.
“Does it work for...nightmares?” I muttered self-consciously.

Tony just gave me a sad understanding look.

“In theory I guess. But I've never tested it out for myself” he admitted.

I nodded in acceptance.

More often than not I was plagued by night terrors of my own experiences as the Winter Soldier.

Some nights I would wake up and I wouldn't even be able to tell if I was really awake or not.

“Fingers” Stiles said, breaking me out of my thoughts.

“What?” I asked confused.

“You have extra fingers in dreams...It's how you can tell whether or not you're still dreaming...Or what's real and what's not” Stiles explained grimly, his voice low, as if the raw emotion in it was weighing it down.

“...Thanks” I said, glancing at Tony from the corner of my eye.

Of course neither of us wanted to ask Stiles why he knew that.

---

(Sam's POV)

With everyone trading dance partners I ended up getting paired with Derek.

The two of us agreed to get a head start on training (it was supposed to be individual pairings anyway), though we agreed not to push it so that we wouldn’t be exhausted for the spars later.

Taking a seat on a bench to wipe the sweat from my brow I glanced over at Derek.

Even working out with Steve as much as I did it was still amazing to observe someone physically enhanced train (though at least Steve kept his shirt on).

Derek had to have done more than sixty pull ups and his pace had yet to even slow down.

Hell he didn't even look tired...And he was barely even sweating!

And before that he'd done God knows how many push ups and sit ups.

I don't even want to mention the bench press bar…

Even with his obvious superior physicality he was fine with involving me in the workout.

Holding my feet for the sit ups, spotting me.

He didn't talk at all the entire time, but he really didn't have to. It was a comfortable kind of silence...a feeling of camaraderie and kinship I got when I was training with Steve or Nat.

Though there was one...actually two things that were nagging at me.

The blue swirls tattoo on his back being the first.

“The tattoo. What's it mean?” I asked curiously, trying to strike up a conversation as I took a sip of
my water.

“It’s the symbol of my family” Derek replied, not even pausing in his reps.

Damn.

“Sorry. I didn't mean to pry” I apologized, feeling a bit guilty for inadvertently asking something so personal.

“It’s a symbol of pride. Not grief” Derek replied, not sounding bothered by my question in the least.

“And the necklace?” I asked, hoping that didn’t have a touchy meaning too.

It had been hidden underneath his shirt so I hadn't seen it until he'd started working out.

The chain was black and the small symbol on the bottom looked kind of like a black version of Target's logo.

This time Derek did pause. If only for a moment.

“It's kind of a homage for those of us in our...friend group to honor the dead back home” he explained, going back to his pull ups.

“Well that's mildly depressing” I thought, though the slight pause at ‘friend group’ was interesting.

Derek released his grip on the handlebars, hopping back down onto the floor.

“Track?” he inquired blandly, though it was a clear change of topic.

“Sure” I agreed nodding.

“Just do me a favor” I began as we started making our way to the door leading out to the track.

“Don't say on your left”

(Natasha’s POV)

I gently stepped across the grass, making sure that my footsteps didn't brush the grass-blades in a way that did not time with the movement of the wind.

“Why did you bring me out here?” I heard Wanda ask curiously from the other side of the shrubbery.

I quietly knelt down to a more comfortable position as I pressed my finger to the sound amplifier in my ear.

I'd been spying on each of the members of the Shadow Guard during their time with the other Avengers, making sure they weren't a threat and trying to gather as much information on them as possible while Tony had Friday looking into them.

“I felt that the meditation garden would be a good setting for what I wanted to talk to you about” Scott replied, sounding relaxed.

Scott reminded me a lot of Steve. Though there was a wisdom to him from experiencing the harshness of life that seemed to have tempered some of Steve's double-edged traits.
“The interview I'm guessing?” Wanda assumed, her tone sounding tight and irate.

“Actually no” Scott replied, sounding a bit amused.

“No?” Wanda inquired, sounding surprised.

I heard the shuffling of feet, and then the soft rustle of clothes.

If I had to guess Scott probably had sat down on the stone bench near the small pond.

I heard the Wanda reluctantly make her way over to Scott and sit down beside him.

“You're doing the interview whether you want to or not” Scott pointed out, “I wanted to talk to you about something else... It's kind of connected, but it's not about the interview”

“Then what?” she asked.

“Your fear...anger...emotions in general” he replied.

“That explains why he brought her here then” I thought.

“So you're going to teach me some meditation technique to help me conquer my fears and release some of my anger?” Wanda inquired, sounding amused in a way that she didn't really think that it would help her, but that she would humor Scott's attempt to help anyway.

“You need an anchor” Scott retorted calmly, sounding oddly like a parent correcting a child.

I couldn't help but blink in surprise, a memory unwittingly returning to the forefront of my mind.

“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, yet do not sin. Do not let the sun set upon your anger, and do not give the devil a foothold” (Book of Ephesians 4:25-27).

“A what?” she demanded sounding very confused.

“An anchor. Something that grounds you. Helps you focus your emotions and gives you better control. It can be a person, a relationship, an emotion, a memory, an object, a mantra. Something that has meaning to you” Scott explained.

“It took you a while to change back” I noted, “I'm surprised The Big Guy didn't end up flattening Stark in the meantime”

“The Other Guy likes Tony” Banner replied simply as he tinkered with some object.

“But Stark's not enough to make you change back” I observed.

“Fury sent you didn't he” Banner assumed knowingly.

“For the most part you can keep from transforming into the Hulk. But not back...Fury sent me to help with that” I admitted.

“You?” Banner inquired skeptically.

“Let’s just say I have some experience in triggers needed to remind you of your humanity” I alluded.
“Triggers?” he asked, not sounding like he was very fond of that term.

“You can call it an anchor if you’d prefer...Something that reminds you of who you are when you’re in a zone. Not yourself” I explained.

“Something that brings you back. Triggers a memory or a part of your consciousness” he finished, suddenly understanding where I was coming from.

“Exactly” I confirmed.

“So uh...What's yours?” he asked hesitantly.

My jaw tightened almost imperceptibly, though my face held no outward signs of change.

The only people who knew were Clint, Fury, and Coulson. And one of those three was dead.

“I’m sorry. That was insensitive. You don't have to tell me” he said backtracking, sounding apologetic.

“A Russian lullaby” I replied.

He looked at me in surprise.

“A song my mother used to sing to me I think...Before I was taken by the Red Room” I explained, fighting the anxiety at sharing something so personal, “It was one of the only memories I had from before”

Banner looked like he was internally fighting himself to not seem like he was pitying me.

“We need to find your lullaby”

“You have an anchor?” Wanda asked, sounding surprised, her voice breaking me out of my thoughts.

I cursed myself for becoming distracted.

“I do” Scott confirmed.

That was interesting and worrying.

“Then what is yours?” Wanda asked, sounding curious.

I focused intently on whatever Scott was going to to say next.

If he needed an anchor than I needed to know what it was in case he got out of control.

“Me” he replied simply.

“...”

“What?” I thought, confused what he meant.

Fortunately Wanda was likely just as confused which meant that he would probably explain his answer.

“My anchor is my sense of self” he continued, confirming my assumption.
“When I first got my powers I loved the benefits, the confidence they gave me...But that lasted all of two seconds before I realized the drawbacks of them. Then I wanted nothing more than to get rid of them...A friend told me that my powers were a gift...I saw them as a curse...Something that made me a monster like the man who forced the powers on me” Scott revealed.

“So he wasn't born with them” I realized, “From what it sounds like the powers were forced on him...Experimentation?”

“Eventually I realized that it didn’t have to be a curse...That I didn’t have to be a monster. That I was still me” he explained.

“If he used to call himself a monster and needs an anchor to stay in control then he might be similar to Bruce in some ways” I considered, thinking back to his red eyes.

“Even then I still pushed down a part of who I was and clung to my humanity. I accepted that I was still me, but I hadn’t fully accepted that the other half of me was just as much a part of me as the rest” he continued, sounding mildly disappointed at his past self.

He sounded very similar to Bruce.

So similar it made my heart ache the for the briefest of moments before I threw the feeling in a box and pushed it down and away so that I could focus on my mission.

“Then an enemy stronger than anything we had ever faced came and completely defeated us. Showed me my every flaw” he said, sounding very pained.

“It forced me to re-examine myself. To accept the part of me that I had considered a monster” he said, sounded more self-assured.

If Bruce ever comes back I should probably introduce them...If.

“Everything I’ve been through in my life, the pain, the suffering, the laughs, the love, the friendships, as well as the betrayals and losses helped make me the person I am today” Scott declared, sounding confident and assured, not a single waver in his voice.

“I know who I am...Do you?”

(Clint’s POV)

I didn't feel guilty about commandeering Kira's time all for myself.

I liked her.

She was sweet, naive at times, but she had a mischievous streak that I was more than happy to exploit.

I was surprised when she had asked to train a bit at the archery range, but there was no way I was going to turn down the offer to show off a bit.

Of course I should have figured Kira would have a few tricks up her sleeve as well.

“Overall you’re pretty good” I complimented, watching as another arrow hit dead center.

So far half of her shots had at least hit the bullseye. The rest hitting the red rungs before it.
Although giving her some pointers to better her aim gave me both a stab of nostalgia and sadness. It reminded me of when I'd take Cooper out to the archery range I had build back home.

“Thanks. I don’t work much with bows and arrows though” Kira admitted.

“Coulda fooled me. What natural talent?” I asked, probing lightly for a little more information.

“Kind of. Argent called it intuitive aptitude once” Kira revealed, unconcerned as she took another shot, this time hitting the red.

I gave her a leery glance out of the corner of my eye, firing off my own arrow even though I was looking at her (I knew it would hit dead center right through the other arrows anyway).

“Intuitive aptitude huh? That go for all weapons?” I inquired lightly, curiously.

“All the ones I’ve tried so far” she replied casually, firing off another shot.

“Soooo you’re basically a cheater?” I asked jokingly.

*That* got a smile out of her.

“Not the first time someone’s called me that” she said, looking like she was internally laughing at some inside joke (which she probably was).

“So what then? You’re automatically a master at any weapon you get your hands on?” I asked, trying to see if I could get more information about her powers. Weaknesses even.

“I wouldn’t say master. More like...I just instinctively know how to use them. I still need to train, or else I’d be hitting the bullseye every time” she pointed out, the next arrow hitting the red again as if to prove her point.

“Fair enough” I conceded.

“I appreciate you giving me some pointers by-the-way...Bows and arrows were the weapon of choice of a good friend of ours” she thanked lowly, quiet grief lacing into her voice.

Were.

“How are you and your friends alive?”

“Not all of them are”

“A badass after my own heart” I replied firmly, giving her a small sympathetic smile.

She smiled back mischievously.

“She would’ve wiped the floor with you” Kira declared proudly.

I smirked at the proclamation.

“My wife would kick my ass if I said otherwise”
practice grounds.
The whole area together was larger than three football fields. Length and width wise.

“Yeah I think this'll work” Stiles retorted jokingly back.

“I have this entire area equipped with all sorts of training apparatuses, and a holographic virtual reality training simulator with thousands of different scenarios to choose from” Tony began, explaining the field to the Guard and Barnes, “If you want to train on a specific terrain the ground can open up to accommodate a variety of fields such as mountainous, volcanic, desert, water, fire, plains, and snow”

“Holy shit” Stiles muttered in awe.

Tony couldn't help but preen bit at that.

“StarkTech is the best” Steve affirmed, the awe of the Guard mildly improving his mood.

Tony fought the urge to try stepping a foot away from Steve (again).

The other man had all but sewn himself to Tony's side since he had walked onto the field looking incredibly distraught.

Steve's eyes had zeroed in on him with laser focus, and had marched his way over to him looking like he had wanted to say something but didn't know how. When Tony had asked what was wrong Steve had just given him a terse “later” and proceeded to make a go at being Siamese Twins.

To make matters worse Natasha was giving Scott a mistrustful glance.

Barton was only mildly better in regards to Kira.

The fact he seemed to genuinely like her probably kept a majority of his overt mistrust at bay.

Lydia's bravado mask was back up and dialed to twenty, which meant something had happened between her and the good Captain.

Bucky looked ready to finally punch Steve in the face.

Stiles looked like he was debating on whether he wanted to play good cop or bad cop with Wanda.

And Wanda just looked unsure of everything.

Hell, the only ones who seemed to be relatively fine were Wilson and Hale.

“This sparring session isn't going to go well” Tony predicted grimly.

Chapter End Notes

So sorry! The spars are up in Part 2! Promise!

The poll was an actual thing on http://marvelcinematicuniverse.wikia.com/wiki/2016

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE comment!!!!
Chapter 10: Training part 2

Chapter Notes

Sorry I posted a day late!
Between the holiday, thesis, work, and family I was swamped!
Enjoy!
And PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE comment!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Third POV)

“Okay so Wanda and Stiles are up first” Tony reminded, “Then Cap and Barnes are up next”


“Right” Tony thought, “Nobody probably had the chance to tell him the change in lineup yet”

“Barnes asked if the two of you could duke things out. I figured it'd be entertaining so I said why not” Stiles explained, grinning like the Grinch.

“The two of us need to talk, and yet all I want to do right now is punch you in the damn nose. This way’s a little more productive” Bucky explained, speaking to Steve for the first time since the invasion on the Compound.

Steve had a moment of shock, both happy and confused.

“I know you're not happy with a lot of my decisions” Steve began, the 'about Wanda' being implied, “If need to give me a good wail-”

“It's not just that Steve” Bucky cut in irritably.

“We've got a crap ton to work through. And I'm warning you now” Bucky said darkly, stepping right up into Steve's space.

“If you don't punch back and fight me seriously, we're done here until you learn to respect other people's feelings” Bucky threatened, fed up with Steve just bulldozing through everyone else’s feelings and deciding he knows better.

Bucky knew what he needed.

And what he needed was to yell at the blonde while slugging on him.

And Steve needed to respect that's what he needed.

Steve looked incredibly hurt, but nodded none-the-less.

“You really think that a...violent conversation is going to help us work things out?” Steve asked,
just to be sure.

“Yes” Bucky said resolutely.

“Okay” Steve agreed, only still sounding minimally resistant.

Bucky nodded, accepting the punk's answer for now.

“Now that the teenage drama has been resolved we can continue” Stiles said, sounding both annoyed and exasperated, “After Rogers and Barnes it's a free for all. Rock-paper-scissors, picking sticks. It doesn't matter who goes next or how you decide”

Clint eyed Kira curiously.

She was supposed to be his match. Able to take him down if necessary.

He already knew of her weapon skills. That she was very likely physically enhanced.

But he couldn't help but feel like that was barely even scratching the surface of her abilities.

“Time to do a little more hands on digging of my own” Clint thought, tightening his grip on his bow, grateful that they were allowed to use some of their signature weapons (non-lethal of course).

“I call dibs on Kira” Clint announced.

Kira rewarded him with a confident smirk.

Likewise, Sam was just as curious about Lydia. She didn't look like a fighter, but according to Rhodes and Clint that assumption was dead wrong.

He had been allowed to use his Suit (minus the artillery) in the spar...but honestly he couldn't see how Lydia (or Kira for that matter) would be able to knock him out of the sky.

He figured she'd only be a match for him physically outside of the Suit….But he'd guess they'd see.

“Let's see what you got Red” Sam declared, addressing Lydia.

Said woman just gave him the smuggest, confident you're-going-down-you-plebeian look he'd ever seen.

“Well that doesn't bode well for me” Sam thought, slightly on edge now.

Natasha eyed Scott and Derek, still debating whether or not she should challenge either to a match.

Derek matched her gaze with an untrusting glare of his own, challenging her to bring it on.

“Alright if all the posturing is done I’d like to get started” Stiles declared, stepping forward a bit in front of everyone.

Wanda nodded a bit warily, nervous about how things were going to go.

“So what field would you like to do this on?” she asked stepping up next to him.

“First off, you know I'm stuck here helping you learn more about your powers” Stiles reiterated.

Wanda nodded, curious where he was going with this.
“Okay so, first and foremost before I kick your ass in our little spar you need to know what it is exactly that your powers are” Stiles emphasized.

That got everyone’s attention, though not all positive.

Tony and Bucky immediately tensed, though both were mentally prepared to take in anything and everything Stiles described if it meant a better understanding of what the Witch was capable of.

Natasha on the other hand narrowed her eyes at Stilinski.

She had her suspicions that Wanda’s powers were more than what SHIELD had initially assessed she was capable of from what she and Steve had discovered during what training they had done with her.

Steve however was just grateful that they now had someone who was better able to assess Wanda’s capabilities and properly bring out her abilities.

Since Wanda had stopped using any facet of her mental manipulation capabilities as a way to show that she was serious about turning over a new leaf, he and Nat had worked on strengthening her telekinetic powers and using them in alternative ways such as levitation, and force-fields.

But following Stilinski’s advice during the invasion at the Compound Wanda was able to use her control over emotions to ease a tense atmosphere rather than directly place the enemy under complete mental control. A skill like that was invaluable to have in order to diffuse more situations more appropriately and potentially decrease damage and casualties.

Stilinski was harsh and blunt, but if he could better show them how to help Wanda than he was game for (almost) anything he would need them to do to help train her.

Vision on the other hand was curious what the Agent would say, seeing as he was still trying to understand his own powers as well.

“What’d you mean?” Wanda asked, confused.

According to her file, SHIELD had labeled her abilities as neuro-electric interfacing, mental manipulation, and telekinesis.

“Right. So from what I’ve been able to gather you are able to manipulate psionic energy. But it’s not just that” Stiles began.

“How so?” she asked. They had already figured her powers were some form of psionic energy, but she wasn’t sure how they could be anything more.

“You got your powers because you were an unactivated mutant—”

“Mutant?” she demanded, cutting him off, absolutely floored by the revelation.

“Yes. Mutant. Hence why you and your brother were the only two to survive Hydra's experiments. Congratulations” Stiles said sarcastically.

Wanda just looked at Stiles in disbelief.

“When you first came to the Compound the health exams you underwent to see if there were any negative consequences to being exposed to Loki's Scepter included testing you for the X-gene...It was in your medical files so we just assumed you knew” Natasha clarified, seeing Wanda’s
confusion.

Wanda didn’t even know where to begin to process Stiles and Natasha’s words.

First, it was her own fault for not delving into the results of her own medical files...But in her own defense it was right after the Cradle had failed to save Pietro. The results of her own health exam had meant nothing to her then.

And to think...The only reason she and her brother had likely survived was because they had unknowingly been mutants.

If they hadn’t been...

“Again. You were a mutant exposed to the mind stone, one of the most powerful energies in the universe. So the energy you generate and manipulate is similar in its signature. Meaning that it’s both very powerful and very unstable since it's connected to your mental and emotional state” Stiles said, finishing his earlier statement.

“What about you? Do you manipulate psionic energy? Because I saw you do things I didn't think I could do” Wanda asked curiously, trying to focus her mind on what they were doing now, rather than dwelling on the mistakes of her past.

“Probably because you can’t” Stiles emphasized.

She blinked at him in surprise.

“Though to be fair we don't know the true extent of your powers yet” Stiles allowed.

“If you aren’t telekinetic or manipulate psionic energy, then what are your powers then?” Wanda asked, very confused.

His powers had seemed similar to hers, though more advanced in some aspects.

“In layman's terms? Magic” Stiles said.

“Magic?” Tony demanded.

Saying he sounded skeptical and disbelieving would be like saying a dog barked.

“I know I hate the word too” Stiles grumbled.

“But if your powers are...magic. How can you really help me when our powers are so different?” Wanda questioned.

“The term magic is actually just a ‘fancy’ word for harnessing and manipulating different kinds of energies. The most common are manipulating the energy of our universe, and manipulating the energy derived from the power of our own life force. Both of which for the most part anyone can do, although some people are more naturally inclined for the art and capable of more than others” Stiles explained.

The gears in Tony’s head were whirling. If ‘magic’ was really just energy being harnessed then there should be a way to collect and use it through technology, like how microwaves and ultraviolet light was harnessed and used.

Natasha however was curious. SHIELD had a few operatives that claimed to have more mythical/mystical connections. Though she herself tended to stay away from the missions that
would have had them cross paths.

An oversight on her part that she would soon rectify.

“So he’s kind of like Agent Crimson then” Clint realized, “Though a hell of a lot more powerful”

Unlike Nat who stuck with the cloak and dagger missions he had a bit of experience with some more mystical-like investigations. Dealing with Thor’s crash landing here had been one of them.

“So which type of energy do you manipulate then?” Wanda asked curiously.

“I’m...a little different. I was actually born with the ability to channel all kinds of energy and manipulate it into the ‘spells’ I need. Due to traditions and code, most people like me use the energy they channel for more...ritualistic spells. Not the things you've seen me do...They’re pretty strict about which energies we should channel due to how it can corrupt us...But I’m…” Stiles explained, trailing off a bit as he tried to find the right words without giving anything away.

“Something of a rebel?” Wanda suggested, smiling slightly.

“Kinda” Stiles admitted with a playful smirk.

Those with Druid heritage almost never went outside their traditions because they could easily turn into a Darach if they weren't careful.

But he never was one to follow the rules so...

“So what...magic do you use then?” Wanda asked, still a bit hesitant about using the term.

“The method people like me use to manipulate the energy we take in is called...faithfery” Stiles said, sounding like just saying the word was like teeth were being pulled out of his mouth.

“Oh my God you're Tinker Bell” Clint exclaimed, his eyes twinkling with endless amusement and a mischievous humor that Stiles knew he was never going to live that nickname down.

“Ha ha yes I know. Faith, trust, and pixie dust all that crap. I've made that joke too” Stiles deadpanned.

“So...what does it mean?” Wanda asked, sounding confused at Clint’s reference.

“Basically it means that I manipulate the energy I take in by using my will power and beliefs as a focal point to alter reality” Stiles explained, knowing his more technical explanation would shut up any other teasing (mostly).

“...”

“Remind me not to piss you off any more than I already have” Clint muttered.

“There are limits. Every ’spell’ takes energy proportional to the level being put out. If you don't have the energy needed for the 'spell’ it's not going to work, so I can't say, make everyone on Earth disappear unless I somehow tapped into an energy source that happened to provide the extreme about of power necessary for it. Not only that, but if I don't possess a rock-firm faith in what I am doing the ‘spell’ won't work either since my manipulation is based on the strength of my own belief and willpower” Stiles explained in more detail.

The last thing he needed was the Avengers to try and off him based on an assumption that wasn’t even true.
“And there's more people like you out there?” Sam asked curiously.

“Like I said, I’m an outlier. Most people like me take in energy from things like nature, which in itself has a lot of rules and limitations. Due to that most people like me aren't all that powerful, faithfery or not. We're scholars and balance keepers. Not fighters” Stiles answered honestly.

And truthfully he had been that way too up until a few years ago.

He had been the research, detective, (occasional thief), life-rescuer, and tech guy. But after the Beacon Hills Civil War and the Anuk-ite he understood that he needed to change if he wanted to protect his friends and family better.

“Then why are you?” Vision asked, though previously spoken information has heavily alluded to why.

“Think of it like gunpowder. It’s just powder until a spark ignites it. You need to be that spark Stiles” Deaton encouraged.

“Oh my god it's working! Oh this is-I did something!” Stiles declared happily when he saw that none of the wolves could cross the mountain ash barrier.

“Let me in Stiles”

“Allisooooonnnnnnnnnnnn!!!!!”

He ran through the doors of the library, jar of mountain ash in hand. For the briefest of moments he saw the Anuk-ite.

Steeling his nerves he did something he hadn’t done since that day at the rave.

He was the spark.

He tossed the jar to the ground, smashing it to pieces.

And he believed.

He willed the ash to surround the monster, forcing it to re-live its worst fear of being trapped again. Its own powers reflected back at it from the magic barrier of the mountain ash surrounding it, turning it to stone.

“You are conflicted” Wanda said knowingly, sensing the strength of his emotions.

Stiles allowed the fact she was apparently using her emotion sensing more actively now to slide. He was used to it anyway with the wolves.

“I first learned I had this...potential when I was sixteen...At first I had been excited that I could do more to help....” Stiles ground out grimly, trailing off a bit.

“What changed?” Wanda inquired gently, sensing the severity of his pain and grief.

“My body was taken for a joyride” Stiles thought bitterly.

Sensing Stiles’ self-loathing Wanda decided maybe she could help him by relaying her own feelings about her powers.

“After I got my powers I changed. I became...something else...But I am still me” Wanda began,
relaying her own confictions and realizations after her talk with Scott, “Now knowing that I am a mutant I realize that this has always been a part of me”

Stiles listened to Wanda, curious what direction she would take her little speech.

“When I first got my powers, like you and Scott, I had embraced it...But now when people look at me they only see how dangerous I am...And I see that too” Wanda stated sadly.

Stiles perked up a bit in interest. Was what they were trying to get her to understand finally sinking in?

Vision too honed in onto the conversation, almost desperately hopeful that Wanda was finally making appropriate headway in the direction she needed to be going.

“But I can't control their fears, but I can control my own...Like you controlled yours” Wanda declared, unknowingly shattering every single person’s hopes for her progress (though in varying degrees).

“You let go of your fears surrounding using your powers even though I can feel that something bad possibly happened because of them...You still have regrets and grief surrounding the incident, but you moved past it and embraced who you were and likely strengthened yourself so that whatever had happened wouldn’t happen again right?” Wanda inquired, trying to connect with him and allow him to see her point-of-view, that they really weren’t all that different.

Yes she regrets everything she had done, but she just wants to move past it all. Strengthen herself so that it doesn't happen again, but in the end it’s for her own sake.

The world would never truly accept her, so rather than continuously letting herself be brought down and shamed for being what she is, she'll embrace it. Banish her own fears and let the world's view of her slide off like water on a duck's back.

Stiles gave Wanda an icy glare.

Wanda flinched back a bit, his sudden change in emotion almost giving her whiplash.

“I think it's time we moved on to the sparring portion of the training” Stiles announced firmly, still maintaining his glare.

“This isn't going to go well...for Maximoff anyway” Tony thought.

He didn't need the Witch's powers to sense the change in atmosphere.

Sensing Stiles’ obvious change in demeanor Steve also wondering if the spar should be postponed to a little later...At least just enough for Stiles to calm down first.

“You have an idea of what field you want?” Tony asked.

“Desert” Stiles answered brusquely, “Can your simulator make it look like Shiprock?”

“Shiprock, New Mexico?” Tony inquired.

“Yup” Stiles affirmed, looked overly serious.

Tony took out his StarkPad and started keying in the request.

Stiles gave Kira a look.
You ready?

Kira nodded.

I'm ready.

Steve didn't like the silent conversation that had just passed, and the Spy Twins were just as on guard, ready to attack if any of the Guard tried anything against them.

The ground rumbled, the sound of gears whirring as the field opened up and hard desert sediment and shifty sand replaced fresh green grass.

Suddenly the space around them flickered as the scenery changed to an all too familiar rocky structure.

“And interesting choice of battlefield” Rhodes noted thoughtfully, “And judging by Stilinski's little exchange with Yukimura it was pre-decided”

“The terrain's not ideal for either of them. Though Wanda might actually have the edge here, however we don't know just what Stilinski’s little hocus pocus is capable of” Sam observed, “She needs to play this carefully”

Scott walked over to Stiles, gently nudging him away for a second to talk.

“Go easy on her. She regrets the things her powers have caused” Scott reminded him.

“But not enough to take responsibility for them” Stiles pointed out.

“I know. I still agree with plan. But if you go overboard...” Scott trailed off.

“You’ll stop me. I know” Stiles stated assuredly.

He knew Scott would never let him fall to the dark side again.

Steve likewise took advantage of Scott and Stiles’ conversation to speak with Wanda.

“Be on guard. You don't know his range of capabilities. Test them. Find an opening, but don't rush” he advised.

Wanda nodded, giving him a grateful smile.

“Let's do this” Stiles stated, walking out to the center of the field, Wanda following closely after him.

Once the two got into the center of the field they moved to face each other.

Stiles looked back at Kira.

“Do it” he ordered, confusing the Avengers.

Kira's hands immediately shot to her metallic belt.

In quick succession she had it unbuckled and flicked it out like a whip next her, the belt shifting into the shape of a metallic spear.

Ignoring the stares of fascination (Tony), wariness (Rhodes, Vision, Bucky), and distrust (Steve,
Natasha, Sam, Clint), Kira moved forward and banged the end of her metallic spear against the desert, the sound echoing impossibly in the open air.

The sky darkened above the two combatants.

“What’s going on?” Steve demanded.

Kira banged the edge of her spear against the field again.

Suddenly, the dust and sand kicked up around Stiles and Wanda, encircling them in a vortex and making them disappear from view.

The entire edges of the field were shrouded in the sandy vortex.

“What did you do?” Steve demanded, looking like he was ready to engage Kira in a fight.

Scott immediately intercepted him.

“At ease” Scott demanded, “They're both fine”

“Where are they?” Steve demanded, stepping up challengingly at Scott.

“I cast a spell that was once used to test me to see if I had control over my powers” Kira cut in.

Steve immediately turned his attention to her.

“Spell?” he questioned (demanded), “You use magic too?”

Natasha gave Kira a critical once over. Realization smacking her in the face almost immediately.

“You’re his backup aren’t you” she questioned knowingly.

The Avengers looked at Natasha in confusion, silently urging her to continue (though Bucky immediately understood what she had meant).

“I thought it was unusual that Wanda was the only one who didn’t have alternating guards...But it wasn’t that she didn’t...You wanted an ace in the hole in case she somehow got the drop on Stilinski” she observed knowingly.

“You’re not wrong” Scott admitted, “Kira’s more than capable of dealing with Wanda if it ever has to come down to that”

“I thought you said we needed honesty if we were going to trust each other” Steve said, throwing Scott’s words back in his face.

Scott just raised an eyebrow at him.

“And yet I know you’re not being entirely honest either Captain. So why would I place my friends at risk just to appease your hypocrisy?” Scott countered.

“Daaammmn” Clint mumbled.

“But it’s just a test...Not some teleportation trick, imprisonment, or torture?” Rhodes questioned.

“No. The spell will dissipate once she either passes or fails. The sand and dust is just to contain Stiles and her attacks better” Kira explained.
Of course what she didn’t say was that the Mirror spell would reflect any attacks Maximoff made back at her, but any injuries sustained during the spell would be healed afterwards so she didn’t feel it was necessary to relay and instigate another round of conflict.

Of course Steve was stubbornly not backing down at the perceived threat he didn’t understand.

Though to be fair they were be intentionally cryptic.

“Even if you knock me out the spell won’t dissipate, so you might as well just wait” Kira recommended firmly.

Gritting his teeth Steve gave her a reluctant nod, stepping back a bit, looking helplessly at the vortex.

Wanda looked around frantically as the sand and dust cleared.

Everything past the edges of the field had turned into clouds of dust and shadows.

It was as if they had been transported to another location. Though Stiles did not look concerned in the least.

“Where have you taken me” Wanda demanded, red surrounding her palms.

“Don’t bother. You’re not going anywhere until the test is done” Stiles declared, sounding unconcerned.

“Test?” Wanda questioned skeptically.

“Yup. Let’s see how good a student you are” Stiles said sarcastically as he hands glowed gold and he disappeared into the swirling sand.

Before Wanda could even call out to him a hooded figure whose cloak matched the color of the sand, clawed their way out of the shifting ground and stood about ten feet from her.

“Who are you?” Wanda demanded in a panic.

With incredible speed the figure rushed at her, barely kicking up any of the dust and sand as it went.

Wanda instinctively blasted them in the chest with a concussive force.

But as soon as the blow landed, an unseen force slammed into her own chest, knocking her backwards as the figure dissipated into sand.

Wanda groaned as she lifted herself up off the ground.

But as she was sitting up a hand sprung up from the sand and latched onto her wrist.

Wanda gasped in fright, reflexively blasting the hand grabbing at her.

As the hand disappeared an incredible pain shot up her left arm.

Rubbing her wrist she stood back onto her feet.

Suddenly five hooded figures formed out of the ground, surrounding her in a circle formation.
But before she could do anything a familiar golden blast came at her.

She quickly deflected the attack with a shield.

“Find me” Stiles’ voice taunted her from the shadows.

Wanda grit her teeth as she readied herself to blast each of the figures at once.

The group outside the battlefield watched as the swirling dust and sand were occasionally lit up with flashes of blood red and golden yellow.

So far it has been almost ten minutes since the spar began and has shown no sign of ending any time soon, and the anxiety around the uncertainty of the match that nobody could see was steadily increasing with every passing minute, though the members of the Shadow Guard seemed relatively at ease.

“This needs to stop. This is no longer a spar” Steve declared, turning to Scott.

He was honestly surprised Steve had kept quiet as long as he had.

“It never was” Scott replied simply, turning his attention to the Captain, “Like we said. It's a test”

“Excuse me?” Steve demanded, narrowing his eyes at Scott.

“I told you we’re here to help. And that’s exactly what Stiles and Kira are doing” Scott continued, unphased by the man's posturing.

“The fight is out of control” Steve declared pointedly, stepping up near Scott.

“Wrong” Scott declared, turning to meet Steve’s challenge.

“She’s out of control” Scott continued firmly, “And she needs to realize that before she harms anyone else”

“Lagos was an accident” Steve declared assuredly, narrowing his eyes at Scott.

He should have figured that's what all this was about.

“What happened in Lagos wasn’t a lack of control. She just bit off more than she could chew at the time because she didn’t have the training on how to contain things without a solid form in high stress situations. Things like fire and water are very different from rocks or people” Scott lectured pointedly, not backing down either.

“When she realized she couldn’t contain the explosion for long she tried to send it into the air. That’s where her mistake happened” Scott emphasized.

“Because of her inexperience in containing fluid matter combined with concussive blasts it took all her focus just to contain the flames, and because of that she couldn’t focus properly on her trajectory” Scott concluded confidently.

Steve just grit his teeth at the accuracy of Scott’s assessment of the situation.

He and Nat had come to the very same conclusions when they had reviewed the data after the whole incident.
They had planned on doing some more training with Wanda, but between the Accords, Peggy’s funeral, and the allegations against Bucky there just hadn’t been any time to address the issue.

“Accident or not her powers are extremely dangerous. The fact her abilities are also tied to her emotions and mental state make things even worse. She should never have been out in the field before she had properly completed any and all training scenarios” Scott chastised.

“Even with all the training in the world we’re still human. You can’t account for everything” Steve countered.

“No you can’t. But that’s still no excuse” Scott fired back.

Before Steve could make another retort Scott cut him off.

“But that’s why I trained” Scott continued in earnest, “I trained until I could handle stressful situations without shifting, without losing control of my anger...And until I had that control, until I found my anchor, I was placed in cuffs and restraints so that I didn’t hurt anyone”

Steve’s eyes widened at the revelation.

“What?!” he thought in disbelief.

And he wasn't the only one.

Clint's grip on his bow actually faltered for a fraction of a second at the revelation while Vision gazed at the boy in sadness.

Bucky tensed at the idea of having to be restrained in such a way. Any kind of restraint automatically reminded him of his time in the Chair.

“He sounds a lot like Bruce” Tony noted thoughtfully.

Rhodes just gave Tony the side-eye.

“Oh boy. Here comes unofficially adopted kid number five” Rhodes thought exasperatedly. There was no way Tony was going to leave any kid similar to Bruce alone.

Natasha however looked at Scott in a new light. He might be a huge undetermined threat, but she could respect anyone willing to go so far in order to keep others safe.

“Hell Stiles used to have to wrap me up in chains” Scott continued, smelling the pity on the Captain, “And that may sound horrible to you, but sometimes there’s no other way in the beginning”

Steve didn’t believe believe that.

He couldn’t.

There had to be a better way than doing something like that to a kid.

“I have super strength that increases with anger. If I lose control I'm basically in berserker animal
mode until I calm down” Scott continued, trying to get Steve to understand.

And in a way Steve did.

Like Bruce and the Hulk, Scott needed to have control over his anger so that he wouldn’t hurt anyone.

“We’re responsible for ourselves Captain. If your powers are dangerous and you know you don’t have control, then it’s your responsibility to make sure that you don’t hurt anyone because of your own negligence” Scott declared sagely.

And Steve had no real counter for that.

“Stiles is showing Wanda the difference in their abilities. What control her emotions and lack of experience have over her...That her belief that she can only control her own fears, and not the fear of others and how they see her is wrong”

Wanda was struggling.

Struggling to find a way to protect herself.

Struggling to find a way to destroy the sand people without causing harm to herself.

And she was struggling to find Stiles.

She didn't know how long she had been at this.

It felt like forever.

She circled and circled in her position, trying to sense where the next attack was going to to come from.

Behind.

She used her telekinesis to launch a rock at the figure, trying to see if attacking them with other objects would do any good rather than attacking them directly.

Wanda grunted as she felt the pain of someone throwing a rock into her stomach.

No dice.

“Next” she thought.

Focusing the energy in her palms she shrouded the next figure in red, launching it into the air…

Only to be thrown herself.

Wanda couldn't help the startled scream that escaped her lips as she was propelled in the air.

The second Steve heard Wanda scream he'd had enough.

“This match is over” Steve said with finality, making a move towards Kira.

Sam and Clint followed suit.
Before Scott even had a chance to intercept him Bucky was there swinging his titanium fist at Steve's head.

“You just need to stop thinking you know best Rogers” Bucky ground out.

Steve flinched back as if he'd been slapped in the face.

“He...He's never called me that before” Steve thought, his brain trying to comprehend Bucky’s statement yet the wires weren't connecting.

Before he had any chance to mull it over any more Bucky lunged forward.

The second Falcon flipped out his wings Lydia propelled her concussive scream in his direction, knocking him backwards onto the grass.

“Shit” Sam muttered, his ears ringing.

Scrambling up off the ground, Sam hopped into the air, hopping to put some distance between him and Lydia.

However before he even got five feet off the ground Lydia propelled a much stronger scream his way, cracking the wings of the Exo-suit and his goggles.

The force of the sound and blast knocking him back and unconscious on the grass, blood trickling out of both of his ears.

The second Cap was intercepted by Barnes Clint launched an arrow at Kira.

Kira effortlessly caught the arrow with her bare hand, giving Clint an unimpressed stare.

“You really want to do this?” she asked him.

“Sorry kid” Clint stated, the arrow in Kira's hand sparking to life.

Clint waited for his taser-arrow to knock her down, only to see Kira not even so much as flinch.

Clint watched as she merely absorbed the electricity coming off his weapon, and toss it to the ground as if it were a rejected toy.

“Now that's definitely cheating” he said, notching a knockout-gas arrow.

Kira flipped her spear around, the point aimed at him.

A bolt of lightning flew from the tip and headed straight for him.

“Shit” Clint said as he somersaulted away from the blast.

“I didn't know Thor had any other relatives” Clint joked as he slowly stood back up.

“Stop before this gets any more out of hand” Kira ordered, staring at him sharply.

Clint took a quick side-glance at Sam while keeping one eye trained on her.

He also quickly caught Nat's expression.

Making what he hoped was the smart decision he put put his right hand up in surrender and slowly placed his bow onto the grass.
Natasha and Derek were all but circling each other.

Derek giving her a challenging gaze that dared her to so much as twitch.

“Boys” she muttered at they're stupidity.

While the Guard had been for the most part friendly-ish (sort of), they were still their parole officers.

She may have been itching to help defend her friends, but she wasn't stupid.

Steve was acting irrationally again, and Clint and Sam jumped in with him without really thinking.

No Wanda's situation wasn't ideal, but Yukimura already explained that even if they knocked her out it still wouldn't do them any good, so this whole tussle was pointless.

A fact she hoped she expressed well enough to Clint when he had glanced her way...And considering he was now putting down his bow she guessed she had.

“Don't either of you do anything” Rhodes ordered, holding Tony back with one hand and Vision with the other.

This is what the Guard was here for. There was no need for them to get involved and throw more fuel onto the fire.

Tony wanted to confront Steve, but he had the feeling Barnes would be more than enough to get through that thick skull of his.

Vision though was conflicted.

He was concerned for Wanda, but not enough so to launch an unwarranted attack on the Guard like the Captain had done.

Ms. Yukimura had said that it was test she had completed herself in the past. He just had to trust that the members of the Shadow Guard knew what they were doing.

Scott merely looked around at the entire situation in exasperated acceptance.

He knew after all this was done that any tentative truces they’d all built between them were now as good as burned.

Wanda growled in frustration.

*Nothing* she was trying was working.

Wanda grunted in pain as one of the hooded figures landed a firm kick at the small of her back.

Wanda cursed herself for losing focus, knocking the figure back with a blast and bracing herself for the inevitable return blow that was to follow, grunting as she hit the ground once more.

Quickly lifting herself up off the ground she placed a shield around herself like a bubble in order to block an attack by another one of Stiles’ blasts.

Before she could assess her situation again a hand reached up from the sand and grabbed at her leg.
Wanda growled as she struck out of the appendage, gritting her teeth at the pain now zipping up her arm.

Of course in her frustration she didn’t realize that she had dropped her shield.

Taking advantage of the situation Stiles launched a blast at Wanda, squaring her in the side, and knocking her back onto the ground.

Wanda made a shriek of anger and frustration, immediately rising to her feet, her eyes glowing just as red as her hands.

“Good” Stiles thought, “I just need to push her a little more”

Stiles sent another blast her way, an action that was effortlessly pushed away by one hand.

As three more figures appeared out of the ground Wanda focused her powers into her palms, the figures coated in red as she tried attacking whatever mentality they had.

Only to choke out a scream as her own mind was invaded.

“Everyone’s afraid of something”

“I want the big one”

“It’s all our fault”

“It’s your fault. It’s everyone’s fault, who cares” Clint declared. “Are you up for this? Are you? Look I gotta know because the city is flying...The city is flying, we’re fighting an army of robots...And I have a bow and arrow. None of this makes sense...But I’m going back out there cause it’s my job. And I can’t do my job and babysit. It doesn’t matter what you did, or what you were...If you go out there you fight and you fight to kill...Stay in here and you’re good. I’ll send your brother to come and find you...But if you step out that door, you are an Avenger”

Feeling the agony of her brother’s mind vanishing from her detection.

“It’s my fault” she declared.

“That’s not true” Steve assured.

“Then turn the TV back on” she retorted dismally.

“I’ve caused enough problems” she pointed out, swiping her hands together.

“You wanna mope you can go to high school. You wanna make amends, you get off your ass” Clint encouraged.

“She’s just a kid” Steve countered.

“Dude, she’s four years older than me. She’s not a kid in any culture, or definition of the word” Stiles deadpanned.

“Burn the Witch!”

“Ultron was created by the Scarlet Bitch sitting over there”

“That’s what you meant when you said that it was all your fault”
“The Scarlet Witch is not a child! She and her brother willingly sided with Hydra and allowed them to experiment on them for the purpose of revenge. And because of her mind-rape she is responsible for all those killed and orphaned because of the Hulk’s rampage and Ultron!”

“Besides, Wanda genuinely wanted a fresh start. I’d be a hypocrite if I got in the way of that”

“You let a fucking Hydra agent become an Avenger?”

“She wanted a do-over Buck. Her brother was killed when they were helping us fight off Ultron. She deserved a fresh start”

“You think anyone is going to defend her when all they know about Wanda is that she caused the deaths of several people in Nigeria? She’s nobody to them. Just someone who randomly appeared one day with the title Avenger”

“Her brother's death was her own fault. You reap what you sow”

As the attack cut off, and clarity returned, Wanda lifted her hands away from her head.

Rising up like a Fury from hell, Wanda was shrouded in a bloody mist of red.

“You need to stop thinking that you know best!” Bucky growled out, aiming another uppercut at Steve's face.

Steve dodged the blow and went for a one-two of his own, both of which Bucky blocked.

“Just say it!” Steve demanded, grunting as he blocked a particularly strong kick to the stomach.

“You hate that I let Wanda on the Team!” Steve shouted, grabbing onto Bucky's leg and using the leverage to try tossing him to the ground.

Bucky however expected the move, and as Steve lifted him up to toss him he used the leverage back against him and kicked the blonde square in the temple.

Hard.

“I'm pissed that you treat little miss ex-mind raping Hydra bitch like an innocent little victim!” Bucky roared back, launching a titanium punch at Steve's chest when he was down.

Steve managed to roll away and back onto his feet.

“She deserves a second chance! To make amends!” Steve countered.

With a growl of frustration Bucky launched himself at Steve, two of them engaging each other in a fast paced fury of blows.

Taking advantage of his right arm being right next to Steve's head after he had dodged a particularly vicious punch, Bucky moved right into an elbow strike, smacking Steve in the nose and making him falter back a few steps as he clutched his now broken appendage.

“You know sometimes I think you like getting your ass kicked”

“Second chance doesn't mean free pass!” Bucky hollered.

“If she really wants to make amends she can do it after she gets out of prison!” Bucky declared,
glaring at Steve.

“They would have given her the death penalty!” Steve exclaimed.

“So what then?! Tony and Banner don’t matter than?! You throw your friends under the bus and treat the Witch like an innocent toddler! Why?!” Bucky demanded, stepping up near Steve again, swinging his fist in a fierce blow that Steve managed to dodge.

“Because you thought if the world could except her than they would except me?! She was what? Your backup plan to remove the Hydra programming once you finally found me? Is that it?!” Bucky accused viciously.

Steve’s eyes widened in disbelief at the accusation, leaving him wide open to the punch Bucky had aimed at his face, knocking him hard onto the grass.

Steve groaned in pain, spitting out the blood welling in his mouth, but he muscled through the pain and pushed himself up desperately onto his elbow.

“No! Buck no! It wasn’t like that at all!” Steve tried to assure.

He would never do something so horrible as to intentionally push his friends away and throw them under the bus for some diabolical plot like that!

Bucky grudgingly had to believe the truth of Steve’s words as he listened to his heartbeat to see if it faltered.

It hadn’t.

“What the Witch needs isn’t someone to push her problems away...She needs someone who will help her face them” Bucky exclaimed.

Steve nodded.

He saw that now. He had made everything so much worse insisting that everything be covered up and that Wanda should ignore what the news was saying about her.

“And that's another thing...You need to stop treating me like I'm some delicate little flower Steve!” Bucky declared irately.

“I know you're not!” Steve fired back, standing to his feet again.

“Then stop treating me like it!” Bucky shouted in frustration.

“I know what I did!” he exclaimed, “I don’t need you to protect me from that!”

“That wasn't you!” Steve countered firmly.

“I know I never made the conscious decision to kill all those people while I was the Winter Soldier” Bucky stated, stepping right up to Steve and jabbing his index finger in his chest, “But that doesn't mean I’m some kind of saint!”

Steve blinked in surprise at the direction Bucky had taken the conversation.

“Before I was drafted I was a champion boxer!” Bucky declared, “I beat people up for living!”

Bucky waved his arms out in exasperation.
“And during the war I was fucking sniper!” Bucky shouted irately.

He had blood on his hands long before Hydra even came along.

And Steve seemed to have forgotten that.

“I know they say that after a person dies you start seeing them behind rose-tinted glasses, but you need to stop being such an ass!” Bucky asserted angrily.

Steve winced at that.

*I know guys with none of that worth ten of you.*

“We always fought side by fucking side” Bucky continued.

*I'm with you till the end of the line.*

“And after I die and come back I'm suddenly inept? No...No this is your goddamn guilt blinding you to everything!” Bucky accused knowingly.

“Bucky!” Steve screamed, watching helplessly as his brother-in-all-but-blood plummeted to his death. Screaming the entire way down.

*He never cursed the serum more than the moment he heard Bucky’s screams stop as he hit the bottom.*

“Maybe you feel that now it's your turn to have my back while I'm recovering mentally, like I had your back when you were still a scrawny midget” Bucky rationalized, stepping up to Steve once more.

“But I didn't need you to fight my battles for me then, and I sure as hell don't need you to now”

“Here it comes” Stiles thought, mentally preparing himself for the onslaught about to be brought down.

“Protect” he commanded to himself, the gold of his magic shrouding him like armour.

Ten figures swirled into formation around her.

In a cry of fury Wanda let out a blast unlike anything she had release before at the clones.

Her powers ripping each of them apart on the molecular level as it blasted through the field like a wave, tearing apart anything in its path.

Stiles grunted as the waves of psionic energy plowed into him.

“I’m safe” he thought resolutely, his belief in his shield not wavering once.

With the function of the spell complete the dust and shadows blew away as if a giant fan had been placed next to it.

“Let me guess” Rhodes inquired to Maria as he carefully watched the medics tend to Sam, “You expected something like this to happen”
“With Little Red Riding Hood being pitted against Stilinski? Yes” Maria admitted.

As soon as Sharon had informed her of the scheduled sparring/training she immediately planned it out to have SEA agents and medical personnel on standby if and when something happened.

And she had no doubt that it'd be when.

After all, tensions were still running high, and Maximoff hadn't been as receptive as the Guard had hoped as of yet.

Though seeing the sandy dome she was going to interrogate Fury as long as it took in order to get him to tell her more about the Shadow Guard.

"I'm starting to sense a pattern in how we keep meeting" Sharon teased, sounding both amused and unimpressed as she gave Barnes the side-eye, knowing he was responsible, yet again, for Steve’s injuries.

"Really? I haven't noticed" Steve joked lightly as he tried to wipe away some of the blood.

“You have a concussion?” Sharon asked concerned, eyeing the multiple cuts on Steve’s bloody face.

“Yeah, but the serum should take care of it pretty quickly...Besides, I've been told that I have a hard head” Steve replied, a small smile adorning his lips.

Bucky scoffed.

“Ain't that the truth. I’ve met brick walls that are softer” Bucky ribbed.

“At least now I know how to get through that thick head of his” Tony joked as he joined the three of them.

“Really now? You're going to fight Steve outside the suit” Sharon challenged teasingly, though there was a note to her voice that let him know she didn't very much like the idea.

The last time Tony had fought a super soldier outside his suit he had nearly gotten himself killed.

The second Barnes had knocked Tony into the tables she had broken position in order to make sure Barnes wouldn't continue going after him.

She would really not prefer a repeat of the event in any fashion.

Not that she didn't trust Steve...But he didn't always hold back as much of his strength as he thought he did...And Tony's not exactly young anymore. He was lucky Barnes hadn't perforated his liver or kidney.

“You do remember I'm a genius right? I wouldn't do something so stupid as to go a few rounds with a super soldier outside the suit” Tony countered, raising an eyebrow at her.

Suddenly the dust and smoke dissipated in a whoosh, startling everyone but the members of the Shadow Guard.

“It’s time” Scott thought.

Wanda huffed in and out as she tried to calm down, the red of her powers slowly fading from
around her body.

She realized faintly that all her pain was just...gone.

As the sand and dust dissipated a single figure remained on the ground.

Wanda slowly approached the figure, hands raised in case it was some kind of trick, ignoring the approach of the other Avengers.

As she got closer she realized that for the first time the figure's hood was down.

As she stepped up in front of it she realized in horror that the figure’s face was that of her own.

“What the hell?” Rhodes muttered in confusion.

Wanda didn't understand….she had been fighting…

Before she could even finish her thought the figure crumbled back into shapeless sand.

“The spell is designed to make you fight against yourself” Kira explained as she and the rest of the Guard more casually made their was over to her.

“Herself?” Steve questioned.

Kira ignored him to address Wanda directly.

“Stiles might have been egging you on, but he was there to make you try and find an alternative way to locate him from the reflections. To try and help you realize that if you continue fighting yourself and letting your powers and emotions control you, you will only continue to hurt yourself and by extension others” Kira explained.

Back when she had first been tested she hadn't understood either.

And unlike now nobody had taken the time to fully explain what had just happened after she had been told that she had failed.

She wanted to make sure that Wanda did understand.

“It was a test. And you failed” Stiles declared, finally approaching the group.

“But I defeated them…” Wanda pointed out weakly, uncertainly.

“You destroyed yourself” Stiles corrected.

Wanda's gaze shifted back to where the unmasked figure had laid.

The figure of her own dead eyes.

“The point of the test was to see if you had control...You failed” Scott reminded her.

“How so?” Natasha questioned, none of them had seen the match after all.

“Because her problem isn't a lack of control...It's a lack of experience. Conviction” Stiles explained, shifting his gaze from Natasha to Wanda.

“Like I explained earlier, if I don't possess a rock firm faith in my beliefs and what I'm trying to get my magic to do, it won't work” Stiles reiterated.
Wanda nodded, remembering his words.

“Your emotions and doubts have the same control over your powers” Stiles clarified pointedly.

And finally it clicked for her how she failed the test.

“Wracked by grief you were able to bend *vibranium*” Stiles emphasized.

“Wanda...If you stay here...You’ll die” Ultron noted, as if it would make her leave.

“Yes, I did...Do you know how it felt?” she questioned softly.

*Letting her grief and fury flow she reached into Ultron’s chest cavity and ripped out his ‘heart’.*

“It felt like that”

“You unconsciously took apart the Ultron Sentries when you felt your brother die” Stiles unhesitantly continued.

*Her screams of grief roared as she clasped to her knees. Her powers igniting in response to her pain, vanquishing everything around her.*

“And in your frustration and anger you took apart the mirror spell, showing that you have control on a molecular level” Stiles pointed out, one after the other.

Wanda thought back to her fury. Her anger. How all her hesitation had vanished as she had blasted the entire battlefield.

“And that all proves that it's not a lack of control...It's a lack of emotional control, conviction, and experience” Stiles explained, voicing out his observations to everyone.

After a moment of silence Wanda spoke.

“Okay…” Wanda breathed, “Okay..So what do I do about it then?”

“Whatever you need to do in order to make sure you learn to control your emotions so that they are no longer ruling you...You need to face your demons head on...You do what you need to do even if you don't want to” Kira declared, jumping in.

It was her turn to try and get through to Wanda.

Scott already tried to explain to her that she needed an anchor, and clearly not all of their discussion had been absorbed into her brain since she probably hadn't thought that it really had applied to her at the time.

Now it was her turn.

Wanda looked at her in surprise.

She and Kira hadn't really talked at all before this, so she didn't really have a feel of her personality or where she stood with her.

“This very test was used on me when I was eighteen during our senior year of high school...And I failed too” Kira revealed sadly.

Wanda blinked in surprise.
“Why? How?” she asked, confused why Kira would even need such a test.

“Because the first half of our senior year involved stopping a bunch of psychotic scientists from experimenting on kids” Stiles muttered.

“What?!”

“I already had my powers then” Kira clarified, “They just needed them out of control for a specific purpose they had planned”

“So your powers were out of control?” Clint asked, trying to get some clarification.

“Sort of...They actually made them more powerful...But in making them more powerful it caused my inner animal spirit to become more powerful than me...And my inner animal spirit started separating from my human half and....taking control over my body” Kira revealed hesitantly, trying not to cave at the holes being bored into the back of her head by James Barnes.

“Taking control?” Bucky demanded, his teeth gritted tightly in his anger.

“It wasn’t mind control. There wasn’t anyone to kick out of my head. Or triggers to nullify....It was internal...My own animal spirit...my own power taking possession of my mind and body” Kira clarified.

“Yeah. Because that's so much better” Bucky thought sarcastically.

“And it only got worse...The blackouts more frequent” Kira described.

Zhelaniye

“Then the next thing I knew I was walking along a highway and was suddenly arrested for a murder I didn't even remember committing” Kira said dejectedly.

Rzhavyy

“After that my Mom took me to a group of women who tested me the same way we tested you...only the stakes were a little different” Kira said tentatively.

“Different how?” Wanda inquired, her concern for her own fate building at Kira's words.

“If I passed, good. If I failed...I was to join them...forever” Kira revealed hesitantly.

Semnadtsat

“I'm sorry did you just say what I think you just said? Because it sounded like your mom left you with a cult” Clint demanded.

“What's going to happen to me?! I failed!” Wanda exclaimed, her fear increasing.

“Nothing” Kira assured calmly.

“Except mind numbing meditation” Stiles joked sarcastically, trying to ease some of the tension.

“Naturally after I failed their test I didn't want to go with them, even if I was out of control” Kira admitted, ignoring Stiles'attempt at levity.

Rassvet
“I didn't want to leave my family. My friends. My boyfriend, for potentially years” Kira emphasized.

Pech’

“I wanted to finish high school. Go to college”

Devyat’

“Hell there was no way I was going to leave my friends to deal with the psychotic scientists by themselves!” Kira exclaimed, her desperation back then showing through.

Dobroserdechnyy

Kira closed her eyes and took in a deep breath to calm herself down.

Opening her eyes again she locked her gaze with Wanda's.

“Staying wasn't what I wanted...But what you want, and what you need, are rarely ever synonymous” Kira advised sagely.

Vozvrashcheniye na rodinu

“I needed to stay...But I didn't...I was afraid. My mom was afraid. Scott and Stiles were afraid...So I escaped” Kira admitted, sounding disappointed in her past self.

Odin

“But I only got worse” Kira admitted sadly.

Gruzovoy vagon

“I couldn't fight”

“Soldat?”

“I was a liability more than anything”

“Ya gotov otvechat”

“So when I needed to reconstruct my sword I went back and I made a deal” Kira revealed.

“Tell me you didn't” Clint demanded angrily.

Kira just gave him an apologetically grim look.

“They helped me to be able to fight with my friends...And when it was all over I went back to be their protege until I had control over my own body again” Kira explained, sounding resigned to the decision she had made years ago.

Clint just turned away from her, shaking his head in frustration.

“It wasn't what I wanted...But it was what I needed” Kira emphasized, looking at Wanda directly as she said it.

“And what do I need to do?” Bucky pondered grimly.
“You need to do what you need to do in order to gain control over yourself...Even if the method isn't what you may want...It might be what you need” Kira declared resolutely.

*Sergeant Barnes...the procedure has already started. You are to be the new fist of Hydra!*

“How long were you with them?” Bucky asked, wanting to know how long it took for her to regain control of herself.

“A year and half. Give or take” Kira replied.


“Sure it was a lot coming back and learning about all the things, good and bad, that I missed when I was away...But my family was okay...Most of my friends were alive...Scott and I resumed our relationship.”

“You're dating?!” Sam exclaimed as he staggered over to the group, his speech slightly slurred as a result of his burst eardrums.

“Welcome back Tweety Bird” Bucky teased.

“Feel more like Tom the Cat” Sam muttered.

Kira gave them a small smile, but ignored their banter in favor of continuing.

“I got my GED and started college...I may have had to put some things in my life on hold...And things were definitely different when I came back...But my life wasn't over...A new chapter was just beginning” Kira explained reassuringly.

Steve couldn't help but feel what Kira had described applied to him as well.

After the ice everything had changed....And even though it felt like it sometimes in the beginning, his life wasn't over.

Like Kira had said, a new chapter had started...And he had been stuck rereading old chapters.

“You have your whole life ahead of you. Take the time to do what you need for yourself” Kira advised Wanda.

“Even if it takes years?” Wanda asked, not liking that potential possibility.

“If that's what it takes” Kira confirmed, echoing her last words to Scott before she had disappeared with the Skinwalkers.

( Clint's POV )

“Okay. Time to finally man up” I thought.

Taking in a deep breath I knocked on Wanda's door.

It had been a while since the spar.

Everyone had mostly scattered amongst themselves, though Steve and Barnes had gone off to rekindle their friendship in a healthier way that didn't involve fists.
Though what did I know? Nat and I bonded over sharpening our weapons and heckling unsuspecting people from the shadows.

After a moment I heard the lock flipping from the inside.

As the door slid open I finally saw just how haggard the young woman was with everything going on.

“Clint” Wanda addressed.

“Mind if I come in” I asked awkwardly.

“Sure” she replied simply, sounding very tired.

“How are feeling?” I asked, choosing to start with the easiest question.

“Overwhelmed” Wanda replied, sounding wary.

“I'm sure” I said, sitting down on her bed.

I pat the side of it for her to join me.

And she did...Folding her legs up indian-style.

“And a part of that is my...our fault” I told her.

“I fail to see how” she stated, raising her eyebrows at me.

“You've been through a lot of shit and we admittedly babied you” I told her reluctantly.

“Babied?” she demanded, sounding offended.

“Not like that” I pushed back exasperated, “I mean we shielded you from things that you should have had to confront earlier on...And if we hadn't done that than everything wouldn't be blowing up in your face like it is now”

“What do you mean?” she asked, irritation gone, “Last I checked you didn't accidently blow up a government building”

I sucked in a breath and clapped my hands on my knees.

I already planned out what I needed to say.

I just need to say it.

“You know I said I went to bat for someone else before. Took a chance on them” I asked her, trying to get her to recall our past conversation when she had first come to the Compound.

“Yeah” she replied curiously.

“That person was Nat” I revealed.

“Natasha?” she said surprised, “I thought SHIELD recruited her?”

“I recruited her” I emphasized, “But she wasn't exactly on the recruitment list”

“You were sent to kill her” Wanda realized in disbelief.
“And I made a different call” I said pointedly.

And I was glad I did.

“But that’s not what I wanted to talk about...The point is she wasn’t just accepted into SHIELD” I said, continuing with the point I was trying to make.

“She was sent on all the high risk missions...She had to work solo because nobody but me would ever team up with her, afraid that she would stab them in the back” I described, though simple descriptions like those really didn't do Natasha's experience justice.

“She put up with the jeers...The glares...The mistrust...All because she wanted to wipe out the red in her ledger” I told her, hoping she was started to understand where I was going with this.

I was rewarded with a small nod of her head a moment later, though it didn't look particularly happy.

“And it took a long time before the other agents stopped treating her like she was an enemy in their midst...But she proved herself” I said proudly.

An inflection Wanda caught.

“It took time, but she proved herself and became one of the original three people who I trusted the knowledge of my family with” I relayed.

Wanda gave a small smile.

“It wasn't easy by any stretch of the imagination, but the point is Natasha didn’t have someone protecting her from all the negativity aimed at her due to the mistrust about her past...But you did” I emphasized.

And naturally her smiled turned into an ironed out line.

“We kept your involvement with Hydra a secret...Johannesburg...We shielded you from negative publicity...But in doing that we actually hindered you” I told her.

“How so?” she asked, not fully understanding.

“You never had to deal with the consequences of your actions. You never had to prove to anyone that you wanted to change. That you wanted to make amends. To wipe out the red in your ledger” I explained pointedly.

Wanda cringed a bit at that.

“You never had to deal with the mistrust or figure out how to win it back. Or even apologize” I continued, ranting at myself moreso than really her.

“And that’s our fault” I told her.

“You didn't do anything wrong” Wanda assured me.

“But we did...You should have been made to face the people you hurt...Helen, Tony, Bruce...Johannesburg shouldn’t have been covered up, and you should have gone on TV to apologize for Lagos earlier” I retorted, trying to get her to understand that those things shouldn't have just been pushed away like they'd been.
“And I sure as hell shouldn’t have broken you out of the Compound without knowing just what the hell was actually going on...That’s on me” I said, disappointed in myself.

Of course at that point I had still thought that everything was a ploy, but even still. Part of Wanda’s conflicted, mixed up notions was because of me, and I needed to try and fix that.

Wanda's excessive force towards Vision had been...shocking, especially since she had admitted to me over the phone a while back that she might be developing feeling for the android.

Though how that one would work was beyond me, but hey pansexuality is a thing. And love is love right?

Hell I'm sure if Vision asked, Tony would build the two of them their own little baby androids.

“I don’t know if I can” Wanda admitted, wringing her hands.

“Hey” I said, grabbing onto her hands, “I know it’s scary, but if you truly are sorry than this is what you need to do, and Steve will be right there with you during the interview” I reminded her encouragingly, “We’ll all help you through this”

She nodded, looking a lot more relieved.

“But...That is admittedly a big first step” I allowed, “Sooo maybe you should start out smaller first”

“Like apologizing to Dr. Cho?” she replied.

“Sounds like a plan” I agreed, giving her an encouraging smile.

(Third POV)

“And Rogers saw the picture?” Scott asked, looking away from the omen.

Lydia nodded grimly.

The Pack had gathered together after all the Avengers had gone to sleep in order to discuss Lydia's premonition.

“Okay. So what are we going to do?” Kira asked.

They had to have a plan to help Tony right?

“Most of this seems to be symbolic” Derek observed, taking his own look at the picture.

“Stabbed in the back, surrounded by sharks, and a shredded heart. Yeah we have no idea what that could be” Stiles mocked sardonically.

“We don't know for sure it's that” Scott reminded him.

“Don't know for sure?! Scott. This has Captain Liar and Frosty the Snowman written all over it” Stiles exclaimed.

“And if it's not?” Scott countered.

“You told us Stark and Barnes are friends now right?” Kira asked.
“Yeah. Friends. Right up until we tell Tony that his new friend murdered his parents while under the control of Hydra, and that Rogers and Romanoff knew for two years max. Then boom picture” Stiles said pessimistically.

“We don't know that...It could be referencing his Company directors, the UN, or even Secretary Ross...Right?” Lydia suggested weakly, her words sounding unconvincing to even herself.

“It's definitely possible” Stiles emphasized, giving her a look that said, but-since-when-has-their-luck-ever-gone-that-way.

“We are still telling him right?” Derek inquired, though everyone knew he wasn't really asking. There was no way Derek would ever keep something like that a secret from anybody.

“Of course...But with everything going on I think it would be best to wait for Morrell to get here first so that she can help us with damage control” Scott decided.

Looking at the omen again, dread curled in his stomach.

Hopefully all these secrets weren't going to get someone killed.

(Bucky's POV)

Startled awake I ripped aside the covers, my mouth open in a silent scream as I blinked unseeingly for a moment before my eyes adjusted to the darkness.

I huffed out deep breaths as I tried to calm my racing heart.

But was I actually awake this time?

Every time I had thought I had finally woken up I would find myself covered in blood and surrounded by the bodies of the dead.

My victims.

I looked down at my hands to see if they were stained crimson.

Then a faint memory came forward.

Fingers.

You have more fingers in dreams.


That's one hand.


Ten.

“I'm awake” I said relieved, leaning back a bit.

“Sergeant Barnes” Friday spoke.

“Yeah?” I replied, startled a bit by the sudden break in silence.
“I know after a nightmare Boss doesn't usually go back to sleep. If you would like, Boss is in his lab right now finishing up some work” she suggested.

“Did he have a nightmare too” I couldn't help but ask.

“...”

“I'm not at liberty to say” Friday replied after a moment.

Well that pretty much confirmed it then.

Well...she wasn't wrong. I usually skulk around after a nightmare, write whatever memories I might have down in my journal, but otherwise I typically don't risk going back to sleep.

“Would Tony mind if I came down?” I asked her.

“Not at all Sergeant Barnes. He's actually working on BARF right now if you'd like to assist him” Friday relayed.

Well, that settled it then.

At least the two of us could cope badly with our nightmares together.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so before anyone calls me a Wanda-Hater I promise I'm not!

Like I mentioned before I'm very big on the psychology of the characters. Wanda's problem is that she's getting so many mixed signals and different advice from different people, combined with her own demons, feelings, and conflicts it's no wonder she's always coming just short of where she needs to be. I hoped I portrayed her psychological conflict well enough in this chapter! In the comics her character actually battles with psychological issues, and while I won't have her have a full on breakdown (probably), she's got a lot she needs to work through, and while everybody thinks they're helping they're really not. And a large part of that is because there is only one person who can understand her and that's Theo Raeken!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE comment!!!!
Hi all! Sorry it's a day late!

This is kind of like an intermediary chapter before the big stuff starts going down next chapter, so enjoy!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE comment!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Third POV)

“Okay so let's get this secret-not-so-secret meeting started” Tony declared, clapping his hands together.

“Im sorry, is no one else worried that our parole officers are just gonna walk in here and tell us to mind our own business?” Sam inquired.

The Avengers (and Bucky) had gathered in one of the conference rooms to discuss what Friday had dug up so far on the members of the Shadow Guard presiding over them.

After the whole training debacle a clear line in the sand was drawn.

Tony, Rhodes, Bucky, and Vision still (mostly) trusted the Guard, while Steve, Sam, Natasha, Clint, and Wanda had very clear reservations.

Steve’s side felt that the members of the Guard were keeping too much from them and were wary of their capabilities. Though they did grudgingly believe that they could help Wanda.

Though the nature of Scott’s powers concerned them.

Tony’s side while not blindly trusting, thought that the members of the Guard had a lot to offer to them in the way of help.

Bucky and Tony especially sympathized with Kira and wanted the chance to speak more at length with her about how she fixed her dilemma in case it could help them with Hydra’s programing.

“It's not like they can't infer what we're doing. If anything they're probably surprised it hasn't happened earlier” Natasha pointed out unconcerned.

“Then let's get started” Steve stated authoritatively.

“Alright. You heard the man Friday. Show us what you got” Tony told her.

“First up is Scott Garcia McCall” Friday announced, bringing up an image of the young man onto the screen.

“He is contracted as a part-time agent and consultant of the Shadow Guard. He is a senior in college at UC Davis completing a bachelor's of science in biochemistry, and has already sent in an
application to continue his education at the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine” Friday continued.

“He's a science nerd?” Clint rephrased skeptically.

Tony was genuinely surprised to hear that Scott was a man of science. He hadn't gotten that vibe off him at all.

If anything Scott reminded him of a young recruit in the army. He was that disciplined.

“That's a lota schooling” Sam noted impressed.

He had volunteered once at a bird sanctuary in high school and found that he really enjoyed it.

At one point he'd actually entertained the idea of being a vet, but he ruled out that possibility after hearing the kind of schooling he'd have to do.

Training and caring for birds? Yes.

Medical school? No.

“Maybe McCall and I can find some common ground through it though” Sam thought positively.

“He was employed as a Veterinary Technician at Beacon Hills Animal Clinic from when he was fourteen to eighteen, though he does occasionally still work there” Friday continued.

“Beacon Hills?” Steve asked curiously.

“Beacon Hills, California Captain” Friday clarified.

“Is that where he's from?” Rhodes inquired.

“It is where each of the members of the Shadow Guard are from Colonel” Friday replied.

“And it'll be the next place I look into” Natasha thought.

“He attended Beacon Hills High School in the same grade as Ms. Martin, Mr. Stilinski, and Ms. Yukimura. His grades were nothing impressive his freshman and sophomore year, however they did improve his Junior and senior year with him even taking AP biology to prepare for college. He was a benchwarmer for the lacrosse team until his sophomore year when he made Captain and was on the track team as well. He, like the rest of the Guard, had a very significant increase in the number of absences throughout their high school career starting in January 2011” Friday detailed.

“He did say that when they were sixteen they became their town's protectors” Steve recalled.

“It would make logical sense that the number of absences would increase as they got more involved in hero work seeing as they would likely have to leave school premises in order to deal with the threat” Vision reasoned.

“Find anything noteworthy in any police reports?” Tony asked curiously.

“He and Mr. Stilinski had Mr. Hale arrested when they discovered half his sister's body buried at the ruins of the old Hale estate” Friday reported.

“Derek murdered his sister?” Tony demanded skeptically, not believing the allegations could
possibly be true.

“The cause of Laura Hale’s death was ruled to be an animal attack. She was cut in half post-mortem” Friday explained.

“You’ve got to be kidding me” Tony demanded icily.

“Who would desecrate a body like that?” Sam muttered angrily.

“Mr. McCall and Mr. Stilinski also have a repealed restraining order that had been placed on them by another Guard member towards the end of their sophomore year” Friday detailed.

“Restraining order? For what?” Rhodes asked curiously.

“Kidnapping”

“Kidnapping….And yet the person is a member of the Guard? I’m sorry does anyone else find that suspicious?” Clint demanded in disbelief.

Everyone else couldn’t help but agree. Things just didn’t add up.

Which meant that there was far more to that story then the restraining order detailed.

“If I may...There was a great many police reports that placed Mr. McCall and the others at the scene of many questionable incidents and murders...In many cases their involvement assisted the police department” Friday reported.

“Makes sense. Playing hero at their age would've meant a lot of crossover with law enforcement” Rhodes noted thoughtfully.

“Anything else particularly noteworthy?” Tony inquired.

“Senior year Mr. McCall, Ms. Martin, and another friend of theirs who is also a part of the Guard were arrested for breaking into a nursing home, though the charges were dropped” Friday replied.

“A nursing home?” Clint demanded, not sure he had heard that right.

“There’s definitely something we’re missing there” Sam muttered.

“I don’t know why everyone finds it so hard to believe a geriatric could be a threat. I kick Tweety-Bird’s ass easy enough” Bucky snarked.

Steve quirked a smile at Bucky’s comment, but he remained as silent as Natasha as the two of them took in and assessed every detail they were given.

“Anything else Friday?” Tony inquired curiously.

These kids were anything but boring.

“If I may Boss, I find that Beacon Hills is a... Bermuda Triangle of unusual occurrences. You will have to be more specific” Friday snarked good naturedly.

Tony could help but feel proud that she was growing and learning so quickly.

“Well that's not a good sign” Clint muttered.
“Medical reports?” Tony inquired, covering all areas.

“Mr. McCall is listed as having severe life-threatening asthma from a young age” Friday replied.

“Life-threatening?” Steve demanded concerned, recalling his struggles prior to the serum.

Bucky likewise stiffened in his seat, all amusement and humor gone from his expression.

“He has been hospitalized several times in the past though his attacks reduced greatly after January 2011” Friday relayed.

“There is a calculable pattern correlating with said month and year” Vision observed.

“He told me that a man forced his powers on him without his consent” Wanda relayed, starting to connect the dots.

“And if I had to guess that attack probably happened January 2011” Natasha reasoned.

“And that time frame is where I’ll start my searches” she thought.

“Does that mean Scott’s powers cured his asthma then? Like the serum did for Steve?” Bucky asked, wanting clarification on the issue.

“I cannot answer that for certain Sergeant Barnes. In his school records there have been asthma related incidents noted during the beginning of senior year” Friday answered.

Both Bucky and Steve frowned at that, their protectiveness over the young man growing exponentially.

“Anything else medically noteworthy?” Natasha asked.

“He has a redacted time of death” Friday relayed in a if-you’re-interested tone.

Silence.

“I’m sorry” Clint said, wiggling his finger in his right ear, “I think I misheard that. It sounded like you said he has a time of death”

“Indeed that I what I said Mr. Barton. I can increase my server volume if you are having trouble hearing me” Friday snarked.

“......How?....When?” Sam questioned slowly, still in shock.

“He was brought into the hospital and pronounced dead after attempts to revive him failed. Less than forty-five minutes later while the hospital was under attack he awoke in the morgue within one of the freezers” Friday reported.

Steve and Bucky flinched at that.

“...Shit” Bucky murmured, echoes of the pain of being forcibly cryogenically frozen by Hydra crawling over his skin.

Steve wasn’t much better. Thinking that you had died only to wake up cold and alone...Perhaps he was being too harsh on Scott. The kid had obviously been put through shit and he was starting to see more than a few parallels between them.
Maybe they just needed another chance to clear the air between them….And he could even help Scott with some of the trauma he’d gone through.

“Did they determine a cause for what happened?” Vision inquired, concerned for the health of the young man.

“According to post-incident check ups they determined that he had likely gone into shock from a severe asthma attack and that a malfunction with their machines had failed to pick up a heartbeat” Friday explained.

“…”

“Hope he sued…That’s one hell of a fuck up on their part” Tony muttered.

“I found no records to confirm that he had” Friday replied. Though Tony really hadn’t been asking.

“The hospital was under attack?” Steve inquired, wanting to skip onto another topic.

“The hospital has been under attack countless times. If I had to logic a guess at that time I believe it had something to do with the Deadpool which many of the Guard was listed on at the time” Friday speculated.

“Deadpool?” Clint demanded.

“Indeed. Mr. McCall was listed at $25 million. Ms. Martin at $20 million. Ms. Yukimura at $6 million, and Mr. Hale was listed at $15 million before his name was later removed from the list” Friday relayed.

“…”

“You're shitting me” Clint deadpanned.

“Why do I have the feeling we're going to be leaving here with more questions than answers?” Sam commented humorlessly.

“It wasn't an asthma attack” Natasha announced tightly, confidently.

Everyone immediately turned to her.

“And if it was, it wasn't a natural one” she continued, hoping everyone caught one to what she was implying.

“The Deadpool” Bucky stated firmly, unhappily.

“You think someone tried to kill him” Rhodes translated.

“Certain toxins and paralytics can make it look like an accident” Clint voiced observantly, “It is a little too convenient that the hospital was attacked right after he was admitted”

“Just how many times do you think they were attacked?” Sam inquired.

“If I may?” Friday cut in, “There are many police reports containing failed murder attempts on the members of the Guard. The assassin formerly known as the Mute attempted to blow up Mr. Hale with a claymore mine. The former assassin couple the Orphans infiltrated the high school lacrosse team and attempted to behead Mr. McCall with a thermal-cut wire. The assassin known as the Chemist spread a deadly virus around the high school while several of the Guard we're taking
PSATs, and almost killed Mr. Stilinski execution style when he refused to give up the location of his friends, but was saved by Agent McCall. And finally a few former sheriff deputies partnered with the assassin known as the DJ and very nearly burned Mr. McCall and a few of his friends alive”

“....................”

“I really wanted that Bermuda Triangle comment to be a joke” Rhodes muttered unhappily, rubbing his temples.

“Can we move on to the next profile? We’re gonna drive ourselves nuts with this if we don’t” Sam noted, stressed already.

“Friday?” Tony gently urged.

“Next is Special Agent Mieczysław Noah Stilinski” Friday continued.

“Mieczysław!? Damn...No wonder he chooses to be called a stepping stool” Clint joked.

“From what I found in his family records Stiles is actually a military nickname on his father's side” Friday commented.

“Military?” Steve inquired curiously.

“Mr. Stilinski's father and grandfather were both in the army. His father is currently the Sheriff of Beacon Hills” Friday relayed.

“That's convenient” Rhodes noted.

“It would certainly be to their benefit to have someone on the inside to assist them” Vision piggy-backed.

“Mr. Stilinski started at George-Washington University as a junior double majoring in both electrical engineering and criminal justice. Due to his impressive application and a recommendation by Agent McCall he was given allowance to immediately start in their pre-FBI program and interned at Quantico for 6 months. He graduated with his bachelor's a year ago and is currently attending MIT to concurrently get his master's and PhD in electrical engineering, and computer science” Friday declared.

“Seriously” Tony emphasized.

“Something tells me Lydia wasn't kidding when she said that she and Stiles could work for you” Clint teased.

“And high school?” Rhodes asked.

“Second best grades in his class behind Ms. Martin. He was on the lacrosse and track teams as well” Friday answered.

“Like Scott” Natasha noted mentally.

“Police reports?” Tony questioned.

“Innumerable” Friday deadpanned.

“Why is that not surprising?” Sam muttered.
“His medical records are actually the larger concern” Friday announced.

“How so?” Steve inquired.

“Other than his diagnosis of ADHD and several documented concussions, Mr. Stilinski was admitted into a psychiatric facility during a time he was misdiagnosed with frontotemporal dementia” Friday replied.

“Frontotemporal dementia?! How do you misdiagnosis a kid with that!!?” Tony demanded angrily. This town's sorry excuse for medical care was seriously starting to piss him off.

“Mr. Stilinski's mother died from the disease. So when he began displaying many of the same symptoms, and the doctors saw what was later determined to be a hacked brain scan it led doctors to falsely diagnosis him” Friday replied.

“What symptoms?” Tony demanded.

“Insomnia, paranoia, irritability, sleep walking, sleep paralysis, and the inability to determine dreams from reality” Friday listed.

Bucky and Tony winced at that.

You have extra fingers in dreams...It's how you can tell whether or not you're still dreaming...Or what's real and what's not

“....You said the brain scan was hacked?” Tony questioned almost to himself.

“Could someone have been making him sick? Make him feel like he was going insane?” Bucky inquired thoughtfully, there were plenty of drug cocktails that could probably cause effects like that.

“Not impossible. Especially not if they had they’re names on a Deadpool at one point” Natasha noted.

“What mental hospital was he sent to?” Vision inquired curiously, hoping his assumptions based on previous information would be wrong.

“Eichen House...Records show it was closed down after the Chief of Medicine killed all the patients” Friday replied.

“He was a patient in that nuthouse?!?” Clint demanded.

“As was Ms. Martin when she had been rendered catatonic” Friday replied.

“Catatonic?!” Sam demanded.

“Her mother admitted her, but quickly pulled her out when she realized that the staff had trepanatized her against her will” Friday answered unhappily.

Silence.

“...What the fuck” Clint muttered.

Bucky’s eyes darkened in anger at such a thing being done to the young woman.
For the orderlies’ sake they better already be dead.

“Though it was not the first time something like that happened. Many of the medical staff have been arrested or fired for abuse of the patients. And in some cases murder. Mr. Stilinski and Ms. Martin we’re actually almost murdered previously by an orderly who turned out to be an Angel of Death” Friday declared.

“Angel of Death?” Steve questioned, confused by the term.

“A serial killer who has it in their head that the people they are killing are being set free from the pain of living. They see themselves as saving their victims” Natasha explained.

Steve clenched his jaw at the newly obtained information.

“How was that place not closed sooner?” Sam questioned to no-one in particular.

“Anything else on Stilinski that’s particularly noteworthy?” Tony inquired.

He could almost feel himself getting grayer...And that was unacceptable.

“Not particularly” Friday replied.

“Then can we do Lydia next?” Sam asked, still hung up on her apparent catatonia and unwilling trepanation.

“Certainly Mr. Wilson. Lydia Lorraine Martin. Started at MIT as a junior. Received a bachelor's in mathematics and chemistry in a year, and her master's in both the year after. She is currently working on her PhD in both fields of study” Friday announced as she switched the photos on the screen.

“The hell is with the brainiacs in this group?” Sam inquired aloud.

This group sure as hell made you feel inadequate with everything they’ve accomplished at such a young age.

“Ms. Martin actually has a documented IQ of 170 and could have graduated high school much earlier, however she held herself back from doing so” Friday noted smugly.

“A fellow genius” Tony stated with a smirk.

“Police records?” Steve asked.

“Other than what has been mentioned previously there is nothing else to note” Friday answered.

“Medically?” Clint inquired.

“She was hospitalized after getting mauled at her sophomore year dance, nearly strangled to death by a serial killer junior year, nearly had her throat ripped out senior year, and was shot prior to the start of her first year at MIT by an extremist group now known as the Monroe Republic” Friday replied.

“......”

“What the fuck is going to start being my new catchphrase” Clint noted (semi) jokingly.

“And Kira?” Wanda inquired curiously.
“Kira Satomi Yukimura actually moved from New York to Beacon Hills during her junior year of high school. She was a member of the lacrosse team and took a few AP science classes. However she left school halfway through her senior year” Friday reluctantly answered.

“When she was possessed” Bucky thought sadly.

“So her story checks out so far” Natasha noted thoughtfully.

“But she got her GED at twenty and started at the American College for Healthcare Sciences working towards a bachelor’s degree in Integrative Health Sciences with the goal of a master’s degree in herbal medicine” Friday continued.

“Seriously...Are they all aspiring doctors?” Rhodes couldn’t help but comment.

“Derek isn’t” Tony pointed out.

“One of them. Whoopie doo” Rhodes retorted, rolling his eyes.

“Police records?” Natasha inquired, curious if her murder charge came up.

“She was kidnapped by a mass murderer previously housed in Eichen, but was rescued by Mr. McCall, Mr. Stilinski, and Ms. Martin, and she was accused of murder, however when the body went missing the police had no choice but to drop the charges” Friday relayed.

“Again with that place” Natasha noted thoughtfully, “Definitely a location of interest”

“Medical?” Wanda inquired.

“Nothing noteworthy” Friday grudgingly replied.

“Okay so we're at Derek now right?” Tony asked.

He knew he should personally ask Derek about his family, but he didn’t want to dredge up horrible memories for the sake of his own curiosity. Contrary to popular belief he did have some tact.

“Derek Samuel Hale graduated from Beacon Hills High School and has a bachelor's degree in English. He is a part-time agent, and a part-time substitute English teacher at Beacon Hills High School” Friday announced.

“So far the he's the most normal one out of all of them” Sam commented amused.

“In his sophmore year of high school his family's estate caught fire during a family get-together. Eight died and his Uncle Peter was rendered comatose from the severity of his burns. Mr. Hale and his two sisters who were at school at the time of the fire survived as well. Afterwards Mr. Hale and his older sister Laura went to reside in their family's estate in New York, while their younger sister went to live with their father's family in South America” Friday reported.

“But the fire was later determined to be arson?” Tony asked, wanting more information.

“Indeed. Six years later it was discovered that the fire was in fact a conspiracy headed by a woman named Katherine Argent” Friday replied.

“Argent? As in Agent Argent?” Clint questioned, narrowing his eyes.

“Agent Chris Argent is in fact her older brother” Friday confirmed.
“Somebody explain that one to me” Rhodes muttered, pinching his nose with his thumb and forefinger.

“Somehow I think that's a long story” Clint deadpanned, his distrust of the Agent immediately skyrocketing.

“Any other police reports?” Sam questioned.

“He and Agent Argent were arrested for the murder of a man named Katashi, however, they had been framed. He was also framed for a mass murder in Brazil that he was later cleared of” Friday replied.

“Didn't Scott and Stiles falsely accuse him of murder too?” Wanda asked, sounding mildly amused.

“Sounds like the guy can't get a break” Rhodes chuckled.

“Medically?” Tony inquired.

“Nothing to note Boss” Friday replied.

“Well then” Tony began, leaning back in his chair, “That concludes everyone’s profile so far”

“......”

“Anyone else feel the need to simultaneously want to check the sanity of our five parole officers and hide them away from all the dangers of the world?” Sam noted (semi) jokingly.

“I think it's time I did a little more digging” Natasha commented, leaning back in her chair as well.

“But first, duty calls” Tony announced, “You, Rhodey, and Viz each have mission assignments”

“What about you?” Steve questioned, hoping that Tony didn’t have anything immediately pressing so that they could talk.

“I'm stuck with the glorious job of speaking with the UN and Ross about Steve and Wanda's upcoming interview” Tony replied with an exaggerated cringe.

That got Steve's attention.

“And considering the time I need to get going” Tony noted, looking at his watch.

As Tony was walking out Steve immediately stood up and followed after him.

“Tony wait!”

(Third POV)

“You can't go” Steve declared firmly (again)

“Steve, as much as I'd love to continue our game of Who's The Most Stubborn I have a meeting to get to. You know the one where I finalize that interview you and Wanda are doing in five days?” Tony stated, irritation starting to set in.
“Why do you have to be the one to go? Send Natasha or Rhodes” Steve demanded irritably (worriedly).

“Both of them have missions Steve. If you haven’t noticed, the number of active duty Avengers has been cut in half” Tony countered, getting fed up with running around in circles with this conversation.

“You’re meeting with the UN and Ross today Tony. You should have some kind of backup” Steve continued stubbornly.

“Why? You don’t trust me to handle it?” Tony ground out in frustration.

“I don’t trust them” Steve corrected.

“This isn’t the first meeting I’ve had with them since your house arrest. So what changed this time? What did I supposedly do now?” Tony demanded annoyed, angry.

“Nothing!” Steve retorted, raising his voice, similarly irritated by Tony’s behavior.

“Then what!” Tony shouted irritably.

“They’re going to be the death of you!” Steve shouted back.

Tony actually had to pause at Steve’s unusual counter.

“What?” he demanded confused, “I know the phrase is getting thrown to the wolves but-”

“Or the sharks are circling” Steve muttered.

“What’s going on Steve? You never cared this much about my meetings before. Why now?” Tony questioned.

Steve took out a piece of paper from his back pocket, unfolding it slowly, hesitantly.

After a moment’s consideration he handed it over to Tony.

Tony hesitated.

He hated to be handed things.

It was a trust issue.

But this was Steve so…

Slowly Tony reached out and took the paper, giving it a quick once over.

“Wow Rogers I knew we had a love-hate relationship but I didn’t know you wanted me dead” Tony commented, trying to keep the hurt from resonating in his voice.

“Lydia drew this” Steve said, sounding exasperated.

“Lydia?” Tony questioned confused.

“Sort of… I mean… she drew this image but she hid it, so I copied what she drew from memory so I could show you” Steve corrected.

“So she’s not by biggest fan. She’s hardly the first person to be poking pins in a Tony Stark voodoo
“doll” Tony pointed out unconcerned.

“She was in some kind of a trance when she drew this Tony. Nothing I said could get through to her” Steve corrected pointedly, sounding very concerned.

Tony stilled at the implications.

“It’s a premonition” Steve said, sounding sure and terrified by it’s meaning.

After taking a moment to calm his internal freak out Tony gave Steve his best carefree expression.

“So what if it is?” Tony said flippantly.

“You can’t be serious” Steve demanded at Tony’s response.

“I’m not going to let a *picture* stop me from doing what it is I need to do” Tony countered firmly.

“Your life is at risk!” Steve reminded him, his voice raising a few notches again.

“My life has always been at risk Steve. Even *before* I was Iron Man. Nothing has changed” Tony pointed out to him calmly, firmly.

“Except we *know* that something is definitely going to happen” Steve countered, gesturing to the picture again.

“What Steve? Because if you can tell me the exact what, when, how, and by whom I'll be more than happy to listen...*This*” Tony said, holding up the picture, “Tells us nothing except that there is a *possibility* something will happen”

Steve glared at Tony, frustrated that the other man wasn’t listening to his concerns.

“Look. I appreciate that you're trying to watch my apparently to be stabbed back” Tony commented sardonically.

Steve’s glare darkened at him, not appreciating the joke in the slightest.

“But nothing short of an Avengers summons is going to keep me from going to my meetings today” Tony stated firmly, knowing that Steve couldn’t stop him even if he wanted to.

And Steve *wanted* to.

“I'll have Friday tell you when I'm back” Tony told him as he turned to continue his way down the hall.

As Tony reached the intersection to the next corridor he paused, looking back to Steve for a moment.

“And I *am* coming back Steve”

*(Third POV)*

“No” Stiles declared firmly.

“You don't even know what I'm going to say” Fury retorted.
“You're not exactly one for social visits” Stiles countered pointedly.

“What's the problem?” Scott cut in exasperatedly.

Fury wasn’t going to leave so they might as well get this meeting over with.

“Dr. Cho and Dr. Selvig each need someone guarding them” Fury declared cutting right to the point.

“No” Scott and Stiles answered in tandem.

“I'm not saying it has to be from your division” Fury replied quickly before they completely shut him down.

“I don't see why we should bring in more people at all” Stiles retorted.

“Because they're a liability. You really think the Watchdogs aren't going to come back and try to convince them to further their goals?” Fury countered.

“Get two people from the New York division. Ohio. Florida. It doesn't matter so long as someone has eyes on them” Fury emphasized.

“You do know that just because you and Coulson helped us to form the Shadow Guard that it doesn't make us a branch of SHIELD right?” Stiles pointed out sharply.

Fury just gave him a pointed stare. One which Stiles returned.

“If you're so worried about it why don't you put one of your own agents on it?” Scott questioned, breaking up the mini staring contest.

“SHIELD doesn't exist anymore” Fury reminded them.

“Yeah I can practically see your pants smoking on that one” Stiles remarked sarcastically, “You used to be a better liar than that”

Fury kept his calm exterior, refusing to let Stiles goad him.

“If you want to take the chance that's on you” Fury stated calmly, leaning forward from his position on the wall.

“But don't say I didn't warn you” he continued smoothly (warningly) as he walked out of Scott’s room and into the hall.

“I hate him” Stiles deadpanned.

---

(Lang’s POV)

“Okay so let’s look at the final determinations” I muttered.


“Antoinette?” Corey questioned, giving me his judgy voice at the pun, “Really?”
“You are seriously a salty twenty year old you know that? And you’re not even going to question the ‘giant ant’ part?” I countered.

“You were *Ant*-man. If you didn’t have some kind of ant farm or pet ant *then* I would’ve been surprised” Corey retorted.

“Fair enough” I grumbled, going back to my recent purchases.

I needed to stock up on activities I can do indoors with Cassie (besides TV and Guitar Hero).

Corey was my babysitter today.

I felt bad for having nothing for him to do but potato-it on the couch, but there really wasn’t anything for either of us to do today (hence another reason for the online shopping).

“In other news Pym Technologies are still under scrutiny by the UN for both their technology and the mystery surrounding the incident with the still missing former CEO Darren Cross” Christine Everhart reported.

“As you all know Pym technologies was almost shut down last year due to internal corruption, however after Hope Van Dyne took the helm as the new CEO she managed to salvage the Company” Will Adams continued.

“Howver will interference by the UN put an end to all her hard work?” Christine closed, “Back to you Jackson”.

My hands froze at the keyboard.

Hope.

Hank.

I hoped that both of them were okay.

I know Hank would rather blow up his lab rather than let the UN confiscate his research.

I just hope Hank doesn’t make an enemy out of the UN by telling them to go to hell.

I turned to Corey.

“You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that would you?” I asked him, trying not to sound hopeful.

“The FBI was tasked to keep a lesser eye on them. You should be counting yourself lucky that your involvement with Captain America wasn’t leaked to the public. Pym technologies would’ve been toast” Corey stated unrepentantly.

“And Hope and Hank would’ve have probably gone on the run in order to keep the remaining Pym Particles safe” I concluded thoughtfully, bitterly.

We still hadn’t tracked down the Particles that Mitchell Carson had stolen.

Hydra having access to the Pym Particles wasn’t something I wanted to think about.

Hank didn't want to involve the Avengers in his issue….But who better to deal with Hydra then the Avengers?
Maybe I should bring it up with Corey and Mason...

“I can’t even send them apology flowers” I mumbled, though Corey still heard me.

“If you really wanted to talk to them you could. You’d all be brought into the same room for questioning at the FBI” Corey replied sarcastically.

“I’m trying to avoid another punch to the face” I muttered, wiggling my nose a bit.

(Third POV)

Tony exited the teleconference room gritting his teeth.

“Note to self: Start on Secretary Ross’ impeachment” Tony thought with a grumble.

“Mr. Stark” a familiar voice called out, grabbing his attention.

“Viz” I addressed, “I thought you were investigating the reports of criminals using leftover parts from Ultron's Sentries in Eastern Europe?”

“The reports were correct. A few leftover Hydra sympathizers in Sokovia had managed to collect some of the remnants of the Sentries. Though I believe I was able to locate and retrieve all the parts” Vision informed me.

“Sounds good...But you really didn't need to give me the report in person” Tony reminded him gently.

“I am...aware that it was not strictly necessary” Vision agreed, hesitantly.

“....Steve sent you didn't he?” Tony asked knowingly.

“He made several points in regards to your safety” Vision replied, not even trying to deny it.

Tony let out a large sigh.

“I appreciate the concern Viz, but as you can see I'm perfectly fine” Tony told him, even holding out his arms wide open.

“When I first arrived your blood pressure was 144/91, which, according to standard blood pressure charts, indicate that you were suffering from high blood pressure likely caused by your recent meetings” Vision assessed logically.

“Damn his computerized brain” Tony thought non-heatedly.

“Not my fault our good ol’ Secretary is the living equivalent of hypertensive drugs” I commented jokingly.

“Perhaps the Captain is right to suggest that you delegate some of the political responsibilities to another individual?” Vision suggested.

“Viz. You and I both know logically why that wouldn't work” Tony said exhaustedly.

And Vision did.

Ms. Romanoff would not be seen as trustworthy, and while Colonel Rhodes would be a good
choice, with the Avengers effectively halved he was the busiest out of all of them save Mr. Stark.

Of course while he himself was an option, logically he reasoned that he did not understand people enough to navigate the political playing field appropriately.

But at the same time Captain Rogers was also correct in that Mr. Stark needed someone to alleviate some of his stress as well.

“I apologize for not being of more assistance” Vision replied regretfully.

“You have nothing to apologize for Viz. You might look like an adult but you're still only a year old buddy. Give yourself some time before you start delving into the more complex facets of the human feelings. Heaven knows us humans have yet to really even figure them out” Tony consoled.

“And...relationship wise? When do you believe that I will be...ready for such an endeavor?” Vision inquired hesitantly.

Tony winced.

“I don't know if I can give you a good answer to that Viz” Tony replied slowly, “I guess it really just depends on you”

Tony walked a bit closer over to Vision, swallowing his nerves and forced himself to speak about his own experiences.

“Heaven knows it took me almost thirty years to recover from the damage the abusive and unhealthy relationships of my youth caused” Tony revealed, patting Vision lightly (awkwardly) on his arm.

Sunset Bain. Tiberius Stone. The many faceless people who said they loved him when all it was they really wanted was his money and Company.

Sex became just an act. Meaningless.

Pepper was the first person he'd felt deeper feelings for in God knows how long.

“And you believe my...interest in Wanda is unhealthy?” Vision asked, sounding hurt.

“I was...fine with it in the beginning...Neither of you were anywhere near ready to act on your growing interests and you were both good at helping each other acclimate to the world...” Tony said trailing off, trying to find the right words, “But as I feared Wanda has a million and seventeen thousand things to work through before she's mentally and emotionally healthy enough for any relationship….Not to mention I'm worried that she'd abuse you again Viz”

“Abuse?” Vision questioned, sounding confused about the use of the term in relation to him and Wanda.

“Sending you through several floors of concrete is abuse to say the least Viz...You weren't holding her captive or threatening her...You were her friend and you just wanted what was best for her...But like I said she's not healthy enough mentally right now” Tony explained gently.

He didn’t want to hurt Vision, but he had to know that what Wanda had done to him wasn’t healthy.

Of course that brought up another matter altogether.
“And honestly neither are you Viz” Tony admitted gently.

Vision looked at him confused as he tried to follow his reasoning.

“You may be physically an adult, but you're still emotionally immature Viz...You're still learning what certain things you feel mean...Maybe you should use whatever time you do have to...find yourself too” Tony advised.

“Jesus. What’s the world coming to that I’m the wise old man now” Tony joked to himself.

“And what is it that you suggest?” Vision inquired, seeing the logic in his reasoning.

“I don't know...Maybe a cooking class?” Tony suggested.

“I believe I would like that...Though I believe that I would...stand out” Vision stated, gesturing to his red synthetic skin.

Tony just gave him the patented Stark Smirk.

“Well then maybe it’s time we made you up a secret identity”

(Rafael’s POV)

“To put it simply, you all violated your parole” I declared sharply.

I was actually having a semi-decent week right up until I got a call from Ms. Carter informing me that three of the Avengers had broken the terms of their parole.

Fast forward to this morning and a near five hour flight and here I was.

Staring at the three mildly repentant stubborn faces of Steve Rogers, Sam Wilson, and Clint Barton.

This was going to to be a headache. I just knew it.

And to top it all off I'm going to have to deal with the UN after this crap.

“I want to make it very clear that the only reason the three of you are not being escorted to the Raft right now is because of the report the Shadow Guard gave” I detailed sternly, narrowing my eyes at them.

“According to them some leeway can be given since the method they used for Wanda's training was atypical, and the fact they were intentionally not being as forthcoming about the nature of the test in the beginning, which lead to your notions of panic and concern for your fellow teammate” I reiterated, knowing they'd been briefed before I had arrived.

“However” I emphasized angrily, “They did tell you that it was a test”

Wilson shifted uncomfortably under my scrutiny.

Out of the three of them he seemed the most regretful. And that just angered me more.

“One that would not just conclude even if you did manage to succeed in knocking them out” I continued bitingly, glaring at Rogers.
Rogers kept up his calm, schooled expression, though I could see it in his eyes he regret being so rash (again).

“They told you that Ms. Maximoff would be fine and that they were trying to help and yet, you still initiated a conflict even though you were made aware at the start of your sentence that it would be a violation of your parole” I emphasized unmercifully.

Mr. Wilson was starting to slump a bit in his seat as he unconsciously tried to make himself smaller, though it was Barton's unphased exterior that was continually pissing me off.

“I'll be straight with the three of you...This doesn't look good for you” I said, pointedly.

I grit my teeth at the fact Barton looked like he was trying to keep from rolling his eyes.

“It shows that you are still rash, and quick to jump the gun” I accused, eyeing Rogers in particular.

“And it makes you look like you do not plan to be cooperative” I continued, narrowing my eyes at them, not regretting in the least what I was about to do.

“So until further notice the three of you are to wear personalized ankle monitors” I revealed, placing one of them onto the table.

“We're being booted?” Barton exclaimed.

“It's either this or prison. And frankly I have to say I'm disappointed in you especially Mr. Barton” I emphasized, directing all of my attention towards him.

“Oh? Is my turn to get a lecture before you send me to the corner Agent Papa?” Barton declared sarcastically, bitterness laced in his tone.

“This isn't a joking matter Mr. Barton...In fact I don't think it's really sunk in for you just what you threw away” I declared, glowering at him.

Barton narrowed his eyes, meeting my challenge with his own glare.

“You were just about to be released to go back home to your family” I snapped back at him.

I was rewarded with the noticeable clenching of his teeth.

“And now because of your actions you're not only stuck here, but any potential visitation rights are postponed until further notice” I reported to him icily.

Barton's glare intensified.

If he wasn't thinking twenty different ways to kill me right now minimum I would dance around the Compound in a tutu.

“I'm going to give you some advice Mr. Barton and you'd be wise to pay attention” I advised him sternly, my tone making it known that this wasn't optional.

“Since you were the only one to actually stop your assault during the spar you have the opportunity right now if you play your cards right to get visitation rights back...But” I emphasized harshly, pausing for a moment to make sure he heard what it was I was about to say.

“You need to find a functional, healthy compromise between your family life and hero work” I told him, “If you can't. Then you have a serious choice to make”
Some of the heat in his eyes died as his brain processed my words.

“Your family...Or the thrill” I continued.

And it wasn't just the job that was the issue.

It was the thrill of it. The nature of it.

People like him don't ever truly retire, and even fewer can find that compromise.

“Coming up with a functional compromise isn't exactly easy” Barton countered bitterly.

“Easy?” I scoffed.

“If you wanted easy then you should have stayed single” I mocked, getting himself another glare from him.

“Trust me when I say unless you want your kids to resent you, you need to either find a compromise, or put your family truly first for once and just retire...And if you can't do that—”

“If you're going to tell me to leave my wife and kids I might actually stab you” Barton threatened.

“Sometimes the better decision isn't the one you want, but it is the healthiest situation for your family” I continued unconcerned.

Barton scowled at my words.

Mumbling something that almost sounded like Kira's name for a second, though I ignored it.

“And what would you know?” he demanded challengingly.

“Because I had to make the same decision” I countered smoothly

Barton scoffed.

“Can't imagine you in tights” Barton said sarcastically.

“Your situation is far more commonplace than you think Mr. Barton” I retorted, “A parent who consistently chooses their work over their family even though he knows it's hurting them”

“They understand what I do” he declared assuredly.

“But for how long?” I countered, wanting him to actually think.

“And what's that—”

“When you miss birthday number five? Baby's first word?” I continued, cutting him off, my words making him reel back a bit.

“It starts out as a missed trip...Then it's a birthday...Then two...An award ceremony...Then graduation” I listed, one after another.

All the things I had missed.

“And then one day you wake up and realize you missed out on watching your child grow up” I recalled bitterly.
One day he just wasn't two years old anymore.

“I started in on the high profile cases in the FBI when I was young” I started explaining, knowing that I had his attention.

“When Scott was just a toddler I had my first kill on the job” I revealed, receiving a knowing look from Wilson at where this was probably going.

“And I took to drowning the grief in alcohol” I continued, disappointed at my past self.

“The job took a hell of a lot out of me but I loved what I did. I was helping, saving, people. Making a difference” I said, knowing the description would help Barton make the connection between my situation and his more easily.

“I would be gone for a month or more at time...And when I was home I was drunk off my ass” I admitted sadly, ignoring the look of understanding from Wilson and even Rogers.

Barton was just stone-faced as he tried to conceal his emotions.

“I told myself that they understood how important my job was”

A twitch.

“I kept choosing my job...To hurt my family”

The grind of teeth.

“Scott knew my job was important, but all he wanted was for me just to be there”

Crinkle of the nose.

“Heaven knows Melissa was a Saint for putting up with it for so long. Hell she might as well have been a single parent”

Tightening of the lips.

“Course that all changed one day when I came home drunk off my ass like usual” I declared ominously, getting each of their attention.

“But this time...I accidentally pushed my own son down the stairs” I declared in a dead tone.

This time Barton did flinch back in surprise.

“I watched as he tumbled and tumbled...The sound of his head denting the floorboards haunts me to this day” I revealed, the heavy emotions weighing down my voice.

“I left that night” I declared, looking at Barton right in the eyes.

“I didn't fight the divorce papers...I had already chosen my job over my family a long time ago” I told him, making him flinch, “The signature just made it official”

“I haven't had a drink since that day well over ten years ago” I told him.

“Being sober isn't easy. But if I ever get the urge to drink I just remember how my son laid motionless on the ground because I couldn't compromise a healthy relationship between my family and my job” I emphasized bitingly, regretfully.
Barton shifted his gaze away from mine.

But he didn't get to tune out just yet.

“Scott grew to resent me...And I missed out on half his life” I continued, “Sure we reconciled when he was in high school...But that took time”

I shifted my position so that I was in front of his line of vision again.

“I'm telling you to do better than I did Mr. Barton” I said firmly.

Barton tightened his jaw and gave me a look of pure resolution.

"I won't be like you" he declared.

“Good” I said.

"Find that compromise”

(Helen's POV)

“What are you thinking?” Tony asked.

“That you should have informed me of your theories earlier rather than moving ahead with testing without me” I retorted, “Though I suppose asking you to wait would be like asked a bull not to charge”

“You wound me Helen” Tony replied sarcastically.

“Your ego will survive” I retorted without any heat.

I observed the brain scans that we had completed so far.

I wasn't a neurologist by any means, however I was brought in to assess the cellular damage in sergeant Barnes’ brain, and whether or not his serum was correctly healing the damage, and if not, whether the Cradle could be an option to assist him.

Both Tony and I agreed that in terms of expertise Dr. Stephen Strange was the one we needed.

The problem was Dr. Strange had been in a life-threatening car accident earlier in the year and the damage done to his hands left him unable to practice anymore.

Even if he could no longer perform surgery his professional opinion was exactly what we needed.

The bigger problem?

He completely dropped off the face of the Earth.

Tony was having Friday scour video surveillance around the world for him to see if he turns up.

While I would typically be against such an invasion of privacy no-one has seen Dr. Strange in months.

I was worried that in his grief Stephen had committed suicide.

And even if he didn't say so, I knew Tony was just as worried (even if he didn't know the man
personally like I did, Tony knew what it was like to be at such a low point).

We needed Stephen and Stephen needed help.

“So what's the prognosis?” Tony asked again, bringing me out of my thoughts.

“There is definitely damage” I replied, frowning at the scans, “But from what I can see Sergeant Barnes is healing. Slowly. But he is healing”

“Do you think the Cradle will be necessary?” Tony asked, shifting his gaze from me to where Sergeant Barnes was laid under the newly developed StarkTech MRI machine.

“Truthfully I don’t” I replied, “He's already healing on his own. Attempting to speed that up may damage brain function”

“Oh prevent memory recovery” Tony mumbled thoughtfully.

Suddenly we heard soft, hesitant footsteps behind us.

We turned to see Maximoff and a young Asian woman standing at the edge of the lab.

My heart sped up at the sight of the Witch in my workplace.

I was able to ignore her in favor of Agent Stilinski during the invasion of the Compound. He had understood my discomfort and kept a good distance between me and her.

But now there was nothing between us but tables.

“I uh wanted to speak with Dr. Cho for a minute...Alone” Maximoff stammered, swiping her hands together nervously.

I said nothing.

“I'll go check on Frosty” Tony mumbled, sounding a bit uncomfortable himself (possibly bitter?).

Maximoff didn't meet his eyes as he left.

“I...I would like to apologize to you” Maximoff stated, moving her eyes from her hands to meet my own.

As much as I wanted to turn them away I wouldn't.

“I should not have been okay with Ultron using the Scepter on you...Using you and your technology to further what we thought were our own goals...But most of all I am sorry my brother and I left you behind when we ran away” Wanda expressed regretfully.

_The flash of pain as I was blasted by Ultron's ray._

“You used me” I blurted out, finally finding my voice and pushing back my fear.

“You used me and then threw me away like some cheap toy you had no use for anymore” I accused, turning to face her more directly.

“And then you both ran and saved yourselves. Leaving me and my staff to pay for your mistakes” I said furiously.
Maximoff averted her gaze from mine.

“You call yourself a hero but all you care about is yourself….How you can keep yourself safe” I unmercifully accused.

“I knew that Ultron would probably kill me for stopping the upload...I could have continued to do what he wanted. Kept myself and my staff safe...But I chose to try and save the world from him...Even at the cost of my own life” I told her sharply.

She just just gave me short jerky nods as she silently agreed with all my accusations.

She was no hero.

She could follow orders.

She cares.

But her self-preservation will always triumph.

“You don't want to face the public, and you're quick to turn on anyone who stands in your way, or threatens you, even if they're your allies or friends” I condemned, recalling the report on her breakout of the Compound and near fight at the Airport.

Maximoff flinched a bit, but otherwise said nothing.

“All you've done your whole life is use people in order to get what you want. And when they're no longer of use to you you toss them aside” I accused, “You used Hydra. Then Ultron...And now you're using the Avengers”

Wanda's attention snapped back to me.

“They covered for you. Made you one of them. They made you feel better about yourself like you had wanted...And now that the public is scorning you you're going to toss aside everything they did for you and run away again” I accused knowingly.

Maximoff sucked in a deep breath before looking at me with hesitant resolution.

“I...I am not going to run away this time” she declared.

I almost believed her.

But right now she was at that midway point.

She could still choose to do either.

“We'll see”

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(Jack Rollins’ POV)

The Monroe Republic wasn't Hydra, but I respected their mission.

In many ways the Republic was very similar.

They believed that humanity was blind and needed to see the truth about who they walked amongst. That humanity was unknowingly being suppressed and hunted down from the shadows,
and that they needed to fight back. And in order to do that a new world order needed to be created in order to re-establish order.

Herr Carson had assigned me to infiltrate their ranks in order to start bringing the Monroe Republic under Hydra's control.

Finding out that the supernatural wasn't a myth was admittedly more shocking than I'd like to admit.

Herr Carson however was delighted.

The supernatural opened up more doors for Hydra than ever before.

And now it was my job to learn as much about it as possible, as well as gain the trust of Monroe herself.

“Rollins” Monroe addressed as she looked upon the war strategy board, assessing the placement of her pieces.

“Yes General” I replied, letting her know she had my attention.

“An ally of ours...Ellen Nadeer. She is also a benefactor for the Watchdogs. I want you to send her a message and inquire if she can set up a meeting between us and their Alpha” Monroe ordered, sneering in distaste at the title of the Watchdogs’ Leader.

“Straight away” I replied firmly, walking out of the strategy room with a purpose.

Now to inform Herr Carson of the latest developments.

Chapter End Notes

I know the beginning was long but it brings attention to certain things like how I retconned Cora's whereabouts because it didn't make sense that Laura and Derek didn't know she was alive. It also helps get Team Cap to sympathize and trust the Guard a bit more again.

Lang's part has some foreshadowing (hint hint lol), and Vision's character arc is finally expanding!

"Cut off one head and another will take its place" - Hydra is definitely still a threat

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE Comment!
Hi all!

Sorry I didn't post last Sunday. I was swamped with thesis work.

Enjoy!

And PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Steve’s POV)

Bam. Bam. Bam-Bam. Bam.

The rhythmic echo of my punches as they pounded harshly against the punching bag were the only sound in the boxing room.

Bam. Bam-Bam-Bam.

“Need a sparring partner?” a familiar voice sounded.

Bam. Bam.

“Just-” Bam. “Letting off-” Bam. “Some steam” Bam-Bam.

“I figured...That much hasn't changed” Bucky noted.

Bam-Bam.

He wasn't wrong.

Boxing has been my outlet ever since Bucky had first taken me to the gym he trained at.

“If you're gonna keep insisting on reenacting David and Goliath I'm gonna make sure you at least know how to throw a punch” Bucky said as he tapped up my hands.

Bam. Bam. Bam-Bam.

“You're not really making a lot of personal progress with the whole compromise thing” Bucky noted.

Bam-Bam.

“I just don't understand why Tony can't-” Bam. “Just-” Bam. “Listen” BAM.

A much louder thud echoed as I used a lot more force than necessary on that last punch.

Tony has been in and out of meetings for the last three days.
And each time Tony returned he looked more and more exhausted, and the frequency of his chest pains were increasing.

“Because you're both right Steve” Bucky noted unhappily.

I knew Bucky was just as unhappy over Tony's declining health as I was, especially since he seemed to be around Tony more than I was these days.

*Flashback*

I was angrily sketching a caged blonde circus lion when Bucky plopped down of the sofa next to me.

The inside of the designated Avengers lounge had been repaired so I was taking advantage of the newly opened space.

I continued sketching even when I saw Bucky raise an eyebrow out of the corner of my eye at the exhausted looking performing monkey in a designer suit and sunglasses, dancing slumped over in front of an audience of men in business suits. The blonde lion scowling from his spot in the cage.

“Tony's back. I told Friday to tell him to come to the lounge” Bucky announced, breaking the silence.

I glanced at my watch.

9:21 PM

“He probably missed dinner....And lunch” I thought, grumbling in dissatisfaction.

Friday had informed us that Tony had left at 8 AM this morning to handle some issues with the SI board of directors, and then met up with Agent McCall to discuss their breach of parole with the UN.

He was supposed to have been back before dinner.

Clearly that didn't happen.

The only thing I could think about all day was Lydia's picture coming to fruition and me being stuck in the Compound and unable to do anything.

The sound of heavy footsteps clomped as they dragged tiredly into the room.

I shot up from my seat as I turned around to see Tony.

“Well, as you can see Cap I'm alive and well” Tony declared, holding his arms out as if to prove a point.

To bad for him the false-confidence in his voice was given away by the barely there slump in his shoulders that he was trying to hide, the rumples in his shirt, and I would bet anything that if I took Tony's sunglasses off I would see bags under his eyes.

What concerned me more was the weak flutters of Tony's heart.

“Well now that you have your proof of life I bid you both farewell. I've got work to do” Tony declared, moving to leave the room.
“Oh no you don’t” Bucky declared, smoothly hoping over the couch to grab Tony's upper arm and direct him to the center of the couch.

“Some of us here have actual jobs Snowflake. The old codgers have been getting on my case about my slacking productivity” Tony said, trying to keep his tone light but only managing to relay just how annoyed he was with the whole thing.

“Then shove one of those files you showed me on your developing work with prosthetics at them. That'll shut 'm up for a while” Bucky declared, draping his arm over the back of the couch where Tony sat, though I knew it was more to keep Tony from trying to get away again.

“Besides, right now the three of us are watching Star Trek. Steve still hasn't seen it and it's on his list” Bucky stated, as I sat down.

“Original or New?” Tony demanded seriously.

“There are two?” I asked, hoping the change in topic would keep Tony here.

“For such ignorance I demand we watch the original. I will not have you and Frosty tainted by the smokescreen of special effects” Tony declared.

As we hoped the show calmed Tony's heart and was enough of a distraction that Tony was lulled to sleep, the back of his head resting between Bucky's arm and my shoulder.

“The Accords needed to go” I thought resolutely.

Now to think of a plan.

*End Flashback*

“You're right that Tony needs a break from all the meetings, but you know Tony's right in that there isn't anyone else right now that can do it” Bucky reasoned.

Bam.

“I know” I grumbled unhappily.

Bam. Bam.

And that was the worst part.

Bam. Bam. Bam.

We were too stretched thin. We needed more people. We needed to be off house arrest.

Bam. Bam. BAM.

“None of us like it Steve. But you need to stop taking it out on Tony. He can't do anything about it either” Bucky reminded him, sounding incredibly unimpressed.

He was right.

And Rhodes, Vision, and Nat were all just as on edge as we were.

That wasn't to say everyone else wasn't concerned.
Clint and Sam definitely were, they just have a lot of their own issues going on that have commandeered their attention at the moment.

Wanda was a bit more difficult to determine due to her and Tony's….complicated history. But I know she’s not taking any particular joy in his heart condition either.

Of course I wasn't happy to learn that Tony's heart condition hadn't gone away like he had let us all believe.

Hell I had only learned that Tony even had a heart condition after Rhodes had shown up after the Battle of New York (and shawarma) and had nearly blown a gasket over learning that the arc reactor had gone out (Nat was pretty pissed to find out that had happened too).

Even then Tony had gotten surgery to supposedly correct that less than a year later so I had just chalked it up as something I no longer had to look out for.

I was wrong.

*Flashback*

“Dr. Wu will be here sometime Saturday” Nat informed him.

“Who?” I asked.

“An old friend of Tony's. He just so happens to also be his cardiologist” Rhodes explained.

*End Flashback*

Dr. Wu would be coming by later today to assess Tony's health.

Hopefully he would be able to give us some good news.

(Scott's POV)

“Anything to report so far?” I asked, glancing between both Hayden and Nolan.

Grudgingly both Stiles and I agreed that Fury was right.

After a lot of debate we decided to bring in Nolan and Hayden to guard Dr. Cho and Dr. Selvig.

Nolan didn’t have any powers, and he was currently in college studying to be a geneticist so we had felt that he was a good choice to pair with Dr. Cho.

Similarly, while Hayden wasn’t in to college to be an astrophysicist, she is working towards a degree in physics and teaching, so she could potentially be of some help to Dr. Selvig.

The two of them had started in yesterday, and I just wanted to check in with them to see if they had noticed anything out of the ordinary.

So I had the three of us meet up at the Widow's cafe inside the Compound.

Derek was guarding (read: stalking) both Rogers and Barnes. If anything were to happen I’d feel it through the Pack Bond so I wasn’t concerned.

Besides, I was more than confident that Derek could hold his own against the two of them.
“I’m pretty sure Dr. Cho is hiding something...But I’m not exactly sure about what yet” Nolan admitted.

Nolan was pretty observant. And if something didn’t seem just right to him he would keep trying to figure out what it was that was off.

“Any ideas at all?” I asked him.

“Her reaction to when I talked about the Maximoffs just seemed...off” he replied hesitantly as he tried to find the right words.

*Flashback*

“I have to say” Nolan said as he gazed wondrously at the Cradle, “You’re a lot stronger of a person than I was a few years ago. Better”

“How do you figure?” she asked curiously as she jotted down the data on nerve cell and tissue regeneration.

“Even after the Maximoffs left you to die you still tried to use the Cradle to try and save Pietro” Nolan told her slightly in awe.

Dr. Cho immediately tensed at his words, her expression quickly switching back and forth between awkward and blank.

“He’s—he was still a person” Dr. Cho stammered uncomfortably as she jerkily shifted on her feet.

Nolan’s eyebrows scrunched in confusion at her behavior.

“Come. We’re taking these results down to Tony” Dr. Cho stated, turning quickly out of the room (and away from the conversation).

*End Flashback*

“Something about her response felt off” Nolan stated after concluding his account of what happened.

I nodded thoughtfully.

It could just be that she was still (rightfully) afraid of Wanda….But it would be best to make sure all our bases we're covered.

“See if you can find out anything else without her getting defensive” I told him.

Nolan nodded as he hopped off the barstool with his hot chocolate.

“Other than the fact Dr. Selvig really doesn’t seem to want to introduce me to Dr. Foster everything seems okay” Hayden declared, taking a sip of her mocha latte.

It still amused me that she even bothered drinking coffee when the caffeine has no effect on her, but to be fair it still tasted good soooo….

“Maybe it’s a trust thing?” I suggested.

It was plausible that he just didn’t want to introduce one of his closest friends to a girl he’d never met before yesterday.
“Fair” Hayden allowed, “I’ll let you know if anything changes”

I silently watched as Hayden walked off to return to the labs.

I huffed out a long breath.

Today was the day.

Suddenly I felt my phone buzz in my back pocket.

I pulled it out to see that Stiles had sent me a text.

*Morrell’s here*

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_(Third POV)_

The Avengers (and Bucky) were all sitting in a circle of chairs in the rebuilt lounge.

The setup immediately reminded Sam of typical group therapy sessions.

And while normally that setup was comfortable and familiar to him, it also reminded him that because of his criminal record (and recent impulsivity) he was left unable to counsel others.

The thought hadn't even occurred him until Agent McCall had gave them all a huge dress down over their actions during the spar.

Sure once his sentence was completed he could refile to be a counselor, but he had international felonies amongst other crimes on his record and having to explain that to a review board was going to be tough.

Chances were he likely wasn't going to working as a counselor ever again.

And that left him a bit lost.

At the sound of heels the group looked over to see Stiles escorting a young woman into the room.

While she didn't look like much, her confident, calm demeanor left them equating her to the hidden dragon rather than the crouching tiger.

The young woman took a seat in the last open chair while Stiles slunk back to sit with the rest of the Guard on the couch.

“Ma'am” Steve addressed respectfully.

“Captain Rogers” Morrell acknowledged in kind.

“I am aware that this is an uncomfortable situation for all of you to say the least” Morrell began, “But I appreciate the initiative that you all are taking, no matter your reasons for it right now”

“Our reasons?” Steve questioned curiously, not sure quite how to interpret her words.

“Indeed. In addition to me overseeing your Team Bonding each of you on parole have agreed to see to me as your personal counselor. However, each of your reasons and motivations for doing so are likely very different” Morrell detailed calmly.
“Yet you made it sound like some of those reasons aren't good enough” Steve implicated.

“I wouldn't say that they aren't good enough” Morrell stated with a slight amused smile, making Steve slightly wary.

“But as I'm sure Mr. Wilson knows motivations and reasons are key if any of this is going to work” Morell continued, seeing Mr. Wilson nodding silently out of the corner of her eye.

“How so?” Bucky asked curiously.

Needing a shrink back in his time wasn't exactly a good thing.

It meant that you didn't have your head screwed on right, and that you needed to be treated in the nuthouse.

Admittedly he didn't have his head screwed on right, but still, this wasn't what he had expected when he was told that he needed to see a therapist.

“Simple” Morrell stated in a relaxed drall, “You can only help someone if they want to be helped” The entire room was silent as they took in Morrell's words.

“If you only agreed to partake in one-on-one sessions with me as a quick means to an end, hoping that I would give you a quick clean bill of mental health, then I kindly suggest that you withdraw your request now” Morrell advised, her calm, no-nonsense bluntness shocking all of them.

Bucky liked her already.

“I beg your pardon?” Steve asked, blinking in surprise.

“I believe I made my suggestion clear Captain Rogers. Though as I just said it was a suggestion” Morrell reiterated.

“If you don't want to take us on as clients then why bother coming?” he inquired accusingly.

“It's not that Steve” Sam cut in.

Steve immediately turned his attention to him.

“You can't help someone with a problem if they don't think that they have one. Someone who's forced to attend therapy sessions is less likely to take it seriously then someone who chose to go to get help. It's the same for those who are given therapy as an option to reduce their sentencing. They'll go through the motions, but typically they won't take it seriously because they're just doing it to cut their parole time, not because they think they need help. So when they complete their mandatory therapy sessions they leave with a paper that says they did their hours, but none of their issues were actually resolved, so they end up repeated the same mistakes and end up back in prison” Sam explained at length.

“Which is what you meant by motivations and reasons” Steve reiterated, turning back to Morrell, now understanding her position a little better.

“You can't help someone who doesn't want it” Morrell confirmed.

“Then maybe I should withdraw” both Steve and Clint thought.

“That is not to say that I could not be of assistance to you in other ways” Morrell remarked, cutting
into the heavy silence.

“What do you mean?” Clint asked.

After all, she was only supposed to be here because of their actions with the Accords right?

“I’m here to listen” Morrell corrected simply, “To anything that concerns you...That is causing you anxiety or conflicts...PTSD, nightmares, past trauma...Family issues, personal identity, stress...Or just as a friendly ear to the listen to the annoyances or joys that occurred throughout your day”

Steve blinked in surprise.

That was...different from what he had been expecting.

“I'm not here to judge you...I'm here to advise you...Give you suggestions to help you in any facet of your life” Morrell continued, seeing that Captain Rogers’ perception was starting to change.

“But you also are to assess whether we are ultimately mentally fit to return to active duty” Clint stated knowingly.

“I am” Morrell agreed, “Though I will point out that having troubles in your personal life, or conditions such as PTSD does not mean that you cannot be cleared for active duty...Everyone has troubles...It's those that say they don't that are only hurting themselves by pushing their problems away”

“But you won't force us to talk about anything we're not comfortable with?” Bucky questioned.

“My job is to guide you Sergeant Barnes, not to rush you. We will go at the pace you are comfortable with. If you do not wish to share something with me that is up to you” Morrell told him.

Bucky nodded, admittedly relieved.

“So what's on the agenda today then?” Steve asked curiously.

“Not sparring” Morrell lightly jabbed, not even turning to address the members of the Guard behind her.

Said members winced lightly, some of them looking fairly sheepish.

Clint and Tony couldn't help but be amused at the Guard's expense.

For once it wasn't them getting scolded.

“Since I am also here to assist with Team Bonding I suggest that I be here for any further group training sessions” Morrell suggested, jabbing in another arrow.

Kira rubbed at her neck and Scott scratched his face awkwardly while Stiles and Lydia obstinately held their head up, not letting themselves be guilted for their decisions.

Derek just rolled his eyes. He didn't care either way.

“So what's the plan then? Introductions?” Sam asked.

“Good guess Mr. Wilson. Yes. We will be doing introductions of a sort today...But you won't be
introducing yourselves to me...You'll be introducing yourselves to each other” she replied.

“Each other?” Tony questioned, raising an eyebrow at her.

“I won't mock any of your intelligence by thinking that you haven't already read my file forwards, backwards, and sideways” Morrell said, sounding a bit amused, “Or researched into my past history”

Natasha and Tony knew she was talking about them, but they couldn't bring themselves to truly care.

“When I was given your case a note mentioned that while you all work together under the title Avengers, you don't really seem to be as close and trusting of each other as you'd like” Morrell noted.

“So we're going to be...what? Telling stories? Braiding each other's hair?” Clint asked skeptically.

“Only if you want to” Morrell replied unphased, “I was thinking more along the lines of a game”

“Okay I'm going to have to pause you right there” Tony interrupted.

“Is there a problem?” Morrell asked curiously.

“Potentially” Rhodes answered, though his tone was more exasperated more than anything.

“Due tell” Morrell stated, gesturing him to continue.

“There is a running list of banned games we are to not play” Vision informed her.

“Seriously?” Stiles muttered loudly in disbelief.

“How come?” Morrell asked curiously, ignoring the peanut gallery.

“Because you never play Jenga with a master engineer” Clint deadpanned, giving Tony the stink eye.

Tony just leaned back with a smug grin.

He remembered full on belly laughing when Clint had first suggested the game. It wasn't until after the first round that everyone had realized why.

Some rounds it truly was a marvel how the tower was even still standing.

He got that thing to defy gravity.

Bruce had been the only one to even come close, but even still he never lost once.

Tony only preened more when Stiles full-on belly laughed his ass off at Clint's proclamation.

“What other games are banned?” Lydia asked curiously, an amused gleam in her eyes.

“Monopoly” Steve replied.

Tony was a master businessman (and so was Pepper when she was around to play).

“Scrabble” Natasha included.
Two geniuses plus the whole argument with using words in other languages.

“Any and all memory games” Sam added.

Two geniuses, plus Steve and Nat's near photographic memories (Clint and Vision were no fun either).

“Clue” Rhodes mentioned.

Natasha and Clint. Spies. Enough said.

“Pictionary” Clint added.

“Pictionary?” Stiles inquired skeptically.

Clint pointed at Steve while Rhodes just pointed at Tony.

Steve just shrugged sheepishly.

It wasn't his fault he could draw things in very good detail.

Any team he was on usually won.

Of course when they first played he was surprised to learn that Tony actually was quite artistic himself.

“Schematics don't draw themselves Steve” Tony told him with an amused smile.

At that point it had become a competition.

Tony on one team and him on the other.

They agreed after that night to add it to their growing list of games never to play again.

“Operation” Rhodes continued.

Tony nearly had a panic attack the first time they attempted to play, and Natasha was no better (though she hid it better behind a blank face).

“And card games in general” Tony concluded with a shrug of his shoulders.

“Card counting?” Lydia guessed.

Tony gave her a you-got-it wink and Natasha just shrugged.

Card counting was a valuable skill to have while on undercover missions.

“Wow” Kira muttered, “Being a hero sounds like it sucks the fun out of everything”

Clint just laughed.

“Yeah it kinda does” Sam admitted, chuckling a bit.

“Well that's definitely good for me to know when planning team activities” Morrell noted amused, “Any chance I can get that list?”

“I'll have Friday send it to you” Tony replied.
“What about tag?” Clint suggested, a mischievous grin on his face.

“No” Natasha said firmly, authoritatively.

“Oh come on” Clint whined.

“No” Natasha repeated, giving him a firm end-of-discussion glare.

“Somehow I see that turning out very badly” Rhodes pointed out.

He wasn’t sure the Compound would still be standing if they all went at it, even if they did a no powers and signature weapons handicap.

“What about paintball?” Rhodes suggested instead.

“I like the suggestion” Steve backed.

It would help with tactics, stealth, and strategy along with teamwork. It would also force others that were more reliant on their suits or powers to handle situations without them.

“I'll mark it down as a potential exercise” Morrell noted down, glad they were working together to work out some ideas.

“What about Cards Against Humanity?” Stiles casually suggested.

“YES!” Clint shouted excitedly, “I can't believe I never thought of that before!”

“I knew I liked you for a reason Legolas” Tony commented with a grin.

The two of them gave each other an enthusiastic high five.

Steve just looked dumbfounded at the two of them.

“Cards Against Humanity…?” Steve said slowly, not really sure how to process why Clint and Tony seemed so happy over a card game that didn't sound...well...like something they would be playing.

Vision looked just as confused as Steve.

“Please tell me someone's told him to put that on the list?” Sam said, looking amused as hell at Steve's expense.

“Not that I saw” Bucky replied, raising a curious eyebrow at Sam, “What kind of card game is it?”

“It is a party game in which players complete fill-in-the-blank statements using words or phrases typically deemed as offensive, risqué, or politically incorrect printed on playing cards. It is regularly compared to a similar yet PG rated game called Apple to Apples where the object of the game is for everyone minus one person who is the judge that round to select a card that best matches the card selected from the pile. The judge then selects which card they think matches best. Whomever has the most best-matches cards at the end of the game wins” Vision explained, sounding like he was reciting from Wikipedia (which he was).

“That is the most clinical, unexciting way to describe one of the best cards games of all time” Clint exclaimed, dramatically clutching his heart as if Vision's words had physically hurt him.

Vision just blinked in confusion.
“It's hard to describe something you've never played before” Wanda defended lightly.

“Oh my God. I've done you another injustice. You've never played either” Clint said, continuing his horrified dramatics.

“Brings the tally up to four. Steve, Barnes, Wanda, and Vision” Natasha pointed out.

“Friday place an order for the deluxe Cards Against Humanity set online” Tony commanded.

“Straight away Boss” Friday replied, “Would you like to purchase the expansion packs?”

“All of them baby girl. And make it express delivery. We're in crisis here” Tony replied.

“I like the brainstorming, but the game I had in mind is much simpler. Two-Truths-and-a-Lie” Morrell stated, bringing their focus back to why they were all here.

“I am afraid I am unsure of the concept of the game” Vision inquired curiously.

“Each person has a turn. When it is your turn you say three facts about yourself. Two of them are true and one of them is not. The point of the game is to see who can guess which of the facts is the lie” Morrell explained.

“And how is that going to introduce us to each other?” Wanda asked.

“Cause you're supposed to make it facts that are ridiculous or ones that make it hard to choose which is true and what isn’t” Sam explained.

“Why don't you start us off then Mr. Wilson?” Morrell suggested.

“Alright uh………Okay” Sam declared, finally thinking of a good three.

“Red Wing is named after a bird I used to take care of. I used to go by the nickname Snap. And I've been shot in the ass” Sam said smirking at the last one.

“That's already far too much information than I need to know about your ass” Bucky snarked.

"You're just jealous of all this" Sam declared smugly, waving his hand around his body with a self-confident smirk.

"Last I checked I was the one who was the peak of human perfection” Bucky snarked right back, leaning back to rest his elbows on the top of the his chair, opening up his whole body for the room to see.

"I'm starting to see how you were rumored to be such a ladies man Snowflake" Tony remarked with a smirk of his own.

"If you're only just startin then I obviously need to step up my game" Bucky countered teasingly.

"Pretty boys" Sam said, scoffing at the two of them.

"I'm flattered you think so Wilson" Tony teased, "But you only wish you could pull off Barnes' rugged bad-boy look"

"More like constipated grumpy cat" Sam countered.

"If the dick-waving contest is quite finished?” Morrell interrupted, sounding both like a quiet
scolding teacher and an amused bystander.

"Sorry yes" Sam stuttered a bit, slightly embarrassed at being chastised.

Tony and Bucky just smirked at his obvious discomfort.

Sam flipped them the bird.

“So what do you all think? All who think it's fact number one?” Morrell asked.

No one raised their hand.

“Fact number two?” Morrell inquired.

Everyone excluding Tony, Natasha, Clint, and Bucky raised their hands.

“Alright then. Mr. Wilson. If you could tell us which one was the lie?” Morrell asked.

“I hate you” Sam exclaimed non-heatedly to Bucky.

“Yes!” Clint cheered, high fiving Tony.

“How'd you all know?” Wanda asked, “I mean it would make sense that he was shot”

Steve and Rhodes had to agree with her there, and Vision had logically come to much of the same conclusions as them.

“Sentimentality” Natasha said, “It's common to name something after a person or old pet”

They nodded, already having guessed that much.

“It's a common trick, place something in that you would think had to happen” Clint commented coolly.

“Besides his expression gave it away” Bucky commented smugly.

“You definitely need to work on your poker face” Tony piggybacked teasingly.

Sam just rolled his eyes.

Stark and Barnes. The two of them were going to be his worst nightmare.

“Snap?” Rhodes inquired teasingly.

“It was a nickname my old high School football team gave me for how I used to make improvised snap decisions on the field” Sam defended.

“Snaps to you” Clint teased.

“Fine then Katniss you're up” Sam declared.

“Oh I'm ready” Clint declared with a grin.

He was a bit wary about what he had ultimately decided to share, but he supposed it was time to open up a bit more to the Team. They knew about his family after all.

Besides, he needed to start setting a better example for Wanda.
“I’m mostly deaf. I used to go by the stage name Trickshot. And I’m from a family of hunters” Clint declared.

“What?!”

The heroes turned to look at the members of the Shadow Guard who, up till now, have been completely silent.

All of them looked horrified and on edge, as if they were preparing themselves to either run out of the room or brace themselves to attack.

“What?” Clint asked, concerned about the reaction he had gotten.

“Hunters?” Scott questioned in disbelief, though from his tone it was clear they were all missing an important connotation.

“Yeah. You know, bears, ducks, bambi” Clint replied, throwing in a mild joke despite the sudden uneasy atmosphere.

The Shadow Guard immediately relaxed, some of them even breathing out a sigh of relief.

“What the hell did you think I meant?” Clint demanded, not liking that they were missing something big.

He didn't have to lock eyes with Nat to know that she was just as suspicious.

“The term Hunter has a different meaning for us” Derek explained tightly, “We're not used to hearing it used the typical way”

Eyebrows hit the ceiling.


“They call themselves Hunters” Scott confirmed, letting Romanoff believe her conclusions in order to cover their little slip up.

“And you're the animals” Steve inferred unhappily, fury raging behind his calm exterior.

The Guard said nothing.

But they didn't have too.

Their expressions said it all.

At that moment each of the heroes decided that they were going to help the Shadow Guard in any way they could.

“As insightful as this all was, let's try to keep on topic?” Morrell said, bringing them all back, “Maybe for now it would be best for the five of you to wait outside the room?”

The Guard glanced at each other, their wide range of expressions relaying their stances in their silent conversation.

Scott won.

“We'll go” Scott declared evenly, sounding unconcerned.
“So not okay with this” Stiles declared blandly.

Scott just rolled his eyes, grabbing onto Stiles’ arm and 'leading’ him (and the rest of the group) out of the room.

Stiles may be officially listed as the leader, but it was clear to all of them that Scott was really the one in charge.

“Show of hands for one?” Morrell continued, ignoring their analytical stares toward the Pack.

Everyone but Tony and Natasha raised their hands.

“And which do the two of you think it is?” Morrell inquired.

“Three” they said simultaneously.

“Ding ding” Clint said smiling.

“You're deaf?” Steve questioned, echoing most of their disbelief.

That wasn't a small fact to omit from your team.

“Was injured in my twenties by a mercenary going by the name of Crossfire. Former CIA. He got on SHIELD's radar and I was ordered to take him out. Lost a lot of my hearing in the process” Clint admitted, trying to sound casual about it.

“Then how-” Wanda started questioned.

“Can I hear?” Clint finished, cutting her off, “SHIELD had implants put in both my ears. Unless I say so no-one-is-the-wiser”

“I get Nat knowing, but how'd you know?” Sam asked, giving Stark a curious eyebrow.

“JARVIS and I were the ones to re-encrypt all the SHIELD intel” Tony reminded matter-of-factly.

He had made sure to place Natasha and Clint's files in the immediate priority pile when everything had first gone down.

Was he surprised to learn that Clint had lost a majority of his hearing? Yes.

But it wasn't his business to say anything.

He had hidden the arc reactor behind shirts in the beginning for a reason after all.

If Clint didn't want anyone to know than that was his prerogative.

“And Trickshot?” Sam asked curiously.

“ Took the title from the original Trickshot when he retired from the circus” Clint revealed.

“The circus?” Steve questioned.

“Yup. The whole cliche” Clint replied with a smirk, he wasn't ashamed of it.

“Never would have pegged you for that” Rhodes admitted.

Clint shrugged.
He changed after he joined SHIELD.

More serious, and less showman.

“Your turn” he said, nodding at Rhodes.

“I’m gonna sit this one out. No fun in cheaters after all” Tony commented coolly.

“Alright then…I have a niece. I’ve used the alias Whiskey Mike. And I’ve got a protege” Rhodes detailed, keeping his voice level as to not give anything away.

“All for one?” Morrell asked.

No one raised their hand (Rhodes didn’t expect them too).

“Two?”

Only Vision and Sam raised their hands, leaving the rest for three.

“The correct answer if you will?” Morrell asked.

“Two” Rhodes confirmed with a smirk.

Sam did a small victory fist-pump.

“You have a protege?” Natasha questioned curiously.

“My niece has been begging me and her Uncle Tony to work on her own suit. She has her heart set on continuing the family legacy as the next War Machine” Rhodes revealed, chuckling a bit.

“Now that I think of it, maybe I should bring her in with Peter and Harley” Tony thought, “Though I’m gonna have to ask Rhodey first lest he skin me alive”

“I’ll go” Steve announced, leaning forward a bit.

He was starting to have a bit of fun with all this now.

“I’ve jumped on a grenade. My middle name is the same as my father’s. And I’ve rode home on the back of a freezer truck” Steve declared, going for more unusual facts.

A memory of red hair and stuffed bears flickered by Bucky’s eyes.

“Those of you who think it’s number one?” Morrell inquired.

Sam, Clint, and Rhodes raised their hands.

“Two?”

Tony, Vision, Natasha, and Bucky raised their hands.

“Alright Captain-”

“Was that the time we used up all our money at Rockaway Beach to buy hot dogs?” Bucky asked, looking at Steve as the memory started coming forward a little clearer.

Steve smiled, happy, yet amused.
“You blew three dollars trying to win a stuffed bear for a red-head” Steve lightly teased.

“Dot” Bucky remembered, smiling faintly, “She must be a hundred years old by now”

“So are we pal” Steve cracked, patting Bucky’s shoulder good naturedly.

“Hate to interrupt the little bromance, but some of us would like to know if we’re right” Sam cut in.

“Two” Steve revealed.

Sam, Clint, and Rhodes groaned.

“I guess I’ll-” Wanda began, but was almost immediately cut off.

“When did you jump on a grenade?” Bucky demanded, the connotations of the first fact finally smacking him in the face.

Steve just made an oh-shit expression as he tried to find a way to explain his death-wish back at the start of Basic.

“He never told you about how Colonel Philips threw a dummy grenade at the privates during basic training? It was a test of bravery and of course our dear Captain passed with flying colors” Tony regaled with a smirk, knowing that Steve was about to get chewed out by Barnes.

Silence.

“You jumped on a grenade you thought was real?” Bucky demanded with such dangerous quiet anger Steve could only sheepishly face the other direction.

“I’m sensing that another ‘sparring’ session is in your future” Sam noted, semi-amused and semi-worried (for Steve).

“Ms. Maximoff if you would continue?” Morrell requested, hoping to divert the conversation.

“...Sure” she replied.

Bucky just continued to glare at Steve.

“I am the older twin. I am learning to play the guitar. I am adopted” Wanda stated, hoping she chose good enough facts. It had taken her a while to think of some good ones.

“I do believe it would not be fair for me to participate in this round” Vision stated, knowing the correct answer already.

“Same” Clint said, relaxing back in his chair.

Morrell nodded.

“All for one?” she asked.

Tony and Natasha were the only ones to raise their hand, which raised more than a few eyebrows.

“Two?”

No one raised their hands.

“It would seem a majority chose three. Ms. Maximoff. If you could tell us the correct answer?”
Morrell requested.

“...One” Wanda replied, not sure how she felt about Stark being one of the only two to guess correctly.

“You’re adopted?” Sam questioned surprised.

“Both my brother and I were adopted from birth by the Maximoffs, but they were the only parents we ever knew” Wanda explained softly, slightly self-conscious.

Maybe following Clint’s example hadn’t been a good idea after all.

“You don’t know who your birth parents are?” Natasha inquired.

She had looked into Wanda's background, so finding the adoption papers hadn't been an issue, but no biological father had been listed.

"Our father, adoptive father, told us that our mother was his sister...But as for our father I don't know” Wanda answered.

“We could look into it if you’d like?” Steve inquired gently.

“...I’ll think about it” Wanda replied gratefully.

Truthfully she wasn’t sure whether or not it was worth it or not to even bother.

Her brother was dead.

The only parents she ever knew were dead.

Did she really want to open herself up to that kind of heartbreak again?

Especially when she’s only just starting to reinvent herself properly.

Shaking herself out of her stupor she turned to Stark.

“Your turn” she told him, addressing directly him for the first time in a long time.

The two of them usually avoided any direct conversation or interaction.

Tony blinked in surprise before nodding slowly.

“I’ve raced in the Monaco Grand Prix. I have a potential future heir to the mantle of Iron Man. And I bought the Shawarma joint” Tony declared grinning like the Grinch.

Everyone blinked in surprise.

“I'm out” Rhodes said, leaning back.

“Figures you'd be that asshole” Clint grumbled.

This was going to be a tough one.

Tony just smirked and flipped him the bird.

Rhodes just huffed out a laugh at Tony's antics.
He knew the potential heir Tony was talking about wasn’t Peter, but the other Avengers didn't know that...And other than him only Natasha knew about the whole Grand Prix incident.

“All in favor of one?” Morrell asked.

Everyone but Natasha raised their hand.

Tony smirked.

“And which one do you think it is Ms. Romanoff?” Morrell inquired.

“Three” she replied evenly.

“And the prize goes to Ms. Rushman” Tony declared, giving her a small theatrical bow as he sat in his chair.

“Rushman?” Steve inquired, echoing Sam and Wanda's confused thoughts.

“I forgot Stark was one of your marks” Clint muttered casually, figuratively smacking himself for forgetting.

“Mark?” Steve reiterated in concern.

A ‘mark’ for Natasha usually meant someone she was supposed to kill.

“Fury wanted me to keep an eye on him. Even more so when I found out he was dying. I was there when he hijacked his Company's race car….He wasn't bad all things considered” Natasha noted casually.

Silence.

Steve turned to Tony and gave him his patented Captain-America-is-disappointed-in-you glare.

“When were you dying?” Steve demanded.

Apparently he was the only one that believed that health concerns were not something to omit from teammates.

“When you were still doing time as a Capsicle...Nothing major just the original element in the arc reactor slowly poisoning me to death” Tony replied sardonically.

“Tony-” Steve started to reprimand.

“Viz. How bout you take a shot?” Tony said, cutting Steve off.

As Steve opened his mouth to continue he felt Bucky kick him hard in the back of his calf.

Biting his cheek Steve grudgingly let it go...But the discussion sure as hell wasn’t over.

And if Tony wasn’t going to talk then he’d go to Natasha.

“I do not believe I have good enough facts to use” Vision remarked sadly.

The only things he could say about himself everyone for the most part already knew.

“Then maybe that is something you can work on as a personal goal for yourself” Morrell suggested, “Finding some more hobbies and interests?”
“Indeed Mr. Stark has requested that I do much of the same. I have already begun reaching into some cooking classes in the nearby area” Vision informed her, sounding a bit happier.

“And that is a good place to start” Morrell complimented.

Vision nodded gratefully.

“I'll go then” Natasha stated.

Clint held his hands up, silently indicating his lack of participation in the round.

“I modelled in Tokyo. My birth name is Natalie. And I'm a talent ballet dancer” Natasha declared simply.

She wasn't comfortable giving away anything too personal just yet.

“Again” Madame B demanded as she latched her pointed gaze upon myself and the red-headed assassin-in-training next to me.

“Yasha” the red-head addressed as we went through the routine together once more. Ignoring the pain in our ankles and the increasing weakness in our arms.

*Weakness was not allowed.*

Bucky blinked at the suddenness of the memory.

Though it was as if he hadn't come back to reality.

The red-headed woman was still in front of him.

“All those who think it is number two” Morrell continued after nobody had raised their hand for the first one.

Bucky shook himself out of his daze and raised his hand along with everyone else.

“The first time everyone has voted unanimously” Morrell observed, “And are they correct Ms. Romanoff?”

“They are” Natasha confirmed.

“Phew” Sam mimed jokingly.

“My turn” Bucky declared resolutely, his hard tone grabbing everyone's attention.

He wanted answers.

“I’m not a former prisoner of war. I know ballet. And I met you in the Red Room” Bucky declared, looking directly at Romanoff, his *gaze demanding* confirmation whether or not the memory was real.

Nobody said a word as the two gave each other a critical stare down.

“You remember” Natasha said simply, not sure how she felt finally seeing the faint recognition in his eyes.

“A flash. Nothing more when you mentioned ballet” Bucky corrected, getting the confirmation he
wanted.

Looks like there was more to his time in Hydra then just as their dog.

He wasn't sure he was looking forward to those memories returning, though it was interesting how his first instincts were right in that Romanoff tugged at some of his memory bells.

Now he just needed to figure out why the Witch did too.

And for her sake she better not have ever messed with his head.

“You've met in the Red Room?” Clint questioned, narrowing his eyes slightly.

Natasha never mentioned anything of the sort to him before.

Not even after the Winter Soldier had killed her mark by shooting straight through her.

“I thought you said he was just a Ghost Story?” Steve demanded icily.

“The Red Room requested him as a trainer. I didn't know he was the supposedly deceased James Barnes” Natasha corrected, ignoring the vitrole and only looking at Barnes.

“Yasha”

“I...trained you” Bucky said hesitantly, trying to grab onto a memory that just kept slipping away.

“You did for a short time...That was the last time I saw you until you shot through me to get your mark in 2009” Natasha informed him.

She had tried to find him.

To help him.

To free him.

She failed.

“Yasha”

Bucky scowled in frustration.

He couldn't remember.

He remembered the mark...Shooting her...But nothing else of the Red Room beside that brief flash.

“You cannot force yourself to remember Sergeant Barnes” Morrell stated, breaking him out of his frustration, “The memories will return when they do. No earlier. No later...There's no point in hurting yourself over something you cannot control”

Bucky nodded reluctantly.

Control over his own mind wasn't something he's had in a long time.

(Steve’s POV)

“So what’s all this about?” I asked, crossing my arms across my chest.
After the Team Bonding session Bucky, Tony, and I had been pulled aside only to be placed in separate rooms.

Scott and Derek with me and Bucky, and Stiles and Morrell with Tony.

“We need to speak with the three of you about Zemo’s endgame. What he was planning for the three of you in Siberia” Scott explained.

That caught my attention.

The report Stilinski had given us didn’t go into detail about why Zemo had been in Siberia, only that he had killed the five other Winter Soldiers and had wanted to lure the three of us there for some reason.

“Then why is Tony in another room?” Bucky asked warily.

Scott hesitated in his answer for a moment, looking both a bit awkward and resigned with a hint of disappointment that seemed to be directed at me.

“You already know that Zemo wanted to tear the Avengers apart from within...That he had created psychological and personality profiles of all of you...That he spent months studying you, plotting” Scott recapped.

“An empire toppled by its enemies can rise again. But one which crumbles from within? That's dead. Forever” Bucky replied, quoting Zemo's words from the report.

Scott nodded solemnly.

“He used the Accords to his benefit knowing it would divide everyone...And he had something he was going to use to cause an even larger rift” Bucky speculated.

Scott nodded again.

I didn't like his silence.

“And what he needed was at Siberia...That's why he needed the mission report” I concluded.

“Bingo” Derek confirmed, his face containing a harder edge then normal for him.

“What was it?” I asked (demanded), though I wasn't sure I really wanted to know.

From their expressions it was obvious that it wasn't anything good.

“I already told you Captain...Secrets always have a way of coming out on their own...Rarely the way you want them to” Scott declared firmly, pityingly.

I froze.

My eyes widening in horror as I registered the potential (and likely) meaning of his words.

My anxiety threatening to suffocate me as it began bubbling to the surface.

“No”

“You had your chance to tell him...And I'm not just talking about these last six days” Scott stated calmly, harshly, “You had two years to tell him”
“You can't do this” I said indignantly.

“It's out of my hands” Scott brushed off.

“It will tear everything apart” I emphasized infuriated.

“And that's on you” Scott retorted firmly.

“No you had a choice. You could have chose differently” I told him furiously.

“To lie like you?” Derek countered accusingly.

“It was better for everything to be left alone” I declared desperately.

“Better for who?” Derek demanded, narrowing his eyes at me, “You?”

“Both of them. Everyone...Sometimes it's better to let sleeping bears lie” I declared in retaliation.

“That wouldn't be a concern if you had just told him the truth two years ago...Now because of you the relationship they built is going to be destroyed” Scott accused harshly, glancing back at Bucky.

“What the hell is going on on?” Bucky demanded angrily, sounding fed up with being out of the loop.

“Zemo had a tape of the Winter Soldier killing Howard and Maria Stark” Scott unhesitantly declared before I could even try to stop him.

Silence.

And there it was.

The secret I kept buried for over two years spoken aloud.

“Tell me he's lying” Bucky demanded, his voice dangerously emotionless.

I said nothing.

“Tell me Tony knows that I killed his parents” Bucky demanded, heat glaring in his eyes as his gaze bore down on me.

“It wasn't you Buck...What Hydra did wasn't you” I pleaded to him, willing him to understand so much in such a short few sentences.

My heart broke as Bucky's expression blanked out.

The only noticeable expression in his body language was his tightly clenched jaw.

As Bucky began to turn away I desperately tried to grab onto his arm.

Before I could even touch him he had quickly pulled his arm away.

Without turning to look back at me he spoke.

“Don't touch me” he said warningly, “Or I might actually kill you right now”

There was nothing I could do but watch as Bucky sped through the door, my heart cracking as he slammed it shut as he went.
Bucky

Tony

Tony

I needed to talk to Tony now.

“Captain Rogers where are going?” Scott demanded as I hurried to the door.

“To Tony”

(Tony’s POV)

I couldn't breathe.

“He killed them.

“Howard”

He killed them.

I faintly heard the sound of a door as it was yanked open.

“Tony!” a familiar voice echoed.

A familiar voice I had trusted.

Respected.

Admired.

“Did you know?” I demanded softly, my own voice sounding foreign to my own ears.

As if I was listening to someone using my own voice to speak.

“I didn’t know it was him” Steve pleaded.

“Don't bullshit me Rogers” I demanded in quiet fury.

“Did you know?” I demanded again, searching his eyes, begging for him to say no.

“...........Yes” he said finally, knocking what was left of my breath out of my chest.

Photographs of the old SSR flashed by my eyes.

“My father was your friend” I said with a hard edge, trying to reason this entire situation out loud for myself more than speaking to him directly.

“Mom. Where's dad?”

“He spent his entire life looking for you!” I near shouted, turning on him in fury.

“Why can't you be more like him?” Howard drunkenly sighed.
“He treated me like I was never good enough because I wasn’t you!” I yelled, not even caring that I had just revealed one of my greatest insecurities.

“Sergeant Barnes?”

“Do you even care?!” I demanded, searching his blank expression for something. Anything.

“Did his death mean anything to you?” I continued furiously, flailing my hands around, only getting madder and madder at his silence.

“Or is the only person you really care about Barnes?” I accused viciously.

The second I had said it out loud it finally hit me like a freight train.

“I can't believe I didn't see it earlier” I realized, starting to chuckle hysterically, ignoring Steve's increasingly concerned looks.

As if I was the one who had completely lost their marbles.

“Nothing...no one else matters to you” I realized, everything finally making more and more sense as I reasoned them out aloud.

The helicarriers.

The Accords.

Bucharest.

Leipzig.

It was all about Barnes.

“That's not true” Steve declared, apparently finding his voice again.

“Sometimes my teammates don’t tell me things”

“You’re a fucking hypocrite Rogers” I spat at him, making him flinch a bit at the vitrole.

“Hey Dad what's this?” I asked, showing him the circular shield with half a star on it.

Dad actually paused in his work for once and gazed fondly at the shield, taking it from my hands.

“This, Tony, was a prototype for a shield I had made that was later used by Captain America” he explained, his usual dismissal of me non-existent.

“Can you tell me about him?” I asked him, hopefilled wonder in my expression.

“You don't deserve your shield...My father made you that shield...You don't deserve it” I declared softly, not able to look at his eyes anymore.

Fed up. Sickened.

I couldn’t stand to be here anymore.

I couldn’t be around him anymore.

But as I turned to get the hell out of this nightmare I felt a desperate vice-like grip grab onto my
I whipped my head around, clenching my teeth, to glare at whoever had dared touch me right now.

Of course it was Rogers.

“Tony you have every right to be angry...But you can’t blame Bucky for what Hydra made him do” Steve pleaded, as if that was what I was pissed about.

“You're willing to let innocent people die...Let the world to burn for him” I accused knowingly, boring my gaze right into his as I said it.

“He’s my friend” Steve pleaded again, as if that explained away everything, made everything better.

“So was I” I told him, yanking my arm out of his grip and walking away.

“So was I”

My own words echoed in my head as I shoved my way out the doors.

Then again...maybe I never really was.

Chapter End Notes

We finally got to the chapter I've been itching to write for a long time!!!

Whoop!

Just FYI all the facts I used for the Two-Truths-and-a-Lie game came from the comics or MCU.

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!
Hi all!

I felt hella motivated to write another chapter this week!

Enjoy ;)

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Steve’s POV)

“He’s my friend” I pleaded.

“Don’t touch me” Bucky said waringly, “Or I might actually kill you right now”

“So was I” Tony declared in a dead unfeeling tone.

There was nothing I could do but watch as Bucky sped through the door, my heart cracking as he slammed it shut as he went.

So was I.

My heart splintering as Tony shoved his way out the doors and away from me.

So was I

Bucky.

Was.

Tony.

Was.

I couldn't breathe.

Why couldn't I breathe?

My lungs felt as if they were constricting in on themselves.

It felt as if I was having an asthma attack again.

But that was impossible.

“Captain Rogers” a voice called out to me.
It sounded feminine, but everything felt as though it were underwater so I couldn't really say for sure.

Why was I shaking?

Was it getting colder in here?

“Dude are you having a panic attack?” another voice asked (At least I thought it was another voice. It sounded deeper. More masculine).

Panic attack?

“You have to hold your breath” Stiles declared, trying to get my attention as he jolted in front of my face.

Hold my breath?

I stopped trying to force air into my lungs...But I couldn't hold it...It felt like I was drowning again.

The feeling of terror as the icy water surrounded me. Filling every crevice of the internal workings of the plane.

The feeling of terror as the ice quickly numbed my body, freezing my muscles and joints...and the despondent resignation when I realized I could no longer stubbornly hold onto my last breath.

The icy water suffocating me.

Freezing me solid from the inside as I slowly died alone.

I was alone.

They were gone.

Everyone I knew was gone.

“Dude you better hold your breath because I am not kissing you” Stiles said, sounding slightly panicked himself.

What?

“Captain Rogers you need to regulate your breathing” Morrell stated calmly, coming into my line of vision, Stiles suddenly gone (She pushed him?).

“Breath in for five seconds and then out for two” she ordered, reminding me faintly of a military officer.

I instinctively complied.

Shakily I tried breathing in, still gasping a bit as I did.

“Now out for two seconds” she commanded.

One. Two.

“Again” she declared.

“Again” she said firmly, taking my hands.

I used her touch to ground me.


Out. One. Two.

I could breathe again.

I wasn't drowning?

“You are not alone Steve” Morrell declared firmly.

Wasn't I?

(Natasha’s POV)

Whatever the Guard wanted to speak to Steve, Tony, and Barnes about couldn't be anything good.

Especially if they thought it'd be a necessary precaution to separate them.

It's only been a few minutes, but the feeling of uneasy dread was growing stronger by the second.

Suddenly a pair of doors were roughly shoved open, only to be violently shut again by Barn-

no...By the Winter Soldier.

Ice chilled up my spine as I saw the raw hurt and cold fury in his eyes.

He strut past me without so much as a glance of acknowledgement.

The promise of murder and pain in each step he took.

Seconds later Steve burst out of the room as well, looking half panicked and half determined, not even seeing me as he immediately veered towards the room Tony was in, pushing through the doors as if they were some offending wall.

Whatever had happened in that room was worse than I could have thought if it set off Barnes' like this.

Doubly so if Steve wasn't evening going after him to try and calm him down.

Steve's panicked call of Tony's name only furthered my concerns.

I wanted to go in there myself and see just what the hell was going on.

…….But I couldn't.

Not knowing that somewhere in the Compound we had a potential time bomb ready to go off.

“Friday. Give me Barnes’ route” I commanded, sprinting off in the direction the Soldier had taken.

“Straight ahead of you. Though he is moving at a rather fast walking pace” Friday relayed, sounding concerned.
I sprinted through the glass hallway, keeping my steps light in order to keep the sound to a minimum of none.

The last thing I needed was to trigger his fight response while he was so...touchy right now.

The second I caught him in my line of vision I slowed my sprint to a light walk.

Keeping a good distance between us in case he turned his anger on me.

“Barnes”

Nothing.

“Soldat”

Not even a twitch of acknowledgement.

It was worse than I had thought.

I needed to get his attention somehow without setting him off.

I sucked in a breath.

It was worth a try.

“Yasha” I called out, hoping to play on his curiosity.

Barnes slowly halted to a stop, though he didn’t turn around.

Getting him to stop and hear me out was more than I could have hoped for.

I steadily moved a few feet closer.

Far enough that I wasn’t at immediate risk if he suddenly lunged at me, but close enough that the two of us were now at the edges of our large personal bubbles.

He needed an outlet or someone was going to get hurt.

“Let’s see if you remember La Bayadère”

(Steve’s POV)

“Stiles go elsewhere” Morrell ordered, not even bothering to mince words with the young man.

After a moment's hesitation he nodded and exited the room, though he looked very reluctant to do so.

“I lost them didn’t I?” I said aloud to no one in particular.

It wasn’t really a question.

I knew I did.

“You’re decision caused a large rift yes” Morrell agreed.

“Rift” I thought with a slightly hysterically scoff, “The Grand Canyon is smaller”
“But they’re only lost to you if you choose not to make amends” Morrell pointed out.

“How do you amend from this?” I asked hollowly.

“One step at a time...Forgiveness is easy to ask for, but much harder to get” Morrell replied sagely.

“Neither of them will forgive me” I retorted.

Scott was right.

I was only being selfish.

I felt like I had to choose between them.

So I made another choice.

I had cut the wire.

And I cut the wrong one.

“How do you really feel right now?” Morrell asked, diverting attention to a larger topic.

I guess this is good a time as any to have our first therapy session.

“Like I had just come out of the ice” I admitted hollowly.

“You feel that you’ve lost everything again...That you’re starting again at zero” Morrell prompted knowingly.

“You've been asleep Cap. For almost seventy years”

“And why does losing both their trust and friendships make it feel like you’ve lost everything?” Morrell questioned.

“Even when I had nothing, I had Bucky”

“Bucky!” I screamed, watching helplessly as my brother-in-all-but-blood plummeted to his death. Screaming the entire way down.

“I already lost Bucky once” I noted grimly.

“Sergeant Barnes represents a piece of your past life that you lost...Having him back in any fashion...Keeping that last tie to your past, especially someone so significant to you, made you desperate to protect him” Morrell stated, though she made it sound almost like a question.

A question I already knew the answer to myself.

“And all I’ve done is continuously drive him away” I pointed out.

“What the hell Steve. I spent the last seventy plus years having my choices taken away from me. You don’t get to decide things like that on my behalf”

“I'm pissed that you treat little miss ex-mind raping Hydra bitch like an innocent little victim!”

“I know they say that after a person dies you start seeing them behind rose-tinted glasses, but you need to stop being such an ass!”
“After I die and come back I’m suddenly inept? No...No this is your goddamn guilt blinding you to everything!”

“Tell me Tony knows that I killed his parents”

“And Tony? He’s not the only friend you’ve made since you woke up” Morrell pointed out, “How is losing him like losing everything as well?”

“Tony and I are…..complicated” I said, trying to come up with the right words to describe us.

“Complicated how?” Morrell pressed on.

“Up until we...started interacting more on the hellicarrier all I had felt since coming out of the ice was anger...despair...emptiness” I admitted.

I had felt unnecessary.

The world had moved on without me.

Including all my friends.

There was no place for me any more.

Loki was right.

I was just the Man-Out-of-Time.

“And meeting Tony changed that?” Morrell inquired.

“In a way...He also made everything more intense” I revealed, being openly honest about everything for once (a little late now).

Tony had been the spark that ignited a flood of emotions, emotions I hadn't felt in a long time...but he also amplified my grief and anger too.

“So Tony was a connection to your past...But he also represented the future...Neither of which you had wanted to confront” Morrell concluded.

She wasn’t wrong.

Tony had reminded me of everything I used to have with Bucky, Peggy, and Howard.

Peggy’s fire.

Howard's looks, charm, and genius.

Bucky's dry wit and sarcasm...stubbornness too.

I was constantly harder on Tony than everyone else because I knew that he would end up dying much in the same way I thought Bucky had (he already almost did during the Battle of New York).

And I couldn't let that happen (again).

Of course Tony was as stubborn as Bucky...Which meant that he was as stubborn as me, leading to more than enough arguments between the two of us.

People who didn't really know us...Those that never really looked beyond the surface of things, just
figured that Tony and I didn't get along.

That we weren't really friends.

That we hated each other.

But they were wrong.

The thing was, my friendship was Tony was different from my friendship with the others.

“Our friendship is...different” I said, poorly explaining my own thought processes.

“Because he’s your equal” Morrell inquired confidently.

Equal.

.....Yeah.

That sounded about right.

Tony was my equal in a way the others just weren't.

We challenged each other on every level.

Neither of us were intimidated by the other.

We respected each other, but we constantly pushed at each other, testing each other’s resolve like two competing Alpha males (as Natasha had so eloquently called us once).

We called each other out on our crap.

Kept each other in check.

Yeah it means the two of us are constantly locking horns, but we’re better as a team for it (usually).

The two of us were always better together.

“You’re each other's equilibrium...Your different beliefs balancing each other out” Morrell continued knowingly, echoing my own thoughts.

I called Tony out when he started thinking too pragmatically, when he started equating things in terms of numbers and machines.

And Tony called me out when my cynical black-and-white view made my stances unrealistic in modern society.

With the two of us typically on opposing sides of an argument it usually forced us to end up somewhere in the middle.

Balance.

That's what we are to each other.

And now….Now I think I broke that forever.

(Third POV)
“And that’s another ten-for-ten” Rhodes exclaimed proudly as his target was wheeled toward him.

“You know I’m thinkin we should have Friday video this and post it on Youtube with the caption: This is why you should respect your elders” Sam teased as his own target come forward.

Only six of his shots had hit the center. Two were close to the center, while another two were a bit further out.

“Considering everyone on the Team besides Wanda and Vision is older than you, that’s something you should already know pretty damn well by now” Rhodes countered back.

“Touché” Sam grinned.

“Well I’m not joining any competitions any time soon” Kira stated, slightly disappointed.

Only five of her shots had hit the center. The rest were scattered around the target, though all of them still hitting within the outline of the person.

“Kid I wish I was that good the first time I ever tried using a gun” Sam exclaimed.

Looks like Clint hadn’t been kidding when he said that Kira had an intuitive aptitude when it came to weapons.

“Fair” she agreed, “Guns aren’t really my thing though”

“But it’s a good skill to have in a pinch” Rhodes advised.

It wasn’t good to focus on just one skill set.

“You never know when having a variety of skills and a larger knowledge base will come in handy” Rhodes continued wisely.

Like if you’re stranded hiking or kidnapped.

Even though he was only in the Air Force he had made sure to arm himself with all kinds of survival know-how for different types of terrains in case his plane ever went down.

He learned Pashto and Mandarin for the very same reasons (Italian he had already learned from Tony back in their college days).

“I can’t really disagree with you there” Kira agreed.

Argent always told them much of the same.

“If you don’t mind me asking, just how many weapons do you know h-” Sam stopped abruptly as he saw Stark heading towards them.

But his arrival wasn’t what made him pause.

It was the wild fury in his body language.

It was the fact that he could see that Stark’s chest was noticeably rising and falling quickly. As if his anger couldn’t allow him to take in a full breath.

Rhodes and Kira turned to see what had captured Sam’s attention so strongly.
“Crap” Kira muttered.

Looks like things went about as well as they thought it would.

Though maybe a little better considering it didn’t look like Mr. Stark had been in a fight.

“Tones you alright?” Rhodes began carefully, turning his safety on and placing the gun down, “What the hell happened?”

As Rhodes walked closer to him he saw the deadened look in Tony’s eyes that reminded him of the state Tony had been in after Obadiah was revealed to have been a backstabbing traitor.

“Can you give us a bit?” Rhodes asked, turning slightly back to address Sam and Kira.

“Sure thing” Sam muttered, removing his bullets.

Kira did the same.

Rhodes gave a sharp glare to Stilinski who had been hanging back a bit at the edge of the range, hoping he made his point for him to leave too clear.

As soon as everyone was out of earshot Rhodes turned back to Tony.

“What the hell happened in the meeting?” he demanded gently.

Tony looked bad.

Really bad.

His breathing was already severely labored which meant that whatever was going on was causing him severe stress and throwing his heart off.

“I want to hurt him” Tony declared, a dangerous quiet promise in his voice.

He wanted Steve to hurt like he was hurting.

He wanted to hurt him for using him.

For playing him like a fool.

For pretending to be his friend.

For treating him like a villain for his mistakes while letting everyone else get a free pass.

For lying to his face for years while still having the gall to judge him for keeping secrets of his own.

Something this entire fucking Team did.

“Team” Tony thought with a scoff.

They weren’t a Team.

They were a bomb ready to go off (just as Bruce had said).

“Okay” Rhodes said, extremely concerned.
“How about you take a few shots first and then tell me whose ass we need to kick?” he suggested. Because if someone had hurt Tony then he sure as hell would be by his side strategizing a way to get back at the bastards, no matter who they were.

Tony reluctantly nodded, following Rhodey back to his lane.

Rhodes reloaded a fresh clip into his gun, flicked off the safety and held it out to Tony.

Before they went and did anything Tony needed to blow off some steam and calm down first. Telling him what the hell happened would be nice too.

Tony immediately took the gun out of Rhodey’s hand and lined up the barrel with the target.


“*Did you know?*”

“............Yes”


“He’s my friend”

“So was I”

Tony viciously switched out the clips. And took aim once more.

“Sometimes my teammates don’t tell me things”

“You’re a fucking hypocrite Rogers”


"I don’t trust a guy without a dark side. Call me old-fashioned."

“Well, let's just say you haven't seen it yet."

“Nothing...no one else matters to you”


*Explosions. Bullets whistling past. A hand delivered missile with my name on it. Blinding agony as my chest was carved like a thanksgiving turkey.*

“How do they have my weapons?”

“I refuse”

*Suffocation from lack of air. The burn of the infested water as it clogged my lungs. The shocks spasming my body as the battery got wet.*

Another clip.

"When I ordered the hit on you, I was worried that I was killing the golden goose. But, you see, it was just fate that you survived it, leaving one last golden egg to give. You really think that just because you have an idea, it belongs to you? Your father, he helped give us the Atomic Bomb. Now what kind of world would it be today if he was as selfish as you?"

"For thirty years, I've been holding you up! I built this company up from nothing! Nothing's gonna stand in my way! Least of all, you!"

“Tony?”

Another clip.

“Oh Tony. So naive to think that it was you that I wanted” Sunset mocked.

“You and I competed over everything Tony. Girls. Sports. Grades...And then I realized the one thing I could win that I could use to finally crush you...Your heart” Tiberius grinned sadistically.

“Tony!”


“I'd like you to meet Agent Romanoff”

A sharp pain in the back of the neck as the plunger pushed the liquid into his veins.

His airway cutting off as Thor lifted him up far off the ground.

“Ultron was created by the Scarlet Bitch sitting over there”

Banner leaving him alone to take the full brunt of the world’s anger over Ultron.

“The fact you're telling me that Rogers distrusts you for something that you proved hadn't even been your fault, and yet he has the gall to trust a Hydra agent to watch his back only proves to me that there's something wrong in that punk's head”

“Howard”

“Did you know?”

“........Yes”

“Tony stop! I think you’re having a panic attack and you were already not breathing right before!” Rhodes pleaded, disarming Tony. Only pausing to flick the safety on before tossing the gun aside.

Tony clawed at his chest.

His chest hurt.

Why did his chest hurt so bad?

Rhodes caught Tony, who had collapsed as if someone had severed the strings holding him up.

Tony let out small gasps of pain as he desperately clutched at his chest for some kind of relief from the agony.

“Colonel I already sent an emergency message to Dr. Wu” Friday informed in a panic.
“Tony! Tony! Wu is on his way just hold on!” Rhodes cried out, holding him in his lap, clutching at Tony’s shoulders as if he could somehow take away his friend’s pain.

“He killed my mom” Tony declared brokenly as his vision faded to black.

(Lydia's POV)

I was anxiously waiting for any kind of news.

Dreading that any moment now I was going to feel the incoming death of Tony Stark.

Of course logically it was possible that nothing was going to happen….

But I couldn't help but feel that something was.

And the suspense was causing me severe anxiety.

I couldn't even draw to relax.

Every time I did I would draw that same picture.

Suddenly a pair of hands reached out to hold onto mine.

I hadn't even noticed that I'd started shaking.

I looked up to see Stiles gazing at me in concern.

“You alright?” he asked worriedly, rubbing at my fingers a bit.

“I just have this feeling that something bad is going to happen” I told him in a whisper.

As if saying the words any louder would kickstart whatever it was that I was dreading.

“Nothing's going to happen” Stiles tried to promise, though we both knew he had no power to enforce it.

“How'd it go?” I asked him, tightening my grip on his hands as the feeling of dread increased again.

“About as well as we expected...So not at all” he said, “Though there was a distinct lack of punching. So now I owe Derek ten bucks”

“And after?” I asked, curious why he was here, though I was eternally grateful for it.

I was starting to feel claustrophobic. Bogged down.

The dread was starting to drown me

“Morrell's with Steve. Scott's waiting outside the door, and Derek went after Widow and Barnes” Stiles relayed.

“And Mr. Stark?” I prompted.

He was the most important right now.

“Colonel Rhodes gave me the stink eye, so I went looking for you instead to see how you were
“Coping” he explained, giving my hands a comforting squeeze.

I sucked in a quick breath.

No.

“Stiles” I croaked, my hands fumbling in his as I tried to find purchase.

“Lydia?” Stiles exclaimed in a calm panic as he tried to steady me.

“We need to get to Tony” I gasped out as I tried to hold back the urge tickling the back of my throat.

“I’m going to scream”

(Bucky's POV)

I knew that ballet was meant to be crisp, and graceful.

Balance and strength.

Showing control of the body and endurance.

But the Red Room had taken its beauty and twisted it to their perverse needs.

They made it sharp like glass.

Seductive for catching their target’s eye.

The dance itself was more an artfully crafted battle.

Their flexibility, balance, strength, and agility meshed into their martial arts.

Logically I knew that La Bayadère was not meant to be such violent a dance.

But when Romanoff had brought us to a secluded flat section of the gym typically used for weight training, and started the music my body had instinctively began recalling the motions for me.

The vicious back and forth between us as we danced was an unexpected release for me that I did not think that I could achieve without slamming my fist against something solid.

“Ms. Romanoff. Sergeant Barnes” Friday called out frantically.

The both of us halted mid-Penché.

“Boss has collapsed at the shooting range. Dr. Wu is already on his way” Friday relayed in a panic, something I had never heard from her before.

“What happened?” Romanoff demanded, the two of us immediately sprinting off.

“His heart is failing. My scans are showing that he is going to into cardiac arrest” she relayed, sounding terrified.

“Dammit” I heard Derek mutter as he removed himself from his spot in the corner of the room to run alongside us.
*Flashback*

“What the hell has got your knickers in such a twist” I demanded.

*Steve had done nothing but rant since Tony left to meet with the UN about the repercussions Steve, Wilson, and Barton will be facing for breaking their parole.*

Steve just tossed a picture at me in frustration.

“The hell Steve? I know you're pissed at him for siding with the Accords but this is uncalled for” I told him sternly, angry that he would draw Tony being killed.

Steve groaned in frustration.

“Lydia drew the picture” he exclaimed, “You know the girl who predicts people's death?”

*End Flashback*

Since then I've made myself a part of the group keeping check over Tony's declining health (with me jokingly calling us the Heart Monitors).

It wasn't a joke anymore.

“And Wu's ETA?” Romanoff demanded as the two of us exited the gym doors leading to the outdoor training fields.

“Just arrived. He is checking Boss over now” Friday stated.

The only thought going through my mind was that Tony was dying.

Tony was dying and it was our fault.

(Steve's POV)

I didn't remember exiting the Compound.

I didn't remember sprinting onto the shooting range.

Everything around me was nothing more than a blur after Friday told us that Tony had collapsed.

Heart failure, she had said.

The image of Lydia's drawing flashed behind my eyes as I slid down onto my knees, paying no mind to the dirt, stones, and shell casings.

Tony lying on the ground, his face pained.

His heart broken from from stress and betrayal.

I did this.

My voice and pleas going unheard as my hand gripped onto his leg.

Whether it was to reassure Tony or myself I don't know.

Tony's soft gasps grew shallower and shallower as they finally stopped completely.
His hand clutching painfully at his chest relaxing, thudding against the ground.

“I can't hear his heartbeat” I croaked desperately.

I killed Tony.

(Third POV)

“His heart stopped” Scott declared, keeping calm in the way only a medical professional could.

Wu immediately grabbed at Tony’s wrist to take a pulse.

“None” he confirmed, cursing silently to himself, “I will start on compressions. I want an ETA on that defibrillator”

Wu immediately lined the heel of his hand up on Tony's still chest.

Laying his other hand on top and lacing his fingers together he began his first rep.

“Mr. Wilson and Ms. Yukimura have retrieved the defibrillator. Ms. Yukimura will arrive in approximately one minute thirty-seven seconds” Friday relayed, continuously scanning Tony’s vitals.

“I'll switch off with you” Scott declared, lining his hands up and taking Wu's place as soon as he completed the rep.

“What are the options?” Rhodes demanded just as Vision landed on the ground next to them, looking as lost and helpless as he'd ever seen him.

Rhodes remembered that Wu had Friday read him off a bunch of stats and vitals to him before everyone had started arriving.

“Tony's heart has been steadily weakening. His cardiac muscles are not functioning as well as they should” Wu explained, “Couple that with his recent heart attack scares and the constant arrhythmia due to stress, and his heart just isn't strong enough anymore to function on it's own”

Of course he had thought that he'd have time to try and correct the issue, but apparently something beyond stressful had recently occurred for Tony to just completely collapse now.

“So where does that leave him medically in terms of treatment options?” Bucky demanded as Natasha took over for Scott.

Tony needed to be okay.

Vision gazed sadly upon the prone form of his 'father’.

He could already logically deduce the next possible measures…and none of them left him with much hope.

“From what Tony and I have discussed previously he only had three viable options: a heart transplant, extremis, or having the arc reactor put back in” Wu explained grimly, keeping his fingers on Tony's wrist.

“Had?” Steve questioned numbly.
Tony had stopped breathing.

For a moment so did he.

“We have no organ available right now for transplantation, the extremis formula is not at this facility, nor do we have an arc reactor ready for emergency surgery” Wu detailed tightly.

Telling loved ones that there was nothing more that he could do was always the hardest part for him.

It just made things even worse to know that he had failed a friend.

“He's going to die” Stiles exclaimed in quiet shock as he held onto Lydia who was trying everything she could to keep from screaming.

“I'm here!” Kira declared skidding to a stop.

She just about chucked the defibrillator at Dr. Wu.

Using the emergency scissors in the kit Wu ripped open Tony's shirt while Scott removed the backing from the pad stickers and placed them on Tony's body.

“It's a good thing Tony shaves his chest hair” Rhodes thought humorlessly.

“Everyone clear” Wu ordered.

Everyone backed off from Tony’s prone form (just as Sam had arrived on the scene).

“Clear” Wu declared, pressing the button.

Tony's body jolted as the electricity zipped through his body.

“Heartbeat not detected. Continue chest compressions” the AED sounded.

Sam immediately knelt down and did just that.

“If there's no treatment that's viable then where does that fucking leave us?...Praying that the defibrillator works?” Rhodes demanded angrily.

No.

No he wouldn't just accept this.

Tony survived shrapnel to the heart, open heart surgery in a cave, being outfitted with a rusty car battery, torture, Stane, palladium poisoning, flying a nuke through a portal, and being blown up amongst other things.

He wasn't going to just lose him now.

“Unfortunately” Wu confirmed unhappily, confirming Vision's own deductions (and fears).

The defibrillator was Tony's only chance.

If it didn't work….Tony was going to die here today.

“Can't you heal him or something?” Wanda asked Stiles as she held onto Clint, trying to comfort him.
Stiles could manipulate reality with his beliefs after all right?

Everyone looked to the young man, desperate hope in their eyes.

“In theory maybe, but I can't just lay my hands over him and say heal. I'm not Jesus. I don't know what I'd have to make my powers heal. I'm not a cardiologist!” Stiles exclaimed, frustration, panic, and helplessness laced in his tone.

“Dammit!” Clint exclaimed, pissed at his own uselessness.

“AED charged. Clear the area” the machine sounded.

“Everybody move” Sam declared, lifting his hands away from Tony's chest.

“Clear!” Wu declared as he pressed the button again.

Nothing.

“Heartbeat not detected. Continue chest compressions” the AED sounded.

“Come on Tones don't do this” Rhodes muttered as Clint knelt down to start compressions again.

“I wish there was something I could do” Scott muttered faintly, helplessly.

Even if he used the pain siphon to try and take Mr. Stark's injuries it wouldn't work.

An alpha's pain siphon can heal someone at near death, but it can't give someone a new heart.

And the sad fact was, Mr. Stark's heart wasn't injured.

Just too weak to function anymore.

That wasn't something he could heal.

“There is something you can do” Morrell declared firmly, having heard Scott's wish.

Everyone turned to her in confusion.

Clint even faltered for a moment before continuing his rep.

One look at her eyes and Scott immediately knew what she was referring to.

“Not without his consent” Scott declared back, his jaw tightening.

He wouldn't bring the man into their world without his consent.

Not without him knowing just what he was getting into, what he was choosing.

“The world needs Tony Stark alive Scott” Morrell countered, matching his resolution, “Do you really want to make the same mistake you made with Hayden the first time?”

Scott narrowed his eyes at her for bringing up his hesitation to turn Hayden in case the Bite would kill her faster.

“It's not that simple and you know it” Derek defended, fighting the urge to growl at her.

The Bite was so much more than getting new powers.
If Scott Bit Tony Stark then that would make him Scott's beta.

A part of the Pack.

Complicated wouldn't even begin to describe things.

“Consequences can be dealt with afterwards” Morrell countered.

Tony Stark needed to live.

If he dies the economy would be in crisis.

The world would lose one of its greatest scientific minds, setting back advancements in countless fields of study.

They would lose a political ally that was key in advocating for the rights of enhanced and non-humans.

The Earth would lose one of its strongest defenders.

Her job was to maintain balance at any cost.

And in order for balance to be maintained Tony Stark needed to live.

“It might not even work” Scott countered, glaring at her.

The last thing he wanted was to give anyone false hope, especially when they didn't know if Mr. Stark has done anything to his body that would cause Rejection, let alone the fact he may be too old and his body too weak to accept the Bite.

“What might not work?” Rhodes demanded, narrowing his eyes at the three of them.

Scott glared at Morrell.

“I…”

He couldn't say it.

“Can you save him?” Rhodes asked (demanded).

Everyone was looking at Scott expectantly (minus Wu who was doing compressions).

Scott sighed, rubbing his eyes with his thumb and forefinger out of frustration.

“….Possibly…But it will change him and even if he survives-”

“In case of emergencies Pepper and I are his power of attorney” Rhodes said cutting him off.

He wasn't in the mood for this bullshit right now, Tony's life literally depended on it.

“Can you save him?” Rhodes demanded firmly, staring Scott down.

Scott let out a huff.

Suddenly Natasha was hit by a sudden realization.

Scott had his powers forced on him…Which meant that he could potentially give someone else
powers.

“It’s a fifty-fifty shot at best” he declared, feeling uncomfortable under all the pressure.

“He’s already basically dead!” Rhodes exclaimed with a roar of frustration, “Whatever it is that you can do, do it!”

“He’ll be like me and Derek-” Scott tried to explain.

But it was all for naught.

“I don’t care if antlers are poppin outa his damn head! Just save him!” Rhodes shouted desperately, cutting him off again.

Scott sucked in a breath, shaking his head a bit, rubbing the back of his neck out of anxiety.

“Scott”

“Scott!”

“Scott I'm about to scream”

“Do it!!”

“Scott!!”

“Save him dammit!!”

With a growl Scott's eyes shot open.

Eyes of illuminescent blood red and menacing fangs protruding from his gums.

Before anyone could even move Scott sank his teeth into the meat of Tony Stark's shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

Daaammnnnnn!!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT ;)
Chapter 13: The consequences of lies part 2

Chapter Notes

Hi all!
Hope you all enjoy the chapter!
Merry Christmas!!!
PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Every action has a consequence.
An equal or opposite reaction.
And sometimes the weight of the decision made, changes the course of fate forever.
For the better….or worse.

(Third POV)

He was halfway through re-reading the Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy when he felt it.
The wave that rippled across the Pack Bond.
Stirring up the threads that bound them all together through their Alpha.
But that wasn't all.
There was something new forming.
The other threads moving aside to make room for a potential new pack member.
And not just another stray either.
“What has Scott done now?” Peter questioned in exasperated amusement, closing his book with an audible thunk that echoed through the Loft.

“I need you to prep the patient in room 216 for surgery” Dr. Geyer stated, walking up to Melissa at the front desk, taking a moment to sign the last of the paperwork.

When she didn't answer he turned to face her.

“Melissa?” he asked slightly concerned as she continued to stare off into space, a look of confusion on her face.

At his voice she realized that she had been focusing too hard on trying to figure out just what it was
that she was feeling through the Bond that was shifting.

“I'm sorry. I just have a lot on my mind” she replied, giving him an apologetic smile.

“Everything alright?” Dr. Geyer asked worriedly, “It's not anything with Liam or the Pack is it?”

“No...I mean maybe...I don't think it's anything bad” Melissa continuously corrected, trying to sound reassuring.

“Did you find anything on our missing persons case?” Sheriff Stilinski asked as he searched through some of the recent files that had landed on his desk in the past week.

Fortunately they haven't had any supernatural incidents in a while.

“Seems to be a run of the mill teenager runs away from home issue, but we're still looking into things. A few more friends houses to visit” Deputy Clarke reported.

“And considering Parrish doesn't seem to have the urge to walk out into the woods in his underwear, I think it's safe to assume for now that the supernatural isn't involved” Deputy Strauss lightly teased.

“Ha ha very funny” Deputy Parrish mocked back good-naturedly.

“Then the two of you can split yourselves up between the homes-”

The forced ripple through both Parrish and the Sheriff, making him pause mid-sentence.

“Sheriff?”

“Life is a bartering system. You want something you have to offer something in return” Coach Finstock began as he walked around the classroom.

“Ain't that the truth” Alex thought disdainfully.

Coach may be eccentric on the best of days, but he was still his favorite teacher.

“When hiring new employees salary can be a bartering game...For some places the potential employee wants more money than the place wants to pay them. So they're told to take a hike. Unlike here where we basically have to bribe potential new teaching employees just to even get them to even consider working here” Finstock declared in comical anger.

“That's because a teaching job here is like the Dark Arts position. Cursed” a student mocked.

As the class was roaring in laughter I felt a wave that almost knocked the breath out of me.

What was this feeling?

I'd never felt anything like this before through the Pack Bond.

What did it even mean?

“It's been too quiet” Theo stated aloud, voicing everyone's concerns.

Several members of the California division of the Shadow Guard were gathered round a long table
for their weekly meeting.

Others were off either on missions, patrol, or attending to other duties in the facility.

“Theo's right. It's public knowledge that a specialized FBI team stopped the Avengers and are being used as their parole officers, and yet we haven't had any backlash from her yet” Liam backed (with only minimal reluctance).

“Yeah yet” Jiang emphasized, “It's only a matter of time right?”

“Considering the Republic's history probably” Lori agreed.

“Not necessarily” Argent declared, “She could be biding her time. Plotting. Using this time to her advantage”

On the occasions that the older Pack members were absent he was left to strategize with the younger members who were only about twenty. And despite all their experiences they weren't quite as tactically skilled as the older members yet (though they could surprise him at times).

“Five of our major members have been temporarily taken out of play. Wouldn't this be the time to act?” Gwen countered.

“Unless she doesn't know that the FBI team is us” Megan Gwynn offered hopefully.

“Our names were used in the reports...Same with our division name” Corey pointed out.

“Doesn't mean she has access to them. Or an interest in the Avengers” Megan countered.

“Our pictures were on the news” Corey deadpanned.

“Okay so she knows and is currently plotting diabolically” Caitlin asked exasperatedly, “What’d we do?”

Before Theo could even make a snide comment, Caitlin's question was instead met with dead silence as a majority of the room shuttered at the waves echoing through the Pack Bond.

“What's wrong?” Gwen asked, looking to each member of the McCall Pack in concern, giving Caitlin and Megan a side glance.

They were just as confused as she was.

“We need to call Scott” Argent declared firmly.

“I can't believe I finally got you to agree to go out with me!” Bobby declared happily, a very noticeable pep in his step as they strode down the sidewalk.

“Kitty was telling me that I needed to do some grand gesture or something. Like a giant ice sculpture of you, or freezing us our own ice rink” Bobby admitted a bit sheepishly.

Danny couldn't help but find his embarrassed blush endearing.

“It's just a coffee date” Danny reminded him gently.

He didn't want to get either of their hopes up in case this didn't work out.
Both of them had crazy lives, and Bobby didn't even know about the supernatural….or him….or about Monroe.

Frankly he didn't think Xavier did either, but he wasn't about to ask.

For now everyone had agreed to keep the supernatural as separate from the mutant population as possible, so as to not make things worse for them.

Of course going to college at MIT meant that he, Stiles, and Lydia had almost immediately run into them since several of the older X-Men were guest lecturers.

“But it's still a date” Bobby declared, giving him an almost goofy grin as he opened the door to the coffee shop for him.

As usual Coffee A Go-Go was packed with people vying for their mid-day caffeine fix.

Seeing the long line and lack of tables Bobby made a logical call.

“Why don't you find us a table and I'll grab us our coffee?” Bobby reasoned.

“Sure. An iced caramel latte for me please” Danny requested.

Bobby nodded and turned to grab a spot in line before more people came in.

“Oh and Bobby” Danny called to him as he had gotten in line.

Bobby turned back to him looking slightly confused, “Yeah?”

“Nice job. Paying for my coffee without having to even ask. Smooth” Danny said with a smirk.

Bobby choked a bit on air, embarrassed at being found out.

Danny couldn't help the huge grin as he turned to go find a seat.

Bobby was always so much fun to tease.

Danny managed to find a good spot next to the indoor fireplace (fortunately for them he caught it just as another couple were leaving).

Despite the long line the baristas were as efficient as usual, so it didn't take that long for Bobby to come back with their drinks.

“And here you go. One iced caramel latte” Bobby declared, handing Danny his cup.

“Thank you” Danny said gratefully, immediately taking a sip.

As soon as he did though he pulled away from his straw, making a surprised, if not slightly affronted face, “Hm”

“What?” Bobby asked, seeing his expression.

“Nothing. They just forgot to ice my latte” Danny explained.

It was still good hot, so it wasn't a total loss.

“Then allow me” Bobby said smirking, reaching out to gently tap Danny's paper cup with the tip of his index finger.
Controlling his powers Bobby made sure to only reduce the temperature of the drink rather than freezing it solid (and embarrassing himself again).

The moment Bobby removed his finger Danny took another sip, moaning appreciatively.

“Chilling me my own iced coffee. Such a gentleman. Are you trying to get me to swoon?” Danny inquired smiling.

“Depends. Is it working?” Bobby declared cheekily.

“Depends. You wouldn't happen to have asked the barista specifically not to ice my coffee did you?” Danny challengingly teased.

Danny couldn't help but full-belly laugh at Bobby's embarrassed sputtering at being found out again.

“This is the last time I take Kitty's advice on anything” Bobby groaned, his head thunking against the table, cuing another round of chuckles from Danny.

Of course his laughter was immediately cut off as a wave shuttered through his body.

The change was so abrupt Bobby lifted his head up to see what was wrong.

“Everything okay?” he against, slightly concerned at Danny's serious expression.

“....Yeah….I just have to make a phone call later”

“Wow you weren't kidding when you said that you had a giant pet ant” Mason stated in slight awe.

“Her name is Marie Antoinette” Cassie declared with that pre-preteen sass that made you question your intelligence level.

“Why is a giant ant so surprising to you two?” Scott Lang asked, amusement laced in his tone.

Privately he was patting himself on the back for finally getting some shock out of Mason.

He and Corey weren't phased by much.

“Corey and I have seen a lot of things” Mason began, still staring at Marie, “Surprisingly a giant ant is not one of them”

“Don't worry she's harmless” Scott assured him.

“Actually, I told Marie that she could eat you if you hurt my daddy” Cassie stated matter-of-factly, looking entirely unrepentant.

Mason looked down at the giant ant who, as if to make a point, snapped her pincers twice in his direction.

Taking the hint, Mason not so subtly scooted back a few steps away from the giant insect, not even bothering to ask whether or not it could actually eat him.

“Honey we've discussed this. Marie is not allowed to eat my parole officers...They'll just send someone else” Scott reminded her jokingly.
Mason just raised his eyebrows at him in an oh-really gesture.

Not a moment later Mason jolted a bit in surprise as he felt the shift in the Pack Bond, immediately getting Scott and Cassie's attention.

“You okay? I promise I won't like my daughter's pet ant eat you” Scott said, trying to reassure Mason again in case they really did scare him.

“Uh no...I uh. I just need to make a phone call”

“Derek sent you to check up on me didn't he?” Cora stated knowingly, recognizing the person's scent before she even opened the front door.

“Well he would’ve come himself except he's stuck with his new babysitting job” Braedan confirmed, unphased by her sister-in-law's less than cheery welcome.

“Well you can tell him I'm still fine” Cora declared with an edge of exasperation, moving aside so that Braedan could come in.

“It's been three years since Gerard had a majority of our paternal family killed. I've rebuilt everything since then” Cora continued defensively, closing the door behind Braedan and striding further into the complex.

“The Ribeiro-Hale Pack is stronger than ever. And I'm going to make sure it stays that way” she declared confidently, flashing her red eyes with assured determination at Braedan.

Braedan just rewarded her with an unimpressed eyebrow.

“You're acting like I'm saying otherwise” she pointed out, “You know this is all just precautionary”

“If Monroe and her mindless goons do decide to come back, we'll be ready for them...Unlike last time we have the Cabeceiras Police Force on our side” Cora reminded her as they continued on, passing a few of Cora and Derek's younger paternal cousins (the ones that had survived Monroe and Gerard's slaughter).

“Yeah in a town where superstitions are both feared and revered...They still call Derek Lobisomem” Braedan pointed out, amusement laced in her voice.

“I find it fitting” Cora replied, giving Braedan an amused smirk of her own.

Braeden huffed out a chuckle.

Chuckling that immediately halted at the erratic waves rippling through the Bond, making her pause just as they were able to enter the back gardens.

“What it it?” Cora demanded.

“You ready to go?” Ethan asked, buttoning his cuffs.

“Just about” Jackson replied, straightening his waistcoat.

“You would think after about five years I'd be used to how formal England is with everything” Ethan joked.
“You would think after five years you would know how to tie your bowtie” Jackson snarked, moving over to Ethan to adjust his crooked bowtie.

“There” Jackson said, leaning forward a bit, intending to press his lips to Ethan's.

“Ah ah” Ethan scolded softly, smirking a bit at Jackson's affronted look.

The two of them were still less than an inch apart.

“If you start we're going to be late” Ethan reminded him, pecking him lightly on the lips before pulling away.

“And considering we are meeting with the wealthier Packs and Leaps-”

“That name is still stupid” Jackson declared with a scoff, cutting Ethan off.

“It's zoologically correct” Ethan reminded him.

“It's stupid” Jackson reiterated bluntly.

“True” Ethan agreed with a smirk, stautering back over to Jackson.

“But we need their money for our Omega Outreach Center” Ethan reminded him, “So play nice”

“You mean schmooze” Jackson corrected, stepping up into Ethan's space with a lascivious smile.

“What else?” Ethan agreed, giving Jackson a smug grin of his own.

As the pair were about to lean in for a deeper kiss, the ripples and turmoil in the Pack Bond made them both freeze.

“Looks like we're going to be late” Ethan breathed in exasperated acceptance.

Isaac was leaning against a tree trunk as he waited for Malia to return from scouting.

It had been quiet the last week.

No hunters.

No attacks.

Nothing.

It left him uneasy to say the least.

Suddenly his ears picked up on the faint tapping of padded feet.

Rushing forward, Malia (in her full shifted form) leaped over the brush, making her way over to Isaac at a much slower pace.

“Anything?” he asked, not very hopeful.

Malia shook her head (doing so in her coyote-form always made Isaac want to laugh).

“Alright then. Let’s go back to base and-”
Tremors wracked their body as they felt the Pack Bond shifting.

“And here I was worried that nothing was happening” Isaac grumbled sardonically.

“You're trying to make it so that the Cradle can construct an entire functioning body?” Nolan asked, never ceasing to be amazed by Dr. Cho's intelligence and work.

“Trying yes” she confirmed, “However I'm not quite there yet”

“So you would be able to say, clone someone?” Nolan asked curiously.

It wouldn't be too much of a stretch.

Cloning technology already existed, it just (to his knowledge) hasn't been perfected, nor is it accessible to the public yet.

“The Cradle is far from achieving something like that...But yes. My hope is that soon I will be able to have it start repairing and constructing entire functioning organs” Helen declared with pride.

Nolan was nothing short of astounded.

If Dr. Cho were to achieve such a feat it would be groundbreaking for those in need of transplant surgeries.

The number of people she would save alone was innumerable!

“Hand me that tray over there” Helen asked him, pointing to a tray of recently cleaned beakers and test tubes.

Nolan quickly went over to the counter, carefully lifting the tray off the table.

As he made his way over to Dr. Cho he stumbled a bit in surprise, one of the taller beakers falling onto the floor with an echoing clang.

“Nolan. Are you alright?” Helen asked, seeing the startled look on the young man's face.

“Yeah I…” Nolan began trailing off as he tried (and failed) to ignore the fluctuations in the Pack Bond, “I just slipped a bit”

“I really think you should put on some pants” Hayden deadpanned as she watched Dr. Selvig pace back and forth in his lab, mumbling something about cosmic fluctuations.

“Don't bother. He says it helps him concentrate. Less restricting...People are used to it around here now” Ian explained as he sifted through the equipment.

“I'm not” Hayden thought.

Don't get her wrong. She was well acquainted to impromptu stripping...But seeing an esteemed professor do so was still a little awkward.

“So who are you again?” Hayden asked curiously.

Dr. Selvig had been happy to see him, though as to her knowledge he hadn't mentioned him at all during her stay here so far.
“Oh right” the young man declared, looking like he wanted to smack himself on the forehead. While she might not know who he was, he seemed to already know her...Which meant that Dr. Selvig had been talking about her to his other colleagues.

Whether that was a good thing or a bad thing she couldn't tell.

“I'm Ian Boothby. I'm Darcy's intern” he introduced, holding a hand out for her to shake.

“Darcy?” Hayden questioned shaking his hand. She didn't recognize that name either.

“Dr. Foster’s intern” he explained smiling.

“You're an intern's intern?” Hayden questioned, raising a speculative eyebrow at that.

“Yup. I'm here to collect some equipment for Jane” he confirmed, sounding unphased by the admittedly slightly judgemental question.

“So you're an astrophysicist then too?” Hayden asked him.

“Ornithologist” he corrected.

“....”

“I study birds” he elaborated, seeing her confusion.

“Then why…?” Hayden asked, trailing off a bit.

“It's a long story” he said with an edge of exasperation.

As Hayden was about to ask a litany of different questions a force rippled through the Pack Bond, the shock of it jolting her slightly.

“Are you alright?” Ian asked her concerned.

“I...I... I'm sorry I have to go” she stammered, turning to leave the lab, “Watch him until I get back!”

“What?” Ian demanded, completely confused as the sudden change in events.

“Watch him!” Hayden shouted back again as she sprinted through the lab doors.

She needed to see her Alpha now.

(Third POV)

“WHAT THE FUCK?!!” Clint demanded furiously, lunging at Scott from his position at Tony's side.

The son-of-a-bitch had moved quicker than his eyes could track.

By the time he had registered the fact Scott's eyes were glowing red, he had already moved and taken a chomp out of Tony.
As he moved to put Scott into a headlock a steel-strong hand had gripped around his wrist, twisting it around.

Scott turned his blood red eyes on him, a low threatening growl emanating from his throat.

“Shit he's fast” Clint scowled, baring his own teeth at the red eyed man.

The second Scott had sank his fangs into Tony both Steve and Bucky lunged at him.

However before they could even get close they were stymied by both Derek and Kira.

Immediately whipping out her belt Kira had arched her blade at Bucky's chest.

But rather than him leaning back and away from the blade like she had anticipated, Bucky brought up his titanium arm to parry the blow instead.

Kira tried not to flinch as the soldier glared at her with the fury of an icy blizzard.

Derek on the other hand had merely body-checked Steve the second he had tried to get back onto his feet, knocking him off balance.

Righting himself against the stones and dirt, Steve clenched his fist in anger.

There was no way he was going to stay down.

Seeing their struggles Wanda immediately lashed out with her powers, intending to encase Scott and then chuck him as far from Stark as possible.

Anticipating the attack, Stiles activated his own magic.

“Protect!” he commanded fiercely, a golden sphere surrounding Scott and Tony, blocking the red mist before it had the chance to touch him.

Wanda quickly turned her attention to Stiles, whipping her arm out and launching a hard concussive blast at him.

Stiles immediately willed the magic in his hand to repel Wanda's blast, smacking it away from himself harmlessly while simultaneously using his other hand to launch a concussive blast of his own.

And unlike Wanda, Stiles hit his mark strong and true, knocking the breath out of Wanda as she was forced off her feet and sent sprawling into the dirt and stones.

“ENOUGH!!” Rhodes roared, his eyes promising no-less than pain and death, commanding everyone's attention the only way a military officer could.

Each of the combative pairs froze, tense and waiting for the other to make a move.

“I told you to save him, not maul him!!” Rhodes declared furiously, glaring Scott down.

Scott just gave him a dispassionate glance, teeth clenched.

“He did help him” Natasha replied pointedly, drawing each the Avengers’ (and Bucky's) attention.

“What?!” Clint demanded, looking at Natasha like screws had just fallen loose out of her head, “He just took a chunk out of Tony's shoulder! How is that helping?”
“Taking into account what we do know about Scott’s abilities, and the fact that he himself had his powers forced on him, means that biting is most likely how the transfer of powers is done” Natasha reasoned.

She was getting tired of dealing with everyone's impulsivity.

“Would it kill them to analyze the situation a little more before they react?” Natasha criticized thoughtfully.

The only ones who hadn't immediately sprung into action had been her, Vision, Sam, and Rhodes.

Though to be fair Rhodes and Vision looked to be barely restraining themselves, and Sam had been too momentarily overwhelmed by everything happening at once to do anything.

Stiles watched through narrowed eyes as Wanda slowly got back onto her feet.

A glare which she returned in kind.

Kira and Bucky slowly pushed off each other and backed up a few steps, neither of their tension easing, both too suspicious of the other.

Steve pushed himself off his knees, his entire body taught as a bowstring as he readied himself to strike again if necessary.

Derek fought the urge to growl at the threat to his Alpha.

Wu however was completely baffled by the recent turn of events.

He had kept silent as everyone pressured the young man (Scott?) to save Tony because he had no idea what any of the were even talking about.

He still didn't.

“Um...Scott was it? What exactly did you just do?” Wu hesitantly questioned as Scott began removing the AED pads.

“If the Bite takes then even if he dies it will revive him by the next full moon” Scott replied tightly, keeping his eyes on the lack of the rise-and-fall of Tony Stark's chest.

He needed to take Sta-Tony and leave.

Being around so many hostiles with his newly Bitten was putting him on edge.

Especially since Sta-Tony was likely going to die before the Bite takes... if the Bite takes.

And he hated it.

He hated it so much.

He could already feel the tie forming between them because of the Bite.

If it doesn't take....

If it doesn't take he's going to have the phantom pain of Tony Stark's soul being cut from his for the rest of his life.
And so will the rest of the Pack.

“....”

“Holy shit....You're that powerful?” Sam asked, astounded at such a medical marvel.

“How is this possible?” Wu questioned in amazement, “Will there any side effects?”

“There is a significant healing factor” Scott ground out reluctantly, still only keeping his eyes on the essentially dead man in front of of him, “If he survives any ailments will be cured”

“That's astounding!” Wu declared, both happy and relieved for his old friend.

Such a thing was a medical miracle!

Just thinking of all the possibilities and potential applications was making his head spin.

“Yeah. Except now he's gonna want to kill anyone he comes across now isn't he?” Clint demanded, glaring pointedly at Scott.

“I did try to warn you. Power always comes at a price” Scott replied with a calm harshness as he returned Clint's glare.

“But it's not permanent right? You don't want to kill anyone” Rhodes reasoned, trying to remain hopeful that he had made the right decision.

“I'm debating on it right now” Scott ground out.

“Enough” Natasha declared, fed up with everything.

She turned her attention to Scott, “What now?”

Seeing a way out Scott turned to Derek.

“Get his legs” Scott ordered.

Derek immediately complied, moving back over to Scott and bending down to get ahold of Tony Stark's legs while Scott moved around to his head.

“What are you doing now?” Rhodes demanded, reaching out to grip Scott's shoulder.

It wasn't overly tight, but it was firm enough that Scott understood that the Colonel wasn't just going to be ignored.

He wasn't going to just let them take Tony without knowing what the hell was going on first.

“We’re taking him to a private room in medical” Scott answered brusquely as he shifted his hands so that they rested underneath Tony's armpits.

“And Colonel” Scott addressed, turning his head to meet Rhodes’ eyes.

The glowing blood red back with a vengeance.

“I'd move your hand. My patience is wearing thin”
“How come we're not allowed in?” Rhodes demanded unhappily.

A feeling I definitely identified with.

Everyone (minus Dr. Wu and Morrell) had been ordered to wait outside the private room in the med wing.

Scott had actually *snarled* at us when we had tried to squeeze our way into the room.

Currently the only ones in the room with Tony's corp-body was Scott, Derek, Dr. Wu, and the Guard member Hayden whom we all rarely saw since she was assigned to Selvig.

The rest of the Guard were standing protectively outside the door, acting as a barrier between it and us.

Though the Guard was more focused on their phones then us.

Ever since Scott had bit Tony their phones had been blowing up with phone calls and messages.

Stiles had already confirmed to Argent and his father that Scott had bitten someone.

Lydia had done the same for Mason and someone named Jackson, while Kira had spoken to two women, Malia and Braedan.

The problem was none of them went into detail about what Tony being bitten *meant*.

And all the unknowns were slowly driving me further off the ledge.

And I was already dangling precariously before.

“Because you'll only be in the way” Kira declared bluntly, though there was a slight undertone of apologetic pity in her voice.

“How?” Clint demanded angrily, “He's already dead. You stopped treatment on him”

Tony was *clinically* dead.

*Dead.*

“Because treatment's no longer necessary” Kira reminded us (again).

But how?

“Yeah. Because some magical bite is supposed to revive him...Sorry but all this sounds suspicious and hokey to me” Sam retorted, folding his arms across his chest.

*Everything* about this was suspicious.

God only knows what they were doing to Tony’s body in there.

“Scott tried to warn you. You're the ones who didn't stop long enough to listen” Stiles snapped back.

He did.

The question was, what was he trying to warn us about?
We knew that Scott needed to keep his anger under control.

That his powers were animal related.

But other than that we had no idea what would happen to Tony.

…..Or if we would need to chain him up like Scott had been.

“That doesn't give you a reason to withhold information from us” I stated fiercely, stepping forward, “That's our friend in there who's life is hanging in the balance and you're not telling us anything!”

“And who's fault is that Rogers?” Stiles countered back, stepping right up challengingly in my face.

Mine.

It was my fault and I couldn't do anything about it.

But I needed to do something.

I needed to know what was going on.

“All of you stop it!” Lydia demanded, actually stamping her foot in frustration.

We both froze.

From the look in Stiles’ eyes I could tell that neither of us would be backing down.

“Fighting with each other isn't going to solve anything” she declared sharply, specifically glaring at Stiles and I.

Grudgingly I knew she was right.

Reluctantly we both stepped back.

“Then you all need to start talking” Rhodes demanded, “Someone needs to give me a damn good reason why I'm not allowed to see my best friend!”

“Besides the fact depending on who tries to invade the space Scott might try and rip your head off?” Stiles snarked, though from his tone I couldn’t tell whether he was kidding or not.

Though judging from Scott's snarl earlier it was a very likely possibility.

“Why is he suddenly so...territorial?” Wanda asked, having likely sensed the overwhelming emotions coming from Scott.

Stiles, Lydia, and Kira gave each other reluctant looks.

I let out a growl of frustration.

This wasn’t the time to be withholding information!

“Because he’s the one who gave Tony his powers” Natasha cut in, eyeing the Guards reaction carefully.

And judging from their expressions Nat had hit the nail on the head.
“Tony is connected to Scott now isn’t he?” Natasha inferred knowingly, sounding like she was almost daring the Guard to try and contradict her.

“...Yes” Lydia admitted reluctantly.

“Connected? What the hell does that even mean?” I thought, my hackles rising again.

Did Scott have some sort of control over Tony now?

“How connected are we talking here?” Bucky demanded.

If his darkened expression was anything to go by it sounded like he was thinking much along the same lines as me.

“It’s complicated” Stiles ground out.

“Uncomplicate it” Clint ordered, folding his arms as well.

“As of right now we don’t even know if Stark is gonna come back...And so until he does we don’t owe any of you an explanation” Stiles declared stonily.

I immediately clenched my fists at his words.

If they weren’t going to give us answers then I wasn’t going to leave Tony with them.

(Scott's POV)

“He’s healing faster than I expected” Hayden stated from her position near Tony’s legs.

I could feel her anxiety at the uncertain fate of her new sibling-beta.

While everyone in the Pack was connected to each other, Liam and Hayden had a slightly stronger connection to both each other and me since they were my bitten betas.

“That is because the next full moon is tomorrow” Morrell pointed out as she jotted down notes.

She was helping Dr. Wu (who was taking in everything with amazing stride) monitor Tony’s returning bodily functions.

I glared fiercely at her.

I didn’t want her here.

At all.

But if I wanted to make sure that Tony was okay she needed to stay.

And God he was Tony now, not Stark.

Though Tony Stark was technically dead I could still feel the Pack Bond between us going strong.

Which meant that he would likely revive.

....Though something felt off.

Different.
I just couldn’t put my finger on what.
I scratched my fingers through my hair in frustration.
Just what had I done?
I just jeopardized everything!
Our secrecy. The safety of the world.
God how could I have been so stupid as to cave under the pressure?
Suddenly I felt a hand grip my shoulder firmly.
“What’s done is done” Derek declared, squeezing my shoulder lightly, letting me know that he was here for me, “All we can do now is be there for him and deal with the damage as it comes”
I took in a deep breath, nodding at his conviction.
Derek would always be my Left Hand. My advisor. My older brother.
I latched my hand atop his, sending my gratitude through our bond.
He was right.
I could feel the rest of the Pack’s confusion and worries.
I wasn’t doing any of them any good if I didn’t get a handle on my emotions.
They needed me.
Tony needed me.
I couldn’t falter now.
Suddenly the commotion outside increased.
Derek and I dropped our hands at the noise, giving each other grim looks.
I immediately focused my hearing to listen in to what was going on.
“This has gone on long enough. Move aside son. We’re taking Tony now” I heard Rogers declare.
I growled in furious annoyance at the man’s gall.
“Oh yeah Captain Moron? I’d like to see you try” Stiles goaded threateningly.
And with that I’d had enough.
I immediately stomped toward the door.
I wasn’t going to stand for Rogers causing any more damage.

“If you wish to hold firm to your beliefs that is your right. However, if you continue to threaten the world because of your bullheadedness, you can stand firm to your beliefs all you want, but I will kill you where you stand”
(Third POV)

“This has gone on long enough. Move aside son. We’re taking Tony now” Steve declared, stepping in front of Stiles, his body tense and ready to strike if the young man didn’t heed his warning and move.

From the corner of his eye he could see that the rest of the Avengers (and Bucky) had followed his lead, even the normally more passive Vision.

“Oh yeah Captain Moron? I’d like to see you try” Stiles goaded threateningly, the golden glow of his magic surrounding his hands.

Lydia and Kira tensed themselves, ready to use their abilities to quickly take out the Avengers as they had in the past.

Before either side could make the first move the door was wrenched open, and Steve was knocked fifteen feet to the left, an incredible pain rocketing up through his undoubtedly now broken jaw as he hit the tiled floor hard.

Seeing the culprit of the attack left the rest of the Avengers stunned beyond belief at what they were seeing.

As Steve shook off the pain he looked up to see a sight he never expected.

Rather than relaxed gentle brown eyes and a disarming smile, he was met with eyes of blood-red fury and ferocious fangs.

Where as Scott’s mouth had once uttered a calm wisdom there was nothing left but vicious growls.

Comparing the two was like comparing night and day.

Just like Bruce Banner and the Hulk.

Steve tried to shift to his feet.

But the second Scott’s eyes had tracked the movement he had bolted over to Rogers faster than the man could see, roundhouse kicking the man underneath his already broken jaw.

The action snapped the rest of the group into action...But before they could even attempt to help Stiles commanded a barrier to surround them, effectively trapping them in place.

“What the hell?” Steve thought as he smacked into the wall, some of the plaster falling with him as he slid back to the floor.

Hearing the familiar growl Steve tensed for the incoming attack.

Just as he had anticipated Steve sensed a blur of movement.

He instinctively lifted up his hands, managing to barely block Scott’s knee jab aimed at his chest.

However just catching the blow wasn’t nearly enough.

Scott (much to Steve's surprise) was the physically stronger of the two of them.
Meaning the force of Scott's blow still slammed Steve back first into the wall hard once again.

Seeing that Steve was in serious trouble Wanda tried willing her own powers to take Stiles’ barrier apart.

“Come on. Come on” Wanda grunted, red outlining the entire inside of the barrier, causing it to ripple under the strain.

“Shit” Stiles muttered.

“It will hold. It will hold. It will hold” Stiles repeated like a mantra, refusing to let himself falter.

The nature of each of their powers causing them to deadlock in a battle of the wills.

Scott used his fury as a focal point to strengthen himself, using his emotions (his fury) to increase his speed, landing a hard blow to Rogers’ nose, causing his head to snap back and blood to gush out like a river.

Not giving Rogers any sort of reprieve Scott shift his hand for the first time in the fight, gripping Rogers’ throat threateningly.

“I told you Rogers” Scott snarled through his fangs, looking very much like a demon from hell as he stood over Steve’s body, glaring at him with his glowing red eyes, “If your bullheadedness continued to get people hurt I would kill you where you stood”

Steve cursed the fact that he couldn’t even move his jaw to speak.

He couldn't even try to (verbally) defend himself.

He wondered if that had been intentional on Scott’s part.

“You’re bluffing” Sam called out, sounding slightly desperate, “You wouldn’t do that. Killing someone in cold blood is not who you are”

He knew it was a gamble, but Steve needed help, and all of them were currently trapped like rats.

Bucky on the other hand was torn.

Did he want to see Rogers dead?

No.

But he wouldn’t lie to himself and say that he wasn’t taking some kind of gratification out of seeing Scott beat the shit out of Rogers.

“You wanna bet?” Scott growled challengingly, tightening his grip on Rogers’ throat, causing blood to trickle down where his claws had pricked through skin.

“What the hell is wrong with you?!” Clint demanded, “Steve didn’t even do anything! You’re the ones keeping secrets!”

“Secrets? You want to talk about secrets? How about what drove Tony Stark into cardiac arrest in the first place?” Scott declared, questioning the rest of the Avengers.

“No!” Steve thought desperately.
He tried to twist Scott's hand away from his throat, kicking out at him to knock him off balance. But it was all for naught.

His attempts at removing Scott was effortlessly knocked aside as if he was some bothersome knat.

Bucky’s eyes darkened.

“What’re you talking about?” Clint demanded.

He hated being out of the loop.

“Tony said that he wanted to hurt someone...That someone killed his mom” Rhodes announced, darkly.

If that was true then heads were gonna roll.

The Avengers (minus Bucky and Natasha) whirled on Rhodes.

Rhodes’ statement even startled Wanda so badly that she completely lost her concentration, causing her attack on the barrier to fail...Though truthfully she could care less.

Her attention was now on a far more important matter.

“Murdered, Colonel?” Vision inquired.

He had been under the impression that Maria and Howard Stark had died due to their injuries caused by a fatal car crash.

“That’s what Tony said at the range” Rhodes confirmed tightly.

Vision’s expression tightened.

Such a revelation would indeed be incredibly painful...But it shouldn’t alone have been enough to send Mr. Stark into heart failure.

“You didn’t tell him” Natasha declared in silent fury, glaring at Steve through Stilinski’s barrier.

The group turned on her.

“Tell him what?” Rhodes demanded, stepping towards the assassin.

When she didn’t answer Clint moved next to her.

“Natasha...What are you talking about?” Clint quietly demanded, almost dreading the answer.

Natasha ignored him in favor of continuing to glare at Steve, seeing the fear, regret, guilt, pain, and sorrow in his eyes.

He was lucky he was on the other side of this barrier.

“Back when all of SHIELD’s files were still out in the open Steve had me dig through them to see if there was anything on the Winter Soldier we could use to try and track Barnes down” Natasha began, telling a story that should have been told years ago.

“Yeah...we know” Sam prompted, wanting to know just where this was going.
“I found a video” she said simply, her voice dead.

“...A video of what?” Wanda asked reluctantly, not liking where this was going.

Natasha glared at Steve in resolution.

Steve closed his eyes in pained acceptance.

“A video of the Winter Soldier killing Howard and Maria Stark” Natasha revealed coldly.

Silence.

Nobody said a word as they each tried to process the impossibility of Natasha’s words.

Seeing everyone’s lack of movement Stiles released the barrier.

Personally he didn’t care if any of them got their own punches in on Rogers at this point. He deserved it.

“You lied to me” Natasha declared angrily, feeling betrayed, “You told me that you told him”

Even if he could speak Steve didn’t know what he would say.

“You lied to Stark’s face for two years while running all around the world trying to find him?” Sam demanded, pointing viciously at Barnes.

Steve winced.

“You both knew and neither of you said anything?” Clint demanded accusingly.

When neither Steve or Natasha met his gaze Clint just shook his head in disbelief.

“I’m done” he declared, walking away.

He needed to get away from everyone right now.

“I agree with Clint” Wanda declared, her view of the man she had considered her mentor crushed into dust, “I need some time to think”

Incited by Wanda’s departure Vision wordlessly phased away through the floor.

He would return to see Mr. Stark alone.

Sam followed suit soon after, deciding not to waste his breath any further on either of them.

“I should kill both of you” Rhodes declared angrily, his gaze alternating between Rogers and Romanoff.

And he needed to leave before he did just that.

He had people he needed to contact about Tony’s condition anyway.

And God help Rogers when they found out.

“You lied” Natasha accused again as Rhodes strode away.
“He died because of you” Natasha accused, driving the final dagger home as she turned her back on him.

Leaving Bucky as the only one left.

Steve gave him a sorrowful pleading look.

*Please don’t leave*

Bucky took one last unsympathetic look at Rogers’ bloody face.

“Sergeant Barnes?” Howard breathed in disbelief, blood running down his face.

And walked away.

Chapter End Notes

Daaammmnnnnn!!!

Soooooo much foreshadowing and heartbreak!!!

Hope you all enjoyed learning a but more about the Pack (and seeing Danny and Bobby's first date!!!)

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!!
Hi all! Happy New Year's Eve's Eve

I'm posting a little earlier today than I usually do, so enjoy not having to wait til 1:00 am for an update lol

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Scott's POV)

I watched as Barnes turned his back on Steve.

Walking away without so much as a backwards glance.

“Don’t worry about Malia or Lydia...We’ll find them...Maybe uh. Maybe you should talk to your Dad” I stammered uncomfortably.

Unsure how to handle the revelation that Stiles had killed Donovan like Theo had said, I turned away from him, opening the doors to the Animal Clinic.

I felt a pang of unwitting sorrow for the man beneath me.

Rogers looked so completely and utterly broken.

“This time I lost everyone”

I breathed in a deep calming breath.

My anger receding.

I just needed him to listen.

To talk to him openly about everything.

Man to man.

I turned to my Pack.

“We're still on duty” I reminded them.

Kira nodded, shifting her sword back into a belt as she made her way down the corridor.

Lydia hesitated a bit, no doubt still uneasy due to Tony's still uncertain fate, but after taking in a deep breath of her own she followed a similar path to Kira.

“Derek. You and Hayden stay with Tony” I told them.
The two of them had remained at the doorway in case they were needed.

With an almost imperceptible nod Derek gently guided Hayden back inside the room.

“You good here?” Stiles asked, looking between me and Rogers (who still looked to be catatonic).

“I’ll take care of it” I assured him.

Stiles nodded and trailed off down the hall.

Turning back to Rogers I saw that he still hadn't even bothered to sit up.

His eyes almost looked dead.

I heard the soft pattering of feet behind me.

Turning I saw Dr. Wu and Morrell with towels, bandages, and antiseptic.

“I thought he might need it” Dr. Wu explained, as if he thought I wouldn't let them clean Rogers’ up.

Though to be fair I can see why he would be wary.

I motioned my arm forward as a go-ahead and moved a bit more out of their way.

Rogers didn't even twitch as they shifted him upright and dabbed at his skin to wipe the blood off.

Not even when Dr. Wu examined his jaw and nose.

I watched as Dr. Wu popped Rogers’ jaw back in place.

While it was broken it should only be a hairline fracture, so it shouldn't take too long to heal. And with his jaw back in place he should be able to talk again.

“Thank you” I told Dr. Wu as he stood up.

The man gave me a critical, yet wary glance, but he nodded none-the-less.

Though he made his way back into the med room Morrell had chosen to stay.

I tried not to grit my teeth at that.

“I'd say sorry. But I'd be lying” I spoke aloud, gazing directly at Rogers.

Barely a blink.

That was fine.

I didn't really expect a response anyway.

“This isn't the end” I told him, bending down to his eye level.

“I know it may seem like it now. But you haven't lost them forever. Not yet” I continued sagely.

“Yes I did” Rogers mumbled hopelessly.

“Only if you don't try to fix things” I told him gently.
“You don't understand” Rogers declared softly, brokenly, “You come in here and use our secrets to tear us all apart”

“We're trying to help” I reminded him.

“Help?” he scoffed, a flicker of anger sparking in the shell of his eyes, “How is any of this helping?!”

“Ignorance can only get you so far. The world was already starting to turn against you and you were unwilling to bend” I scolded, my annoyance levels increasing again.

“I'm not talking about the Accords! I'm talking about how you're revealing secrets that aren't your place to reveal!” Rogers declared, raising his voice as he sat himself up straighter.

“Because it’s yours? Don't forget that if we hadn't stopped all of you at the airport Zemo was plotting to show the video to Tony while you and Barnes were all in the same room” I reminded him unmercifully, causing him to clench his teeth, “How well do you think that would have gone over?”

I could almost see him grinding.

“Why do you care so much?!” Rogers shouted.

“Because I was exactly like you!” I blurted out in frustration.

My admission making Rogers reel back slightly.

“And it nearly cost me everything!” I continued, shouting over at him.

Rogers run his eyes up and down over me, taking in my expressions and body language, his own face showing the confusion I smelled wafting off of him.

I took in a deep breath.

Praying that he would finally listen this time.

“I let someone in, giving him the benefit of the doubt...Sticking to the first impression I had of him when we were nine, and letting myself be blinded to all the warning signs” I began heavily, letting my own disappointment at myself echo in my voice.

“He came in and manipulated all of us” I revealed to him.

“No calls Scott...No Stiles. No Malia. No Lydia...You’re gonna have to wait here alone for what happens next”

From his shifting expression I could see that he was starting to make the correlation.

“He pitted us against each other”

“Liam the supermoon is feeding your anger. Making you more aggressive”

“I broke my friendship with Stiles...Kira had to leave to find a way to regain control of herself...Lydia was catatonic...Liam tried to kill me out of anger and grief when Hayden died...And Malia was pushing herself away because she was planning to do something she didn't think I would approve of” I listed painfully, one after the other.
Though he wasn't gaping like a fish, his mouth had gone slack, his eyes going as wide as saucers (especially at the part about Hayden).

“This time I lost everyone”

“An empire toppled by its enemies can rise again. But one which crumbles from within? That's dead. Forever” I recited, recalling a time those words had applied to us.

“You’ll get them back...You have too” my Mom affirmed.

“That's what Helmut Zemo tried to do with the Avengers...And that's exactly what happened to us” I told him, unshed tears stinging at the edges of my eyes.

“Why would they come back?” I asked her brokenly.

“We were nearly destroyed” I emphasized to him, the grief near palpable in my voice.

“Because you’re their leader...And even when a leader thinks they don’t have anything left to give, there’s still one thing” she said, waiting for me to look her in the eyes before she continued.

“Hope. Give them hope”

“We managed to fix things eventually...But when everything had first shattered I realized that everything that happened was all rooted in me” I revealed to him painfully.

“Something’s different...With me and my friends. With all of us...Something’s changed...I think it's because of me...And I don’t know how to fix it”

I had accepted that truth a long time ago.

I smelled the confusion on him, obviously not understanding how that could be.

“The person was able to manipulate us because he knew my personality...He guessed my actions and decisions and he knew he could use them to tear us apart” I told him.

“You still want to be part of the Pack?” I asked Theo in disbelief.

“Scott...I’m with you...For better or worse” Theo declared.

“Trust me there’s going to be worse” I assured him.

“I’m counting on it” Theo replied back smiling.

“He knew my black and white view of morality would come into conflict with some of my other friends who see things more in practical terms, or in gray” I continued.

“We can’t all be perfect...We can’t all be True Alphas” Theo mocked.

“When Liam and Hayden's lives were on the line I grew rash and desperate, just like you”

“He’s right. We don’t have time for that” I declared impatiently.

“No Scott don’t!” Lydia called out, but it was already too late.

My claws had already sunken into the back of Corey's neck.
“And it got people hurt...I hurt people...And it cost me the trust of my friends”

“Is he okay?” I gasped out after I had exited Corey's mind.

“The hell did you do to me?” Corey demanded.

“You’ll be alright” I told him, still gasping for breath.

“There’s blood” Corey realized in horror.

“You’ll heal” I said, brushing his comment aside, ignoring Lydia's look of disbelief at my callousness.

“Scott” Stiles questioned me gently, obviously wanting to know what was up with me.

“He’ll be fine!” I shouted, my uncontrolled panic and desperation coming through.

“He knew I would withhold important information from my friends if I thought it was for their benefit”

“Um...Yeah something’s happening to her. She’s got this aura around her...It’s hard to explain. Um it’s supposed to be part of her...But now it looks different. like...Almost like it’s taking over...I don’t know...Something’s happening...And to be honest...I don’t know if I can trust her anymore” I admitted to Theo after he played the clip of Kira speaking Japanese in her sleep.

“Sound familiar?” I said, giving him a pointed look.

Rogers actually flinched a bit at that.

“I didn't do it out of malice...I did it because I felt it was my duty to shoulder the burden for them...Even though I knew they deserved to know”

“Scott...You don’t think it was me...Do you?” Kira asked softly

“No...No of course not” I assured her, hoping she didn't read too much into that momentary pause.

“And it all blew up in my face...Again” I emphasized.

“Well then maybe you should tell her what her mother was actually trying to do that night” Derek said harshly.

“Because I've withheld information before” I continued, seeing the twisted look on Rogers' face.

“The first time I withheld information was from my ex-girlfriend on the details of surrounding her mother's death”

“She tried to kill you” Allison reiterated in disbelief.

I nodded.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she asked, sounding hurt and betrayed.

My admission was awarded with a flinch.

“I did it because I didn't want her to know that the only reason her mother was...injured by Derek was because she almost killed me”
“I’ll tell you everything. A-Anything you want to know. But right now-”

“Just tell me why?” she said desperately, cutting me off.

“I couldn’t...Allison I couldn’t let that be the last memory that you had of her”

Steve raised his eyebrows at me in surprise.

“I didn't want that to be the last memory she had of her” I told him sadly, “But you know what they say...The road to hell is paved with good intentions”

I watched helplessly as Allison hacked at Isaac without mercy.

Her slowly making her way over to Derek to finish him off.

“No...Allison!” I called out desperately.

“Because she didn’t know the reason why, her grandfather was able to use her grief and turn her against us for a time”

I halted in my sprint as Allison came around the corner pointing a crossbow at my chest.

“Allison” I said in disbelief, wondering why she was here.

“Where’s Derek?” she demanded.

“What’re you doing?” I asked her in confusion.

“If you’re not going to tell me, then get out of my way” she declared firmly.

“And that's on me” I declared, looking Rogers directly in the eyes.

“I told Kira that she was fine when I knew she wasn't”

“You’re not going to hurt anyone” I assured her softly.

“Scott...Look at me. Look at me with your other eyes and tell me what you see” Kira implored.

“That's on me” I emphasized, hoping that I was driving things home to him.

“In the end, withholding information benefits no one. Especially when you know they should know” I told him.

“I don’t know what to do. I don’t think anyone does...And maybe that’s why nobody's really talking to each other...Sometimes we don’t even notice each other...I think some of us are okay with that. Cause not talking makes it easier to keep secrets...I don’t know if anyone’s really lying about things. Maybe it’s more like lies of omission”

I breathed out a barely audible sigh of relief when I saw him nod his head brokenly in agreement.

“And that's why I came to help” I emphasized, bringing things back to his original question.

“Because I didn't want the Avengers to end up like us”

Finally I saw the spark of understanding in his eyes as he leaned his head back against the broken wall.
“I wanted to stop you from making the same mistakes I did” I told him truthfully.

Though I was ultimately too late.

“I didn't want you to have to hit below rock bottom before you realized that you needed to change”

(Happy's POV)

I couldn't help the giddiness that put a pep in my step.

As of today I was officially Asset Management!

Some people weren't happy with my newest promotion, but I couldn't care less.

I'll show'm that I was right for the job.

Contrary to what most people think, Tony didn't just give us what we wanted...Well actually for the most part he did try, but job-wise no way.

Pepper was CEO because she was a badass.

A fact others learned fairly quickly.

Just because I had wanted Asset Management didn't mean that Pepper and Tony would agree to give me the position.

So I took the time to demonstrate that I hadn't just been screwing around working for SI for over twenty years.

Being Head of Security in particular gave me some good experience in checking up on all our departments and finances, and making sure that no one was trying to steal any of Tony's tech.

The only difference now was that I actually ran the numbers, and personally made sure everything was where it needed to be.

Ding.

I looked down at my cell.

*Hey Happy. It's Peter again. Peter Parker. I was wondering if you had any missions for me today?*

I rolled my eyes at the kid’s text.

“Mission” I thought with a scoff.

*This isn't a James Bond film kid. I'm Asset Management, not Resource.*

Just as I had finished pressing send my incoming call screen came up, alerting me to a call from Rhodey.

“Hey” I answered, “Any news on the home front?”

“Where are you right now?” Rhodey asked, sounding grave.

“What happened?” I demanded, indirectly letting him know that I was in a secure space.
The only reason Rhodey would ever start off asking a question like that, is if it was something serious or confidential.

“Tony's in intensive care” Rhodey declared in angry solemnness.

“What?! Why?!” I demanded, already making a move for my keys.

“Heart failure. Nothing they can do” Rhodey said grimly.

“I thought you said Wu was coming to take care of it?” I demanded.

“Arrived just as he collapsed because of Rogers” Rhodey revealed, sounding incredibly pissed off.

“Rogers? As in America's Golden Boy?” I questioned skeptically.

I knew the guy could be a stubborn dick, but I didn't think he'd do something to cause Tony's heart to fail.

“I'll explain when you get here. Just grab Pepper on your way out” Rhodey near ordered.

“You bet your ass you better explain” I told him, ending the call.

As soon as my call screen vanished my phone automatically returned to my text chat with Parker.

Yeah of course. Sorry. Just tell Mr. Stark thanks again. The suit is amazing! I'll keep up the updates.

Unless he changed his mind about the voicemails?

I'm not bothering him am I?

I don't want to bother him.

I let out a large sigh and rubbed at my eyes in reluctant remorse.

“Crap”

(Rhodes’ POV)

As I got off the phone with Happy I fought the urge to chuck my phone at the wall in anger.

“How dare they!!” I thought furiously, thinking back to Natasha's omission, “How dare they lie and backstab Tony like that!!”

I scoffed a bit.

Actually, Romanoff wasn't so much a surprise.

She already stabbed Tony in the back (neck) once.

Rogers though….God I wanted nothing more than to put on my suit and have a turn at beating the man to a bloody pulp.

So much for being a 'good man’.

“Colonel” a familiar voice called out to me, bringing my attention back to my surroundings.
I watched as Vision phased through the corridor wall.

“How are you doin Viz?” I asked him.

“I am bombarded with a myriad of emotions...So many that I am unsure what to do with them” Vision admitted, sounding as broken as he did unsure and lost.

He was still learning how to deal with the more human of his emotions so it wasn't really that much of a surprise.

Especially with everything that has gone down he's probably feeling so many different things he's never had to deal with before, so it's no wonder he's so confused.

“Sadness...Disappointment. Worry. Betrayal” he listed grimly, “But most of all I do not understand why Captain Rogers would keep such information from Mr. Stark”

My expression darkened at the reminder.

“Logically one can only reason that such information would eventually be revealed. That informing Mr. Stark sooner rather than later would have been more beneficial to their relationship, and Mr. Stark's emotional well-being. That as their son Mr. Stark had a legal and personal right to know how his parents truly died...All the data I've gone through backs this...So then why did he lie?” Vision implored me.

“Because he wanted to have his cake and eat it too” I began bitterly, “Because he was being a selfish bastard...Because he is an emotionally unwell man protecting the last thing he has from his past...Take your pick and have at it”

Vision frowned a bit as he took in my reasoning.

I wondered if he was looking up the idiom, and going over the statistics and logistics of my answer.

Eventually he gave me a slow nod.

“I believe that you may be correct on all accounts Colonel” Vision agreed dismally.

Knowing didn't make you feel better though.

And I didn't think Viz actually knew any coping strategies.

“Come on” I told him, lightly patting his upper arm.

“Let's go wait for Pepper and Happy...And see if we can find you a new hobby in the meantime”

(Pepper's POV)

I was sorting through the newest topics to be discussed at the upcoming board meeting.

Namely pondering over Tony's upcoming meeting with Hope van Dyne, and my fascination with Tony's latest ideas for the prosthetic industry.
Combine that with his recent work on BARF, and SI had the potential to expand its reach to the veteran and mental health communities as well as expand our medical department.

“Give Tony a problem and he will figure out a way to fix it” I thought, with a hint of exasperation and fondness, “I just wish it was as easy for us to fix the issues in our relationship as it is for him to fix a car, or me to salvage a business deal”


“Hello” I greeted.

“Pepper. Grab your things and come to the lobby now” Happy demanded.

“What?” I demanded confused, standing up from my seat, “Are we under attack?”

I immediately scanned my surroundings, even looking out the floor to ceiling windows for any helicopters or planes.

“No. Tony's in the ICU at the Compound” Happy explained brusquely, sounding like he was rushing around.

Fear chilled up my spine.

“The ICU?! Why?! What happened?!” I demanded, grabbing my purse and a stack of folders.

My mind immediately went to Tony's list of approved physicians, reciting their numbers in my head and readying myself in order to deduce which one he would after Happy explained things further.

“I don't know. Rhodey just called and told me to get to the Compound” Happy replied, sounding just as annoyed by the lack of information as I felt.

“I am going to have words with him when we get there” I said irately, ending the call.

I did not appreciate the lack of information.

Pressing the down button I walked into right the private elevator and pressed the button for the ground floor.

The unknown was killing me.

Fearing that one day Tony would get killed because of the Avengers.

The Avengers for all they represented were good.

But I hated them with a passion.

Tony had retired.

He was no longer risking his life on a daily basis.

Then DC happened.

Fortunately Tony had created a backup armor in case of emergencies

Then Steve pulled him back in on mission after mission.
It was causing a strain in our relationship, but it was manageable.

Then Ultron happened and Tony was more involved with the Avengers than ever before.

The fact that it wasn't really Iron Man work didn't make things better.

Getting involved with the Avengers had, once again, caused another downward spiral in Tony's life, and due to all the damages of Ultron's aftermath Tony didn't have time for anything else but Avengers work.

He had promised that he was done.

Then he had promised that it was only a few missions.

Then he had promised that he would make sure to balance us and Iron Man better.

All those promises broken because of the Avengers.

The world needed Tony Stark.

Not Iron Man.

I needed Tony.

Logically I knew that using the suit allows him to help people.

But he can help people without it too.

He wasn't getting any younger.

And at the rate he was going Iron Man would be the death of him (if it wasn't already).

When I asked for a break I told him that I couldn't be that military wife waiting for her husband to return home, only to find out he had died overseas instead.

I loved him, but I couldn't be with him only to bury him.

Fighting the tears in my eyes I scrolled through my list of contacts to find Rhodey's name.

However when another name flashed by I couldn't help but pause, slowly moving the screen back.

Harley Keener

(Steve's POV)

Scott was right.

My stubbornness in my own beliefs and justifications tore us all apart.

Zemo had used my own personality against me.

And I played right into his hands.

And the truly sad thing was that at any point things could have gone differently if I had made different decisions.
But I didn't.

Zemo knew I didn't trust governments after the fall of SHIELD, and hinged a lot of his plans on the assumption that I wouldn't agree with the Accords either just based on that fact.

He needed to find Bucky in order to get the mission report, so he publicly framed him knowing that a world-wide manhunt would likely turn him up.

He counted on my desperation to protect Bucky.

That I would go after him when he tried to leave the JCTC, and that we wouldn't go back due to my distrust of Agent Ross.

He counted on me and Tony constantly disagreeing over the Accords.

That I would keep him out of the loop.

That I would withhold information.

I brought Clint and Lang into a matter they had no business in.

I helped encourage Wanda’s poor behavior and indirectly incited her into attacking Vision unnecessarily.

Because of me we were all on house arrest.

The world thought we were rogues.

All my decisions had cost me my friends.

Tony was dead.

Because of me.

Listening to Scott it was very eerie how similar our situations were.

“So what do I do now?” I asked him hollowly, “How do I fix this?”

Because right now it didn't seem possible to me.

“Sometimes in order to rebuild you need to destroy the old foundation” Morrell proclaimed, speaking for the first time.

“Once all the rubble and mess from the demolition has been cleared away you will have room to rebuild again...This time on a stronger, sturdier foundation” she continued sagely.

“Yeah well... I've made quite a mess” I huffed out, “If I'm lucky it'll only take years to clear away all the rubble”

“Maybe” Scott admitted, “There'll be bumps and snags...But so long as you keep at it you eventually will”

(Fury's POV)

I watched as Rogers finally picked himself up off the ground.
He was still a shell of his former self-confident, self-righteous self.

But he was standing again.

As he always does.

I watched as Rogers walked away.

Taking a huge slice of humble pie with him.

“You think he listened?” Scott asked when Rogers was far enough away.

Judging from Rogers’ expressions throughout Scott’s little speech it certainly seemed like something had gotten through.

“When we hit our lowest point we are open to our greatest change” Morrell advised.

Now whether that change would be good or bad we will have to wait and see.

Only time will tell if Rogers actually learned anything from this experience.

Unlike me, Rogers didn't have the thick skin necessary to withstand the fallout of his secrets coming out.

The thick skin that came from experiencing countless betrayals, underhandedness, and seeing the worst the world (the universe) had to offer.

“Last time I trusted someone, I lost an eye”

“So...skrulls are the bad guys?”

The idea to bring together a group of people to defend the Earth from things the average officers never could, was never a new concept.

“And what connection does Isaiah Bradley have to Dr. Erskine?”

"There's important work to be done in the field that only the Particle can handle" Hank declared, “And the only way SHIELD gets the Pym Particle is with a Pym operating it”

“If my husband is going to be putting his life on the line for SHIELD then he’s going to need a good partner watching his back” Janet stated resolutely, daring anyone to contradict her insertion into SHIELD.

“Project G.O.L.I.A.T.H will work Fury” Bill assured me as he zipped himself in the test suit, “David and Goliath were adversaries. The small man defeating the giant. Just think what the giant, small man, and woman, could do as allies”

“War is a universal language...I know a renegade soldier when I see one...Never occurred to me that one might come from above”

“The X-men do not give up. They stand up” Charles Xavier reminded him, a firm resolution in his tone, “We may have chosen to fall to the wayside for the sake of peace and coexistence, but make no mistake, it is not our dream that has fallen to the wayside...The world will always need the X-men”

“We have no idea what threats are out there...We can't do this alone...We need you” I declared,
locking eyes with Carol, begging her not to leave.

The current iteration was brought together through a common death, and the threat of invasion.

Banner was correct in that the end group selected was too combustible, to volatile.

A group with too many secrets and too many personal issues ignored.

But the world needed the Avengers.

And if the current roster needed to be torn down first in order for a better one to take its place, then so be it.

(Liam’s POV)

“Liam you need to calm down” Argent tried to placatingly reason.

“Calm down?! Right now every one of my instincts are telling me to get to Scott even if it means running all the way to New York!” I declared in frustration.

Ever since Scott had Bitten Tony Fucking Stark I’ve had the overwhelming urge to be near Scott and Sta-Tony.

Back when Scott had Bitten Hayden I had felt the instinctual need to remain with her and Scott through her transition...But it had felt nothing like this.

Argent had tried to assure me that it was probably because I was so far away from Scott and our new Pack member that I was having so many issues.

While Scott is connected to all of us, Derek had explained that betas turned by the Alpha themself have a stronger connection to each other since it was the Alpha’s spark that turned them.

Especially in Scott's case.

Since Scott creates his own alpha spark through the strength of his willpower, character, and emotions, his power level can not only fluctuate according to all three, but it can only be stolen from him by a beta of his own creation since their own power comes from the very spark that he generates.

Any beta Scott personally turns will automatically have a stronger connection to him.

And in turn, each of his betas will feel a slightly stronger connection to each other since their power had stemmed from the same source.

I knew that.

I understood that.

But it still didn't change the fact that I wanted to hop on the next available jet to the Big Apple.

“I should be there” I stated weakly, pacing in frustration.

“For what? Your glowing emotional support?” Theo mocked sarcastically.

The smug bastard was sitting casually with his shoes up on the table.
“Nobody needs your running commentary” I fired back annoyed.

“My commentary is exactly what you all need, seeing how nobody is commenting on the fact that Scott just bit Tony Fucking Stark” Theo emphasized.

“We still don't know if he's going to survive” Corey pointed out.

“Whether he survives or not doesn't matter” Theo declared, “The Avengers are going to want answers”

“Doesn't mean we have to tell them everything” Argent pointed out.

“Do you really think that they're going to accept the cliff notes version? Because it doesn't take a rocket scientist to infer that they're going to try and steal the whole paper” Theo retorted.

“Then we do damage control. If Tony Stark does survive the transition then we'll make sure he understands that he needs to keep things under wraps” Argent mediated.

“I am Iron Man” Theo declared scoffing at the end of the badly mimed quote, “Yeah that'll go over well”

“Would you shut up! You're not helping!” I shouted, directing my ire at him.

“As much as I hate to admit it, Theo has a point. I can't really imagine Tony Stark listening to Scott...Or any Alpha” Corey pointed out.

“It's Scott” I reminded them firmly, “He's not controlling, or a dictator. Sta-Tony will see that...Eventually”

Hopefully.

(Wanda's POV)

Smash.

I aimed another blast at yet another robot, blowing it apart.

“I found a video”

Seeing movement out of the corner of my eye I willed the car to freeze, my powers wrapping around it.

“...A video of what?” I asked reluctantly, not liking where this was going.

Seeing that I was starting to get surrounded I launched the car at the robots coming towards me, completely mowing them down.

“A video of the Winter Soldier killing Howard and Maria Stark”

With a sudden burst of anger and betrayal I let loose a wave of energy, willing it to dismantle any robots it came into contact with.

I huffed a bit as the last of the red faded away, leaving only metal parts behind.

With a ding the simulation concluded, the scenery and destruction fading away and dematerializing
like a video game.

“You're getting better” a voice noted behind me.

I turned to see Kira at the edge of the simulation area.

“Because I'm angry” I noted bitterly.

She said nothing.

Of course her silence only irritated me further.

“Aren't you going to say anything? Isn't that what you came here for?” I mocked irately.

Kira raised an exasperated eyebrow at me.

“I'm not a mind reader...I can't really give you advice if I don't know what the problem is” she retorted calmly.

“My problem is the man I looked up to as a mentor” I growled, stepping closer to her.

“Ever since I joined the Avengers he's treated me delicately, gently. Told everyone that I’d been through hell in my life and that I needed a turn-around...That I was a good person...That things weren't my fault and that we couldn't save everyone” I ranted angrily, “And then he goes around and lies to Stark's face about the deaths of his parents for years?”

Seeing my parents’ bodies under the collapsed beams.

Waiting in fear as Pietro and I were trapped underneath that rubble, staring at that bomb with the Stark Industries logo emblazoned on it.

The foolishness I felt after I learned that Hydra were truly the ones responsible for the war in Sokovia. For the false Stark Industries bomb that had fallen on our house.

It was no different to seeing a video, and watching in fear as a man you had become friends with murdered your parents.

Parents you had thought died under different circumstances.

Only to learn that it was all a lie.

A lie that someone you trusted knew.

I wasn't Stark's friend.

We barely tolerated each other's presence.

He didn't like being in the same room as me, and I was just as uncomfortable.

Though at this point I no longer had any misplaced anger towards him.


But now I felt something I never thought I ever would.

Anger for him.
“Steve had no right to keep that from Stark” I declared angrily.

“No he didn’t” Kira agreed pityingly, her reply short and unhelpful.


They always seemed to magically have something to say to us.

“No advice on hypocritically nice mentors?” I continued, glaring her down challengingly.

“The only mentors I ever had employed tough love, so…” Kira trailed off, giving me a rueful half-smile.

I couldn't help but scoff a bit, her answer deflating my anger slightly.

I didn't know if her answer made me feel better or not.

But honestly didn't know if I could handle anymore advice right now either.

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(Fury's POV)

“Go back with Dr. Wu. I have something I need to take care of” Scott, gently, near ordered Morrell.

An order she complied with.

While she may not be Scott’s emissary she did respect him enough to listen (for the most part).

Scott turned his attention to the shadows I had hidden myself behind.

Taking that as my cue I moved forward into the light of the hall.

“I hope you understand what this is going to mean if Stark survives” I began warningly.

Scott gave me a grim look.

“Frankly all my mind keeps going to is the worst case scenario” Scott admitted.

“Good” I told him, “You should be planning for the worst case scenario...Then maybe you'll be a fraction prepared for what is about to come”

“And what exactly is coming?” Scott questioned.

“You already know what's coming…. It's been in the works a long time now” I told him knowingly.

Scott nodded solemnly.

“Exposure” he breathed out, his voice sounding heavy.

“The world has for the most part accepted the mutant population as part of the norm...Like with anything there are still racist and prejudice bastards, but nobody other than the rare extremist groups will bother going after them these days” I began, “The Inhumans are more feared due to their non-human heritage”

“But we'd cause an apocalyptic World War” Scott finished knowingly.
“Maybe just world-wide chaos and fear if steps are taken now” I corrected.

“Comforting” Scott retorted sarcastically.

“The world’s getting ready to change again Scott…Maybe it’s time you take your own advice…Show them that you’re not the monsters they’ll think you are”

(Clint’s POV)

There were lines that you just didn’t cross.

You don’t lie about someone’s family.

Yes I kept my family’s existence a secret for years.

But that was for their safety.

Thunk.

Lying about how someone’s family died, was murdered, and yet having the gall to look that same person in the face and bash them for keeping secrets?

Angrily I tossed another dart at the board, hearing the soft chink as it knocked the previous dart out of the way.

I knew I screwed up leaving my family and getting involved with the Accords.

But now?

I left my family for literally nothing!

It was all about Barnes.

How could I have been so stupid not to have realized that earlier.

Frustrated at myself I turned away from the stupid dart board, not getting the release I’d hoped for since I couldn’t use my bow, tossing the remaining three darts at the board without looking.

“That’s a party trick” Stiles muttered from the far corner of my room.

“You all knew” I questioned accusingly, turning on him.

Stiles gave me a grim look.

“Zemo fessed up pretty easily” Stiles admitted solemnly.

“That’s why he wanted Steve, Barnes, and Tony in Siberia isn’t it…He was going to use that to tear everything apart from within” I declared knowingly.

Stiles nodded.

“Well” I began, smiling sarcastically with an accompanying slow clap, “I gotta give the son-of-a-bitch props. He succeeded”

Stiles said nothing. An odd look morphing onto his face.
Sympathy?

“Only if you let’m” Stiles said, slowly.

“Nice first attempt at being positive. Doesn’t suit you” I snorted.

“Yeah being positive isn’t my thing...I’m just saying don’t completely shut Rogers out. I know he completely fucked up.”

“That’s an understatement” I said, cutting him off.

“But we had something similar happen to us with Scott-”

“Temperamental goody-two-shoes McCall?” I stated in disbelief.

Sure he was dangerous when angry, but the kid seemed to have a good head on his shoulders...When it wasn’t sporting red eyes and fangs.

“Like you thought Rogers was such a paragon of morality and righteousness?” Stiles countered back snidely.

“...Touche” I agreed bitterly after a moment of silence.

“The problem is the higher you put someone on a pedestal, the easier it is to forget that they're human too...That they have flaws and make mistakes just like everyone else” Stiles advised sagely, “We made the mistake of doing that with Scott, and it facilitated in almost tearing us all apart”

I only followed people I respected.

I respected Fury.

I respected Coulson.

I respected Steve.

I knew Fury kept secrets.

I knew Coulson did.

But Steve had always said he hated secrets.

Especially after Ultron.

Just about everything left a bad taste in my mouth about that.

I may still be mentoring Wanda, but that didn’t mean I had forgiven her for mind-raping Tony (and Banner) and keeping quiet about it.

I wanted her to change for the better.

But like I told Nat when I first brought her to SHIELD...If she ever became a threat again I won’t hesitate to finish the job I was given.

The same went for Wanda.

The same went for Steve.
I followed his command because I respected his leadership.

Well no more.

He’s not going to get unquestioning compliance from me anymore.

If he wants me to follow him again he’s going to have to earn my respect back.

And that sure as hell isn’t an easy thing to do.

(Scott's POV)

I knew Fury was right.

Our kind needed more exposure.

We needed the public’s trust.

The minor publicity on the Shadow Guard, and the backing of the UN was a good start...But it was also a double-edged sword.

Any positive publicity would incite retaliation in Monroe and her forces.

If we made ourselves look like heroes she might reveal the supernatural's existence to the world.

We needed publicity, but at the same time we couldn't risk it.

After the Beacon Hills Civil War the Pack and I were confronted by high prestige members of the supernatural community, all demanding to know what the hell had gone down in Beacon Hills (and across the globe).

Half of them wanted to kill us for indirectly being responsible for Monroe's vendetta, while the other half sang us praises for standing up against her and Gerard.

Ultimately a Supernatural Council was formed in order to try and organize ourselves against the threat Monroe still posed to not only us, but to the peace of the world.

For almost three years the Council has been drafting different potential laws, regulations, alternative measures, and potential PR tactics to be enacted both prior to and after our existence is finally revealed.

The only solace we have is that President Ellis knows of the existence of the supernatural (apparently it was knowledge passed down in the position) and is willing to help make sure to maintain peace.

“Chaos will still reign” I noted.

“Then it's a good thing you're new beta is a futurist isn't it?” Fury countered back, turning to go back to whatever hole in the Compound he was hiding.

“We still don't know he'll live” I reminded him.

Something still felt off...Something not quite right with his transition.

“Stark's too stubborn to stay dead” Fury replied, his voice echoing slightly as he walked away.
Honestly I didn't know if I wanted that to be true or not.

Suddenly I felt a buzz as my phone vibrated in my pants pocket.

Pulling out my cell I saw that my caller ID read Deaton.

Immediately pressed the answer call button.

“Hello” I greeted glumly.

“Well you sound like you’ve taken Atlas’ place” Deaton greeted in return.

“I'm sure you felt that I Bit someone” I said, cutting right to the chase.

“I did” Deaton admitted easily.

“Not gonna ask who?” I inquired curiously.

“I got a visit from Sheriff Stilinski” Deaton replied simply.

“So you know” I breathed heavily.

“And how is his transition?” Deaton asked.

“His body's healing. He's still clinically dead. But he's healing” I informed him.

“That's a good sign” Deaton stated, though from his tone I already could tell that he knew something was up, “No black blood?”

“No” I replied simply.

“But you feel that something is still wrong” Deaton figured knowingly.

“Something just feels off” I admitted aloud for the first time.

“Off how?” Deaton prompted, needing more details.

“Just...off. Not like he's not going to make it...He just doesn't feel like Liam or Hayden” I told him.

And that was what was concerning me.

“Do you still have a Bond with him?” Deaton inquired, sounding slightly concerned now as well.

“I do” I confirmed.

“Is it weaker or stronger than with Liam or Hayden?” Deaton asked curiously, fishing for more details.

“About the same so far” I replied, wondering where this was going.

“Hm” Deaton pondered.

“What?” I asked him, recognizing the sound as Deaton's I-think-I-know-what's-going-on-but-I'm-not-going-to-tell-you-just-yet grunt.

“I think I know what it is you may be feeling” he replied.
“But?” I prompted, knowing that there was a catch.

“But I'd like to make a few phone calls first to confirm my theory” he answered.

“The full moon's tomorrow” I reminded him.

“Hopefully I'll have your answer by then”

(Sam’s POV)

I was pissed off.

I was pissed off and I had no idea how to release my anger.

The boxing equipment only pissed me off more, reminding me of the source of my anger.

Running wouldn’t give me the physical release that I’d need.

The shooting range was out.

No way I was going back to the place Stark had died any time soon.

I rubbed my hands against my face harshly in frustration.

I needed a new fucking hobby.

I heard the familiar soft click of heels against the tiles.

Turning, I saw that my hunch had been correct.

Lydia made her way slowly into the lounge in a muted daze, not really looking at me...or anything.

“I possess precognitive powers that allow me to sense death...All death”

“Crap” I thought, pityingly, “I can’t even imagine what she must be feeling right now”

Actually....

I gave her a moment to herself as she rested on the couch, staring blankly out the large windows.

Taking in a deep breath I made my way over to her.

If I couldn’t deal with my anger right now, maybe I could try and help her.

I eased myself slowly down onto the cushions, gazing at her as I sat.

No reaction.

“You okay?” I asked, going the direct route.

“I will be” she replied, still staring out the window.

Well, that was more than I expected to get at the first question.

“Stark’s...death weighing on you?” I asked her, catching myself before I stumbled on that word.
“Isn’t it weighing on you?” she retorted calmly.

“Touche” I replied, “But I’m not the one who senses death”

“And I didn’t know him” she countered.

“Neither did I...Not really anyway” I replied lowly, “We weren’t really friends...Co-workers sure...Acquaintances...I respected him though”

Just when the whole Team was starting to bond and learn more about each other…

Learning that Steve and Natasha had lied about the deaths of Stark’s parents wasn’t exactly what I had in mind when I said I wanted us to learn some more stuff about each other.

“Respect” Lydia corrected, still not looking me in the eyes.

I gazed at her in mild surprise.

“He’s alive?” I questioned in hopeful disbelief.

By the way she was acting I figured that Stark wasn’t going to survive the ‘Bite’ or whatever.

“He’s in a kind of limbo right now” she admitted solemnly.

“Limbo...So it could still go either way?” I asked curiously, wanting some more clarification.

“I don’t feel the urge to scream anymore...Take from that what you will” she replied, going silent once more.

“Thank God for that” I mumbled, “My hearing is still muffled from the last time”

I counted the small upturn of her lips a win for now.

Of course with the silence returned it left me open to my spiraling angry thoughts, with Steve at the epicenter.

I already had the revelation that Steve omitted things pretty frequently...But this?

I didn’t know if I could ever really trust Steve again.

(Scott's POV)

Just as I got off the phone with Deaton I got an incoming call from Stiles.

Hopefully nothing was wrong.

I didn't want to have to handle any more issues right now.

“What's wrong?” I asked, letting Stiles hear the exhaustion I felt.

“Nothing. Barton wanted an update on St-Tony and figured he'd have more luck if I called you and asked” Stiles admitted, “You're on speaker phone by the way”

I let out a sigh.

“Well. He's not wrong” I mumbled, “I just got off the phone with Deaton. He's gonna look into
something for me”
“Everything alright?” Stiles asked at the same time Barton demanded, “What does that mean?”
“Is he gonna make it or not?” Barton demanded.
“I'm not going to give you a definitive answer right now...But his body is healing” I informed him. I didn't want him to get his hopes up.
“But something's bugging you” Stiles stated knowingly.
“Deaton thinks he knows what it is, but he wants confirmation first...It didn't sound bad though” I admitted. At least I hoped that I had read Deaton correctly.
“Well that's as good as it's gonna get for now” Stiles declared, most likely at Barton, “By the way, Peter keeps calling me”
Peter?
“Is he Extra Crispy?” Barton asked.
“Extra Crispy?” I questioned, confused what he was even talking about.
Peter wasn't a food...
“Yeah. A number ID keeps popping up with the name Extra Crispy on Stilinski's phone” Barton said, sounding mildly amused.
“You put Peter in your phone as Extra Crispy?” I deadpanned.
“Hey!” Stiles declared, sounding slightly offended, “Everybody else has him as either Satan in V-neck or Creepy Uncle Peter...I wanted to be unique”
“Who the hell is Peter?” Barton asked, sounding a bit less amused and slightly more concerned.
“A psychotic murderer” Stiles replied unhelpfully.
“Stiles” I breathed out in exasperation.
“Fine. Reformed psychotic murderer….Sort of” Stiles corrected.
I could almost hear Barton's eyebrows at they hit the atmosphere.
“I'll call him” I informed Stiles, hanging up the call.
Stiles could deal with Barton’s questions.
I immediately scrolled through my phone, wanting to get this over with as soon as possible.
Unsurprisingly he picked up on the second ring.
“So the Alpha finally deems me worthy enough of his time to call back” the familiar snide greeted me.
“What'd you want Peter?” I retorted back, not feeling up to dealing with any of his games right now.

“I want to know which one of the Avengers it is you Bit” Peter replied, sounding like his usual cocky know-it-all-self.

“How do you know it's even one of the Avengers I Bit?” I challenged.

“Call it a hunch based on the logistics of our lives” Peter retorted in his usual calm, sarcastic drall.

“Tony Stark” I revealed with an exasperated huff.

“Tony?” Peter parroted in surprise.

“You know him?” I asked skeptically.

“We've been acquainted” Peter replied.

“That's not a comforting thought” I retorted back.

“I must say though I'm impressed...You chose well” Peter complimented.

Of course any time Peter compliments you, you automatically feel skeevy.

“What are you talking about?” I demanded in an exasperated tone.

“Making Tony Stark one of us...Risky. But strategically beneficial” Peter elaborated, sounding like he was thinking of all the advantages and disadvantages of Tony Stark being one of us.

“It had nothing to do with tactics or strategy...Between Morrell, Lydia, and the rest of the Avengers I caved under the pressure” I told him, slightly annoyed.

“Then it would seem that I owe our dear counseling druid a fruit basket” Peter said whimsically.

“If this is all you called to say-”

“I called to give you some advice” Peter corrected, cutting me off.

“Which I will be skeptical of taking” I reminded him.

“Tony Stark is not just going to accept this” Peter said, sounding slightly more serious.

“I already know that” I responded tightly.

“Do you? Because take it from someone who's slightly more acquainted with him...Picture how resistant both you and Liam were when you were first Bitten...and then multiply that by fifty” Peter detailed sternly, “That's about how difficult this is going to be”

“I'm still not hearing any advice” I pointed out.

“Don't hover and don't seem controlling” Peter (finally) advised.

“That's ironic coming from you” I said sardonically.

“Take my advice or don't. Just remember” Peter said, taking a dramatic pause.

“Tony Stark doesn't need fangs and claws to be dangerous”
Chapter End Notes

Oodles and oodles of foreshadowing.
What is wrong with Tony?
Steve has started on his path to reformation! Wanda's moment is upcoming ;)
Pleased please please please comment!!!!!
(Ancient One’s POV)

A shutter past through me as a wave rippled through the fabric of energy in our Universe.

No.

Not just a wave.

The very course of our Universe has shifted in the entirety of its direction.

“The Council will need to be informed...Especially due to the root cause of such a radical shift” I pondered uneasily.

“Is everything alright?” Hamir inquired, noticing my grave surprise.

At his words Strange and Mordo paused in their spar.

Ever since he had learned to use the sling ring Strange has been improving by leaps and bounds, already capable of creating whips and other tools, which he was currently using in his spar.


“Is everything alright?” Hamir inquired, noticing my grave surprise.

His comment was met with silence.

Though contrary to my (now) more neutral expression Mordo did reward Strange with a raised eyebrow.

“You know? Star W-You know what? Never mind” Strange declared, giving up on trying to explain yet another one of his pop culture references.

“You’re more right than you realize” I admitted, my words sounding as ominous as they were.

“I uh, I was joking” Strange stammered slightly, awkwardly.

Even now still the skeptic.

“A decision was made…Setting our Universe’s course on a different path” I revealed, my
admittance causing a thread of uneasy tension in Hamir and Mordo.

“...A path it was not supposed to take?” Strange hesitantly asked, seeing the others’ unease, not sounding like he was sure if he wanted to know the answer or not.

“There are an infinite number of possibilities hinged on every decision one makes” I corrected.

“But you did not expect this one?” Mordo asked carefully.

“I don’t think anyone could have”

(Maria’s POV)

“That is not explaining what happened” Sharon declared crossly.

I had been overseeing the last bit of renovations at the Hub when Friday had alerted me that Stark had collapsed from heart failure.

Sharon and I had immediately made our way to the private ICU room, only to be stymied by Stark’s cardiologist.

“I’m sorry Ms.?” Dr. Wu inquired.

“Carter. I’m on the list of individuals to be contacted as Tony’s power of attorney if Ms. Potts, Colonel Rhodes, Mr. Hogan, and Ms. Rhodes are unavailable” Sharon explained irately.

I couldn't blame her, Wu wasn't telling us anything of particular use.

“I apologize Ms. Carter, but there is a lot I myself do not even understand right now” Dr. Wu admitted.

I tensed uneasily at that.

Unknown information was not good information.

Especially with a critical person of interest like Stark.

“Unfortunately that is not an acceptable answer Doctor” I told him sternly.

Dr. Wu let out a heavy sigh.

“If you’re not in surgery right now I’m assuming he’s okay, relatively speaking?” Sharon inquired.

“Clinically speaking Tony Stark is dead” Dr. Wu corrected.

Silence.

What?!

“I’m sorry...I think I just misheard you” Sharon said, her voice dangerously low, “Because there is no way you just told me that Tony Stark is dead”

“As of right now he is clinically dead and apparently reviving” Dr. Wu elaborated, sounding disbelieving himself.

“Reviving?” I demanded, “How is that even possible?”
Did Fury inject Stark with GH.325?

I thought all the work on it was destroyed after Coulson?

“That falls into the large category of things I don’t understand” he declared with an exasperated sigh.

Before either myself or Sharon could ask any further questions Wu held up his hand.

“If you have any further questions on that vein I suggest that you speak to either Mr. McCall or Ms. Morrell for answers” he informed us, sounding exhausted.

“Why them?” I asked suspiciously.

“Because it is Mr. McCall’s...bite, that is apparently reviving Tony” Dr. Wu explained.

“Bite?” Sharon demanded, sounding as confused as I felt.

“Then if you could tell Mr. McCall that we’d like to speak with him I’d be greatly appreciated” I requested of him, giving him a polite, yet obvious dismissal.

I needed real answers.

Tony was dead.

And apparently a fight had broken out seeing as maintenance was currently cleaning blood up off the floor.

Dr. Wu nodded and opened the door back into the ICU.

If Fury wasn’t going to answer my questions, then I’ll go straight to the source.

(Natasha’s POV)

I stood stock still, staring at the gravestone as if it held all the answers that I was seeking.

“Be careful Steve. You might not want to pull on that thread” I warned him gravely, knowing what he would find if he chose to open that folder.

“This is where it all started” I thought bitterly.

“You flee all the way here to disturb my grave and you don’t even leave flowers” a familiar sarcastic drall sounded behind me.

I couldn’t be in the Compound right now.

He understood that.

Or else he wouldn’t have come.

“I left a post-it on the CD that said I’ll leave it for you to tell” I began.

“That thing you asked for, I called in a few favors from Kiev” I told him, handing Steve all the information I managed to procure.

“When I handed him that folder I trusted that he would do the right thing...Expected that he would
do the right thing” I detailed, the words leaving a sour taste in my mouth.

“He didn’t do as you expected” Fury said, voicing the obvious aloud.

“He lied” I exclaimed, still in shocked disbelief, “He lied to my face when I asked him...And I didn’t even realize it’

I had been played.

I allowed myself to be blinded by my own biases.

“People are capable of anything with the right motivation” Fury pointed out.

“Tony died because of him” I snapped back at him, irately.

“Stark died because of a multitude of things...The betrayal was just the straw that broke the camel’s back” Fury corrected.

“It shouldn’t have been a factor in it at all” I countered in calm anger.

“No...But we can’t change the past. Only our actions in the future” he reminded me, though it wasn't what I had wanted to hear.

“Steve has repeatedly shown that he’s perfectly okay with lies of omission if the situation suits him” I challenged.

How could I have allowed myself to ignore all the warning signs?

“Losing everything is a good motivator for change” Fury calmly pointed out.

“Well you seem pretty chipper for someone who just found out that they died for nothing” I teased Steve semi-seriously.

“Well. I guess I just like to know who I’m fighting” Steve replied, leaning back in his seat, slightly amused by my comment.

“None of us are innocent” Fury reminded me.

As if I needed a reminder.

“And all of us were given a second chance in one form or another” Fury exclaimed, turning to leave me with that last piece of imparted wisdom.

(Sharon’s POV)

“So your bite, has transformative properties?” I questioned him skeptically.

“Basically” Scott confirmed, sounding exasperated and done with the world, but trying to be nice about it.

“And if his body accepts the transition it will continue to heal him until he essentially revives by the time of the full moon tomorrow?” Maria asked, bouncing off me, sounding just as skeptical.

“Yes” Scott replied blandly.
“So he’s going to be like you?” I asked, narrowing my eyes at him.

“Like me, Derek, and Hayden” Scott corrected, huffing out a tired breath.

“And just what exactly are you?” I questioned, not caring that he was tired.

Tony was dead.

He was dead and being revived as an enhanced.

I wasn’t leaving here until every what, how, and why was answered.

“Basically...A shapeshifter” Scott revealed, sounding fed up.

I reeled back slightly in shock.

What?!

“A shapeshifter” Maria demanded, immediately wanting clarification as she gazed at Scott distrustfully, her hand subtly moving closer to her gun.

I wish I had mine.

“A type of shapeshifter yes. I’ll explain a bit more once Ms. Potts arrives” Scott detailed, his tone making it clear that he was done answering any questions for now.

As if to make that clear he walked back into the private ICU room without so much as a backwards glance.

The soft click of the door might as well have been a slam.

He was a shapeshifter?

This changes things.

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(Third POV)


“Deputy Director” Agent Ross addressed, answering his cell phone.

“Agent Ross” Marion James greeted, “I have a job for you. We just got word that the Museum of Great Britain was robbed by Ulysses Klaue a few hours ago. You and your team have been assigned to the case. The files are being sent to you now”

“Yes Ma'am” Agent Ross declared.

This was their first hot lead on Klaue since Ultron and the Maximoffs had tracked him down and left his arm behind as a present for them.

“Find him Ross. I do not want him getting away again” Marion ordered firmly, the warning not to fuck up evident in her voice.

“Yes ma'am” Agent Ross declared, ending the call.

He couldn't afford any more fuck ups right now.
He was still being scrutinized as it was.

He really didn't want to leave his oversight of Zemo, but orders were orders.

He'd just have to double check everything before he left.

(Third POV)

“I will throw you over. Now Yield!” T’Challa demanded, tightening his thighs around M’Baku’s throat, further cutting off his air supply, “Your people need you”

Through hazy vision M’Baku gazed out at his men pointing their spears at him, their eyes screaming in pain as they could do nothing to help their leader.

“Yield man!” T’Challa roared, hoping he would not have to toss the other man over the Falls.

Accepting T’Challa’s words M’Baku released his already weakening grip on T’Challa’s leg, tapping out.

Throwing his head back in relief T’Challa released M’Baku from his grip.

T’Challa stood as M’Baku was taken back to his Tribe, the crowd roaring in applause and celebration for the newest Black Panther’s victory.

“I now present to you, your new King!” Zuri declared proudly, adorning T’Challa’s neck with the ceremonial necklace.

“My King” Zuri whispered in T’Challa’s ear as he pulled him in for a quick hug, proud of the man he had become.

Despite the happy moment T’Challa knew that he would have a long road ahead of him.

He would show everyone that despite his rashness in Europe his eyes had been open to many things.

He had learned harsh lessons.

Gained new potential allies.

And through all that he has experienced, it would allow him to rule them all well.

T’Challa crossed his arms in an X across his chest.

“Wakanda forever!”

(Third POV)

WHAM. WHAM-WHAM-WHAM. WHAM-WHAM.

Steve watched as Bucky wailed everything he had into each punch of the bag.

Though...Tony...had made them with him in mind, they weren't made specifically for someone with a titanium arm who also had near superhuman strength.
There was a noticeable strain each time Bucky hit the bag with his left arm.

WHAM. WHAM. WHAM. WHAM-WHAM-WHAM.

Steve had no doubt that Bucky was likely imagining his face every time he struck the bag.

While he had never shied away from confrontation he wasn't so sure that confronting anybody so soon was a good idea.

WHAM-WHAM. WHAM. WHAM!

But he couldn’t just leave things to stew either.

“If I even said sorry would it matter?” I called out, deciding to jump right in.

WHAM!

The bag teetered at that last punch.

Bucky still had yet to turn around.

But his fists were clenched so tightly his knuckles were white, and Steve could tell he was likely fighting for some semblance of control seeing as his shoulders were moving up and down as he took in heavy breaths.

“I think you've already established that your words mean nothing” Bucky bit out harshly, glaring holes in the punching bag.

He didn't trust himself to actually face Rogers right now.

Steve closed his eyes at the jab.

Frankly it was nicer than he deserved.

“Actions speak louder than words” Steve continued, opening his eyes once more, leaving the 'I'll show you’ unspoken.

“The world is still recovering from your so-called actions over words” Bucky countered icily.

Steve winced a bit at that.

Yet again another undeniable fact.

Gazing sadly at Bucky's tense back Steve found himself at a loss.

He had no idea where to even try and began to make any kind of amends.

……Maybe he needed to try a more direct approach...Even if it got him (another) broken jaw.

“I should have told him. I had no excuse not to...I was just being selfish” Steve declared calmly, knowing Bucky's reaction would be anything but.

WHAM!

Bucky punched the bag in anger as he turned himself around to face Rogers, his shoulders hunching a bit in fury as he clenched his fists even tighter.
“Damn right you were selfish!” Bucky ground out in quiet fury.

“What? You thought you could keep something like that a secret and expect nobody to find out?!” Bucky demanded, stepping forward.

“I knew it was a possibility...But when you and Tony had started getting closer-”

“I thought he knew!” Bucky shouted, cutting Rogers off.

“And it doesn't bother you...having me here?” Barnes inquired, sounding very apprehensive.

“What you did was Hydra's fault, not yours” Tony said firmly, pointing my screwdriver at him to emphasize my point, “You had no choice. Those deaths aren't on you”

“I thought he had forgiven me for killing his parents!” Bucky shouted in miserable frustration.

“It wasn't you Buck. Hydra-” Steve began, trying to help his former friend understand that he hadn't actually chosen to kill anyone.

“It doesn't fucking matter if I was brainwashed Rogers!” Bucky cut him off furiously, feeling like his words had bounced off the proverbial wall.

“The point is, it was a huge weight off my shoulders! He made me feel like less of a monster! That if he could forgive me then maybe I could make amends for all my hands had unwillingly done under Hydra” Bucky admitted painfully.

Tony had given him hope again.

His forgiveness.

His friendship.

The chance to live his life trigger free.

For the first time in a long time he had felt hope.

And it all had stemmed from Tony.

The man was like the Sun.

He was bright and fiery and pulled everyone into his gravitational pull.

Only to find out that it had all been smoke and mirrors.

A lie.

Tony hadn't forgiven him.

He hadn't even known.

And because of him and Rogers they had snuffed out the Sun that was Tony Stark.

Steve slumped shamefully at Bucky's admission.

He had been worried about Tony and Bucky getting closer for this very reason...And he had nobody to blame but himself.
“Tony will understand that you didn't choose to kill Howard and Maria...He'll just need some time to cool off first” Steve reasoned, trying to sound positive even though his shame and sadness was evident in his voice.

“Tony would've already had the chance to cool off if I had told him two years ago” Steve thought bitterly, “If only I hadn't been so selfish...or cowardly”

“If all he would've needed was time to cool off, then why didn't you tell him sooner?” Bucky demanded, the vitriol clear in his tone.

Steve clenched his fists.

“I felt like it would mean choosing between the two of you...And I couldn't...So I told myself that keeping it a secret was necessary to protect both of you” Steve admitted, not able to look Bucky in the eyes as he said it.

He had told himself that lie so long that he had actually started to believe it.

Of course there was always that nagging thought, that once he actually found Bucky he would have to choose to either continue his web of lies, or just come clean...But for two years he had pushed those thoughts to the back burner since he hadn't actually been able to locate the former Winter Soldier (he really did live up to his reputation as a ghost).

And then he had used everything going on with the Accords as an excuse to not say anything.

“Yeah. Tell me how well that worked out for everyone?” Bucky declared darkly.

Steve flinched.

“Tony's dead Rogers. Dead...Even if Scott's bite does revive him he still died” Bucky declared in furious anguish.

It had taken him an additional twenty-nine years, but he ended up killing the entire Stark Family after all.

“And that's on me. Not you” Steve declared, fighting the tears that were starting to make an appearance at the reminder of Tony's prone form.

“That doesn't make me feel better!” Bucky shouted in anguish, “I'm still involved! And my hand in this, no matter how indirect, is going to leave me guilty for the rest of my life!”

Steve closed his eyes in sorrow.

He did this.

He hurt Tony.

He hurt Bucky.

He tore everyone apart.

“I know it may seem like it now. But you haven't lost them forever. Not yet” Scott continued sagely.

“Yeah well... I've made quite a mess” Steve huffed out, “If I'm lucky it'll only take years to clear away all the rubble”
“Maybe” Scott admitted, “There’ll be bumps and snags...But so long as you keep at it you eventually will”

“What do I need to do? What do you need me to do?...Give you space? Let you wail on me?...What do you need?” Steve pleaded.

*I’m with you till the end of the line.*

“I just-I can’t...You're not the guy my memories are telling me you are” Bucky stammered, caught between anger, anguish, and confusion.

And it was that fact that was screwing with him even more.

Frankly, his head just *hurt*.

Steve really looked at Bucky for the first time.

He understood that Bucky wasn't the same.

Underneath it all he was...But the fact remained that even though he was the same at his core, Bucky wasn't the same person he had watched fall from the train all those years ago.

But then neither was he.

“I've changed...I'm not the same person I was before the ice...Before the war even” Steve admitted aloud.

The ‘before I thought you died’ left unsaid.

“I'm not the guy you remember either” Bucky told him firmly.

They had both changed.

With everything they both had been through it was impossible for them to have not.

“Things are so different now...We're so different we might as well be strangers” Bucky declared honestly.

He could get all his memories back this second and still feel like the man standing across from him was a stranger.

Steve said nothing.

He just got that look on his face that Bucky recognized as his serious thinking face.

The one he had when he was coming up with a plan.

He hated that he knew that.

“In that case” Steve began, walking slowly up to Bucky with an odd sense resolution on his face that it left the other man confused.

Steve paused a foot and a half from his former old friend.

Carefully keeping the distance between them.

“Hi. My name is Steve Rogers. I'm a 98 year old art student from Brooklyn, and a former military
Captain. I'm currently a hero under house arrest for committing international felonies, and an asshole hoping to be a good man again” Steve greeted, holding his hand out to Bucky.

Bucky fought the urge to smirk a bit.

That was so very Steve.

Instead, Bucky straightened himself out.

“I'm James Buchanan Barnes. I'm a 99 year old former champion boxer from Brooklyn, and a former military Sergeant thought to have been killed-in-action. Instead I was tortured and brainwashed by Hydra to be their pet assassin for seventy years. Other than getting my head fixed I'm not sure what I want…Except maybe a pizza” Bucky introduced, taking Steve's hand.

Steve huffed out a few chuckles as they shook hands.

He knew Bucky didn't trust him yet.

Wounldn't for a long time.

But it was a start.

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(Third POV)

“If he so much as comes near Tony while he is recovering I will stab him with the heel of my Jimmy Choo!” Pepper declared furiously, the sound of her heels striking the floor making her words that much more threatening as the sound echoed down the halls.

“Steve should be counting his lucky stars that Tony deactivated the Extremis in her system…” Rhodey thought, feeling both pity and righteous vengeance.

But super powered or not Pepper was still not someone you wanted to cross.

And unless Tony woke up to stop her (because he sure as hell wasn't) then Steve Rogers was going to end up penniless, discredited, and in prison for God knows how long.

And Happy was feeling just as furious.

He spent twenty-one years personally watching Tony's back as his bodyguard, protecting him from those around him that wanted to hurt or use him.

*Flashback*

After his recent loss twenty-four year old Harold Hogan decided to drown some of his sorrows away at a local bar.

Walking into the Cheers Beacon Hill he immediately noticed that the place had been taken over by a large crowd of college students.

Ignoring them he sat on one of the bar stools.

“One Bud Lite please” he ordered, trying not to look like he was favoring his right side.

Though he knew it did him no good, his opponent had gotten a TKO on him in the tenth round, leaving him with a busted lip and black eye.
“Come on Stark you know the rules. For every answer you get right you take a shot” an annoying voice sounded nearby.

He looked to his right to see a bunch of college students playing some kind of drinking game.

“MIT” he thought, reading the shirts of some of the group.

Taking a look at ‘Stark’ he saw the younger man looked completely plastered, even a little sick, and very much like he wanted the game to stop so he could find somewhere to hunker down and sleep.

If he had to guess ‘Stark’ was pretty damn smart if the twenty or so shots in front of him were any indication...Though that was debatable since he got involved in the drinking game to begin with...Though he figured peer pressure probably had more to do with that than anything else.

He watched as one of the older college kids put his arm around ‘Stark’ in a way that was clear to him that the man wasn’t his friend, and was getting a kick out of trying to kill the kid from alcohol poisoning.

He also caught the kid next to him dropping a dissolvable pill into one of the shot glasses.

“Come on Stark. You wanted to hang out with everyone right? You want us to see that you can be one of us?...Then you need to follow the rules” the kid said, pushing the drugged shot under Stark’s nose.

The millisecond Stark looked like he would fight back his bile and take the shot Hogan bolted from his seat, ignoring the pain in his right leg as he did.

Winding and pushing through the crowd in a way only an experienced boxer could achieve Hogan crammed his way to the center of the group and smacked the shot glass right out Stark’s hand.

“Hey man what’s your deal?” the older student complained.

Hogan turned on him in a fury, removing the kid’s arm from Stark and pushing him a foot back.

“Hey!”

“You think drugging someone is funny?” Hogan demanded, narrowing his eyes at the two main offenders.

“Mind your own business dude. This doesn’t involve you!” the kid who had drugged the drink said.

“This place has video surveillance. You sure you wanna to challenge this?” Hogan threatened.

A look of horror formed on both of the college student’s faces.

“Look man we don’t want any trouble-”

“Then get lost...All of you!” Hogan shouted, his threats quickly dispersing the group around him.

“Who’re you?” Stark slurred, trying to look at him through fuzzy vision.

“Harold Hogan. Is there someone I can call for you?” he asked, trying to hold the young man upright.

“You nee a niknam” Stark slurred, giving him an odd look as he tried to concentrate long enough to think of a nickname for him.
“Some of my boxing buddies call me Harry” I suggested, trying to keep him conscious and talking.

“Ha’py” Stark said, testing it out, “I lie it”

“Harry” I repeated.

“Tha's wha I sad. Ha’py”

*End Flashback*

Twenty-five years after meeting twenty-one year old Tony Stark and here he still was.

He had thought Tony would be safe without him.

That he could take care of himself.

That he would be safe with the Avengers.

He was wrong.

“Finally” Sharon exclaimed, pushing herself off from her spot on the wall.

“Any word yet on Tony?” Rhodey asked worriedly.

“None that they're telling us” Sharon replied, relaying her annoyance.

“Mr. McCall said that he wanted to wait till you all arrived before explaining things further” Maria elaborated.

“Well we're here so someone go and get him please” Pepper demanded, that please sounding anything but polite.

“No need Ms. Potts” Scott said, opening the door, having heard the group's arrival.

“How is Mr. Stark's condition?” Vision inquired hopefully.

“He is doing well all things considered. Like I informed Ms. Carter and Ms. Hill, his body is healing. If it continues to do so then he will revive” Scott explained.

“Revive as what?” Pepper demanded.

Tony didn't want to be enhanced.

He specifically made sure to keep the Extremis he used for his heart surgery concentrated, and immediately had it deactivated once the surgery was completed before it even had the chance to integrate with the rest of his body.

He told her that he did it because he didn't want to be a super soldier like the man his father had compared him too his entire childhood.

He said he wanted to grow old and die with her.

“A shapeshifter apparently” Sharon snided, narrowing her eyes at Scott.

“A what?!?” Rhodey demanded.

*That was news to him.*
“Basically what I am is a species of shapeshifter. You can be born or turned—” Scott began, trying to continue where he left off earlier.

“Born?” Vision inquired curiously.

“Derek was born. Hayden and I were turned” Scott elaborated slightly, trying hard not to use the word werewolf or lycanthrope.

“If you're an actual species how come we've never heard of you?...Are you an alien?” Maria asked suspiciously.

Sharon eyed Scott curiously, suspiciously, awaiting his answer.

Scott's face twisted in reluctant hesitation.

“We're definitely not aliens” Scott explained, “And technically you have heard of us...However we were relegated to mythology and stories, and not considered real”

Silence.

Vision scoured the information he knew of Mr. McCall, Mr. Hale, and Ms. Romero and compared it to mythological information on the internet.

“You're joking right?” Rhodey asked hesitantly.

“Your old teammate was the basis for Norse mythology...Myths have to come from somewhere” Scott pointed out.

“Thor's an alien” Sharon countered.

“And thousands of years ago a sect of humans were turned into something more by the aliens that were the basis for Greek and Roman mythology” Scott elaborated more, admittedly slightly proud of himself for talking around his species name (for now).

Silence.

“You're shitting me” Happy deadpanned, “The Greek Gods, Zeus and Aphrodite, they exist?!”

Scott just gave him a yeah-I-can't-believe-it-either-but-unfortunately-yes expression, lifting an open palm up in his direction.

“Okay so what are you then?” Pepper demanded.

Scott said nothing.

“You're going to have to tell us eventually. You said it yourself, Stark is likely to live” Maria pointed out.

“It's complicated” Scott ground out.

“Complicated how?” Rhody demanded.

Scott wasn't sure if he could handle the headache of explaining Hunters and mass hysteria right now.

“You said if he survives?” Happy asked hesitantly, not liking this at all.
“If he rejects the transformation he will remain dead” Scott replied, taking the out.

“What would cause Rejection?” Vision inquired, half listening to the conversation while the rest of his focus went to scanning the internet.

“It's a fifty-fifty shot at best. Even if you're perfectly healthy you might still reject the Bite. I had severe life-threatening asthma and Hayden was dying and yet we both survived, and yet Derek's first girlfriend Paige didn't, and she was perfectly healthy” Scott explained grimly.

The weight of Scott's words weighed heavily on all of them.

“Would anything else cause Rejection?” Vision inquired, certain things coming to mind he hadn't thought of earlier.

“Probably...Why? Did Tony experiment on himself at all?” Scott inquired, his concern increasing.

“When he had his Arc Reactor removed he injected himself with a super soldier serum called Extremis. But he kept it concentrated at his torso and deactivated it before it could fully integrate with his body” Pepper explained, her worries increasing at the shock on Scott's face.

Without a word Scott ran back into Tony's hospital room.

The group of six immediately followed after him.

Scott ignored their presence in lieu of using his enhanced senses to see if anything was wrong with Tony internally.

Lub-Dub. Lub-Dub. Lub-Dub.

“Heartbeat normal” Scott determined, muttering to himself.

In contrast to the concerned looks of Tony's 'family', Dr. Wu was watching Scott in fascination.

Morrell (wisely) kept to herself at the back of the room in case her assistance was needed later.

Scott took in a deep breath, diverting his focus to separating the markers in Tony's scent.

“I don't smell any illness or internal bleeding” he muttered, opening his eyes.

Eyes that were now glowing red.

Reaching out with his hands he ghosted them over Tony's arms, using his ability to sense heat signatures through his skin as he scanned Tony's entire body with his infrared eyes.

He would forever be grateful to Deucalion for teaching him how to truly use his senses.

“His heat signature is slightly above what it should be, but otherwise I'm not sensing any issues” Scott determined, causing almost everyone to breath out a sigh of relief.

“What does Extremis do?” Scott demanded, looking at each person's face for an explanation.

“Essentially it-” Dr. Wu began.

“I do not want essentially” Scott bit out irately, “I am a biochemistry major and have worked as a Veterinary Technician since I was fourteen. Transformative effects on the cells of the human body are my specialty. I do not want some dumbed down version of an explanation. If I am to determine
what effect this is going to have on his survival you will explain to me exactly what Extremis is and does’

Morrell couldn't help the small up-quirk of her lips. Scott has come such a long way since he had first been Bitten, and it was awe-inspiring to see just how much he's grown.

“Shit” Happy thought, “This kid means business”

“And there's that scientific side Tony complained about never seeing” Rhodey thought, mildly impressed and amused.

Vision tilted his head slightly in interest, seeing a different side to the young man.

Dr. Wu nodded, mildly surprised by Scott's outburst.

“My apologies...Extremis is a form of genetic manipulation through the use of nanotechnology. The nanites harness the body's bioelectricity and use it to activate the parts of the brain that govern repair, and recode it. Allowing the user to hack into the basic operating system of living organisms and rewrite their DNA” Dr. Wu explained, “If the body chooses to accept it, the individual will gain regenerative capabilities as well as physical enhancement, and exothermic ability...However Tony altered the formula, making it more stable. He removed the unintentional exothermic deficit and the physical enhancements, and slowed the regenerative capabilities so that he could use the serum for his surgery, but it's fundamental basic operating code of rewriting the individual's DNA is still intact”

Scott's brows knit together as he concentrated on the implications.

“But it was deactivated so it shouldn't have any effect on your...bite” Dr. Wu pointed out.

“Not necessarily…” Scott muttered thoughtfully.

A sentiment Morrell silently agreed with.

“What'd you mean?” Rhodey asked worriedly, gazing back and forth between Tony and Scott.

“It may be deactivated, but it wasn't removed from his system...Instead it was made dormant” Scott theorized, “My Bite probably reactivated it...Hence why his heat signature is a bit above what it should be”

“What does that mean for Tony then?” Pepper asked worriedly, “Is it going to kill...re-kill him?”

Scott paused for a moment, looking down at Tony in fascination.

“Extremis’ basic function is to rewrite the individual's DNA...If I had to guess...It did the opposite...It saved him” Scott said in amazement.

Morrell was silently glad she had left the explanation up to Scott. He would be a force to be reckoned with in the medical field if given a few more years.

“Saved him?” Happy questioned in confusion, “How?”

“Extremis encoded the transformation into Mr. Stark's DNA. Ensuring that the...Bite would take” Vision explained, understanding Scott's hypothesis.

Scott nodded, confirming Vision's words.
Though personally Scott doubted there would be any lasting effects from Extremis after Tony fully transformed.

“....What about his implants?” Pepper asked curiously.

Scott froze.

“Shit” Rhodey cursed.

He had forgotten about those.

“What implants?” Scott demanded, his concern returning in waves.

“He has micro-repeaters implanted in his arms and head that allow him to summon, and remotely and mentally control his armor” Rhodey explained warily.

Silence.

“Scott?” Maria asked worriedly, seeing the unfocused look in the younger man's eyes he was lost in his own thoughts.

“....They should have already been expelled from his body” Scott said slowly, “Our healing factor wouldn’t allow them to remain within him”

Morrell frowned at the implications.

“Crap” Rhodey muttered.

“If that is the case than Extremis is likely writing the function of the implants into his DNA as well” Vision logically deduced.

“.....”

“What's that going to do to him?” Sharon demanded, looking at Tony warily.

“...I'm not sure” Scott answered truthfully, causing her to frown.

“But if I had to guess...Having the implants integrated into his biology would probably make Tony some degree of technopathic...At least with his armors anyway” Scott reluctantly theorized.

"Just what did I agree to?” Rhodey muttered, rubbing his hands regretfully against his face.

"That's a good question" Scott thought to himself.

There was so many uncertainties about Tony's transformation.

He could now safely say that Tony Stark was probably going to survive the Bite.

That he would likely be enhanced in some way outside the typical werewolf powers.

But even knowing all that...For whatever reason he didn't think that Tony's uncertain enhancements were what was bothering him about his transformation.

Maybe it was an Alpha's intuition because of their developing Bond, but he couldn't help but feel like something else was different about Tony's transformation.

And hopefully Deaton would be able to tell him what that something was.
The idyllic peace of the Nadeer Mansion was in stark contrast to the tensions within the residence itself.

Within the gorgeous sunroom a meeting between three dynamic forces was coming to a head.

The leader of the Monroe Republic, Tamora Monroe.

The leader of the Humans First Movement and New York Senator, Ellen Nadeer.

And the ‘Alpha’ leader of the Watchdogs, Felix Blake.

Jack Rollins and Vargas were standing guard behind Monroe as she was seated at the metaphorical round table.

“Missing only one” Monroe pondered to herself, “Though that will be rectified soon enough”

“I must admit I'm curious about your organization” Ellen began, “Up until I received your email I had no idea the Monroe Republic even existed”

“We've existed for quite some time now” Monroe explained unflustered by her skepticism, “For three years we've expanded across almost every country in the world...And our civilian supporters even more numerable”

“Supporters against what, exactly?” Ellen questioned smoothly.

“Our interests are the same...Humans first” Monroe replied in kind.

“So you're against terrorists like the Avengers?” Felix questioned, wanting verbal clarification.

Monroe gazed at the man in amusement.

In the same way a parent would gaze upon a child yet to see the bigger picture past what concerns them.

“Mutants, enhanced. I don’t have a problem with them” Monroe declared calmly, aware of the tension that immediately erupted in her potential allies, “They are merely humans who have evolved to protect themselves against a much larger threat...A threat the Monroe Republic seeks to erase”

Monroe fought the urge to smirk at her colleagues’ now curious looks, knowing that she had their complete undivided attention.

“What I have a problem with are the Avengers and those like them...Humans who use their gifts against those who have none...Humans who place themselves above the rest of us just because they consider themselves more special...Because those gifts give them power” Monroe detailed, her sharp tone echoing into the hearts of Ellen and Felix.

“Especially when we should all be fighting together to be rid of a much greater threat” Monroe concluded, purposefully being ambiguous.

“And just what kind of threat are we talking about here?” the Felix demanded, leaning forward in his seat in anticipation.
“Humanicide” Ellen answered, speaking out her fears since the revelation of the existence of the Inhumans.

“Exactly” Monroe praised, pleased to find another enlightened individual.

“But the Inhumans are only the tip of the iceberg” she declared, hoping to bait them once again.

And seeing their expressions she’d say that she had.

“And hook line and sinker” Jack thought, “If only Hydra had found her first”

“Then why don’t you tell us what’s really lurking beneath the depths?” Felix inquired, getting mildly exasperated at all the lack of directness.

“I’d be happy too” Monroe declared, a victorious smile adorning her lips.

(Scott’s POV)

I carefully draped the shock blanket over Hayden as to not wake her up.

She had fallen asleep in one of the cushy waiting chairs (no doubt Tony’s idea), and I had decided to commandeer one of the room’s shock blankets to make her a little bit more comfortable.

She shifted slightly as I laid the blanket over her, but otherwise did not wake up.

Shuffling back over to my seat I plopped myself back down and let out a huge sigh of relief.

I was completely emotionally drained.

Dealing with Steve, Fury, Peter, Hill and Tony’s family left me wanting nothing more than to join Hayden in dreamland.

But I couldn’t yet.

I had sent Derek to keep an eye on either Rogers or Barnes.

At this point it doesn’t really matter who.

I just hope that Rogers truly did learn something (positive) from all this.


My groan was deep and sincere.

Dragging my phone reluctantly out of my pocket I glanced at the caller ID on the front screen through one dreading eye.

Deaton

I immediately shot up straighter in my seat, hitting the answer button.

“Hello” I greeted, hoping for some good news.

“I think have an answer for you” Deaton replied, cutting right to the case.

“That was quick” I said, literally and figuratively on the edge of my seat.
“I had a hunch. I just needed to be sure. I made a call to an old allied Pack of the Hale's in New York” he detailed.

“And?” I asked, wanting to know just what was going on with my new beta.

“Sometimes the shape you take reflects the person that you are” Deaton replied, reciting the familiar saying.

Then it hit me like a truck, the shock of it bringing me to my feet.

“He's not a werewolf” I whispered, staring down at Tony in disbelief.

“I don't believe he is” Deaton confirmed, “Though if what you say is true and your Bond with him is no weaker than the ones you have with Liam and Hayden it likely means that he's still in the canidae family. Potentially the genus canis”

So he's still a type of canine related to the wolf.

But the real question was...

“Then what is he?”

The light of the full moon radiated behind the light of the day.

It was calling to him.

Awaken.

Awaken it said.

So he did.

And at one minute past noon, the day after he was Bitten, Tony Stark opened his illuminescent glowing blue eyes.

Chapter End Notes

I'm evil....Sorry....But not really ;)

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!
Hi all!

Sorry I'm posting so late. This chapter has a lot going on in it so read carefully and enjoy!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Haigh POV)

Today was a good day.

Why?

Because Agent Everett Ross was out of the picture much earlier than planned.

And I didn't even have to kill him.

Now there was nobody skilled enough to monitor my actions close enough that I was concerned about my cover being blown.

I couldn't bust Zemo out yet, but now there was more opportunities to plant some more small loops in the security footage.

Like now.

“And in 3, 2, 1” I mentally counted down.

I had timed it so the cameras would loop around the middle of the meal so that the other JCTC officers would be less likely to notice that the food wasn't actually decreasing.

Though we only had 45 seconds.

“We have approximately 40 seconds left before the cameras return” I spoke quickly, though my hands were still frozen in place with the bland eggs on the fork.

“You wish to take down the Avengers?” Zemo asked, cutting right to the chase, knowing there was no time to waste on small talk.

“They are a threat that needs to be rectified” I replied in confirmation.

30 seconds.

“And you assume I have the information to do so” Zemo stated.

It wasn't a question.
“We can help you finish what you started” I beseeched to him, a fiery surety in my tone.

19 seconds.

Zemo gave me a critical glaze.

His eyes almost looking as if they were peering into my very soul.

Searching for what I don't know.

11 seconds.

My anxiety was starting to spike slightly at his continued silence.

Suddenly something in his eyes changed.

5 seconds.

“Flashdrives contain various things” Zemo advised, opening his mouth for the bite of rice, likely having kept mental track of the time.

And I dutifully fed him.

“Flashdrive” I thought to myself, fighting to keep the relief and excitement out of my expression.

Monroe will be pleased.

(Third POV)

“Rhodes”

Pausing in his movements Rhodey turned to address the call.

“Sharon” Rhodey acknowledged back, slightly irritated.

Right now he was on his way to see Tony.

Scott had said that he would be waking up at some point today.

Well, more like he was going to wait outside his room in the ICU.

Scott had told everyone that it'd be too dangerous for anyone other than the Guard to be with Tony when he first wakes up.

Everyone had protested, but Scott had assured them that they'd be able to see him after they made sure he was calm.

Vision, Pepper, and Happy were currently waiting on him.

So talking to Sharon was the last thing he wanted to do right now.

“What were you thinking having McCall bite Tony?” she demanded furiously, strutting up to him with sharp steps.

Though she had planned on giving Rhodes a piece of her mind at some point, it just happened to be convenient timing that she had run into him as she was on her way to Maria's office.
“I made the right call and you know it” Rhodey defended stubbornly, “Tony would have stayed dead otherwise”

“Alive, yes. But at what cost or consequence?” Sharon fired back, “I don't like unknown variables”

“Tony’s my concern. Not yours” Rhodey declared sharply, narrowing his eyes at her, “I made the right call”

“For your sake I hope you're right” Sharon declared through narrowed eyes.

(Third POV)

At the behest of the General of the Dora Milaje, Okoye, the Tribal Council was convened to discuss an imperative matter that had been brought to her attention.

“A misidentified Wakandan artifact was stolen yesterday from a British museum. We have learned Ulysses Klaue plans to sell the vibranium to an American buyer in South Korea tomorrow night” Okoye detailed, bowing her head slightly as she stepped away to allow the Council to deliberate on the matter.

“Klaue has escaped our pursuits for almost thirty years. Not capturing him is perhaps my Father’s greatest regret...I wish bring Klaue back here to stand trial” T’Challa requested of the rest of the members.

“Wakanda does not need a warrior right now. We need a king” the Merchant Tribe Elder spoke out firmly.

And while the River and Mining Tribe agreed with her, they silently held their tongues in order to further hear out T’Challa’s stance on the issue.

“My parents were killed when he attacked...Not a day goes by when I do not think about what Klaue took from us...From me” W’Kabi said, reminding them all of just how much damage Klaue had incurred upon them when he had attacked their nation all those years ago.

“It’s too great an opportunity to pass” Okoye implored them, knowing that Klaue rarely ever showed his face.

The last time they possessed a lead such as this was the aftermath of the Avengers’ Battle at the Salvage Yard.

“Take me with you. We’ll take him down together side by side” W’Kabi implored T’Challa, his thirst for revenge glistening in his eyes.

A look T’Challa found to be all too similar...And far too dangerous.

“I need you here protecting the border” T’Challa reminded him firmly, knowing that if he took W’Kabi with him it would potentially jeopardize both the operation and innocent people.

“Then I ask you kill him where he stands, or you bring him back to us” W’Kabi stated, his request verbalized more as an ultimatum.

“You have my word. I will bring him back” T’Challa assured him.

He would be sure of it.
Steve sat hunched over on the track bleachers, holding the old black and white photo of him and the rest of the Howling Commandos.


They had become his brothers-in-arms.

He had considered them his close friends.

But after waking up out of the ice and learning that they had all died…

He wasn’t proud to say that he hadn’t researched whether any of them had families (nor had he for Peggy or Howard either).

He hadn’t wanted another reminder that everyone he knew had moved on with their lives without him.

“Except Howard” his mind supplied, “He never stopped looking for you…”

“My father was your friend” Tony said with a hard edge.

“He spent his entire life looking for you!” Tony near shouted, turning on me in fury.

“…Even at the cost of his own relationship with Tony”

“He treated me like I was never good enough because I wasn’t you!” Tony yelled.

That one statement alone had summed up the entire reason why Tony was so passive aggressive and intentionally dismissive of him when they first met.

“Did his death mean anything to you?” Tony accused.

Steve placed the picture back into the small photo album he had bought, flipping to next page, revealing a similar black and white image of the SSR.

When he had first watched the CD he had cried.

Everything about it was just so wrong.

The first time he had seen live footage of his old friend was of his death by a man whom he had known and had called an ally.

While Bucky had recognized and broke conditioning for him, he hadn’t had that near fairy-tale moment with Howard.

And he had to watch as one old friend had killed the other.

He had watched the video twice more in denial of what he had seen before taking the CD and snapping it in half, hesitating (debating) for about ten minutes before he did.

Knowing that once the CD was broken there was no looking back.

“I'm sorry” Steve thought, silently wishing a photograph could talk.

Though what would Howard say if he was here?
What would Peggy?

Would she be angry? Disappointed?

“She would probably shoot at me again...And this time she probably wouldn't miss” he thought wryly (glumly).

Clang.

Startled out of his reverie, he saw that Natasha had somehow snuck up onto the bleachers near him without him noticing.

“That sound was probably a courtesy knock. Her having gotten tired of observing me” Steve mused as he gazed at the hard, distant, closed off edges of her body language.

Nat had always maintained a relaxed confident posture around him.

This was the first time her knife sharp eyes were ever directed at him.

Reminding him just exactly who she was.

“You lied to me” Natasha declared simply, her voice casual, but sharper than glass.

“I know” Steve replied simply, knowing there was no defending himself.

“I trusted you to tell him Steve” Natasha glared, her accusing gaze boring holes right through him.

“I know”

“You didn’t” she declared, her words like another knife thrown at his chest.

“I know”

*Flashback*

“Got your cover identities figured out?” Steve asked as Natasha slunk out of the shadows.

“More or less” she replied, moving up next him on the edge of the roof.

“Sam's on the south side...No luck so far” Steve explained, bringing her up to speed.

“Just us?” Natasha asked curiously, hoping Steve would understand exactly what she was implying.

He did.

“I wouldn't ask this of Tony” Steve stated, looking out onto the horizon.

He wouldn't.

**That** wasn't a lie.

“You tell him?” Natasha inquired, eyeing him carefully put of the corner of her vision, searching for any of his tells.

“...Yes...He needs time” Steve replied shortly, tightly.
“I'd imagine anyone would” Natasha exclaimed softly, accepting things at his word.

*End Flashback*

“Why?” she said, demanding his reasoning.

“Because I didn't want to lose anything else” Steve replied, firm but cowed.

“Not your best plan” Natasha fired back like a bullet.

Steve nodded in accepting sorrow.

“The worst part is I get why you did it” Natasha grit out angrily.

And she hated that she did.

But at the same time there were too many variables where things could've gone wrong.

Steve ignored all the potential variables whereas she wouldn't have.

“But that doesn't mean you were right to keep it from him...Especially when you say you hate liars” Natasha criticized harshly.

“Sometimes my teammates don't tell me things”

God he was such a hypocrite.

That sentence was going to haunt him the rest of his life.

“Why didn't you tell him?” Steve asked her softly, genuinely curious.

“Because Tony deserved to hear it from someone who hadn't already once stabbed him in the back” Natasha declared firmly.

*Whatever happens stay who you are, not just a soldier, but a good man.*

Right now he didn't know how to be anything but a soldier.

And because of that the 'good man' had started fading away...Just as Erskine had feared.

“Your undercover mission at SI?” I inquired, lifting my eyes up to meet hers.

“Fury knew Howard and Peggy. Tony was always on SHIELD's radar in one form or another” Natasha revealed tightly.

Steve looked back down at the photograph in his hand, gazing sadly at the old image of Peggy Carter.

*Compromise where you can. Where you can't, don't. Even if everyone is telling you that something wrong is something right. Even if the whole world is telling you to move, it is your duty to plant yourself like a tree, look them in the eye, and say, 'No, you move’.*

“I'm pretty sure Peggy is rolling over in her grave for how I used her own words to justify my own goals” Steve said, not even bothering to look up from the picture.

“The bending willow survives. It's always the oak that will eventually break” Natasha replied pointedly, though not quite as sharp as before.
Steve nodded.

“And I definitely broke” Steve declared softly, looking back at the metal of the bleachers.

Natasha said nothing for a moment, debating on whether to continue jabbing at him in her anger, or reach out an olive branch to a hurting friend.

Finally coming to a (very reluctant) decision she spoke.

“....More like uprooted” Natasha said reluctantly, her jaw tight.

Steve slowly looked back up at her, a sliver of hope in his eyes she knew he was trying to hide in case he was wrong.

“When everything happened with SHIELD, during my little hiatus, I went back to Russian and tried to find my parents...Two little gravestones by a chain link fence” Natasha detailed, “I pulled some weeds and left some flowers”

Steve looked at her sadly.

Despite what Zola had said he knew Natasha was older than she looked.

Closer to his own age really.

She had alluded to that much.

And she had lost people to time too.

“We have what we have when we have it” she advised, her voice the softest it's been since their conversation had started.

“I guess I haven't quite learned how to move on” Steve admitted regretfully.

From what he can tell everything ultimately comes back to that.

“...I know” Natasha admitted, making him snap his attention back to her, “Fury saw it. Tasked me to keep an eye on you...But I guess at some point after the fall of SHIELD I stopped paying attention to the warning signs”

That was her fault too.

That's why she tried not to get close to her missions.

So she couldn't be biased.

She failed.

“So all those questions about my dating life?” Steve inquired, semi-amused and not as surprised as he probably should be at her admission.

“Fury just wanted to make sure you were stable. I made it my own personal mission to get you a date” Natasha revealed, her lips quirking slightly in amusement, though Steve could tell she was fighting it due to her still simmering anger.

“Did you know Sharon was Peggy’s niece?” Steve asked curiously, though already having guessed her answer.
“I did” Natasha admitted, “But considering her adamence on keeping her relationship to Peggy and Tony a secret I figured you had a chance to get closer to her before you found out...Though I guess it really didn’t work out that way”

The two of them had a chance...But the fact Steve hadn't really kept contact with her over the two years since SHIELD fell should have been the first warning sign that Steve still wasn't as adjusted as he tried to let on.

“What’re you talking about?” Steve asked, the heavy confusion in his voice breaking her out of her own thoughts.

“What’d you mean?” she asked, uncertain about which part he was confused about.

“What connection to Tony?” Steve all but demanded, confusion still interwoven into his words.

Natasha looked at him in disbelief.

He had to be joking.

“Nat?” Steve called to her, slightly concerned by her silence.

“You really don't know” she said in soft amazed disbelief.

“Know what?” Steve demanded, narrowing his eyes at her.

(Third POV)

“You told Tony not to go to his own Aunt’s funeral?” Steve demanded, pushing past the doors going into Hill's office.

Seeing Steve's ire Maria was quick to tell him that she had sent Sharon back to her office to collect some paperwork for her, washing her hands of the issue.

Turning around, Sharon gave him a quirked eyebrow.

“Tony told me that you didn't even know that he knew Aunt Peggy” Sharon pointed out, curious how Steve found out.

“Up until ten minutes ago I didn't” Steve declared crossly, “Why would you tell him not to go? He had a right to be there”

“Because I didn't want any tensions between the two of you to ruin the funeral” Sharon calmly justified.

“The Accords hadn't divided us then. We were still civil. There wouldn't have been a problem” Steve countered assuredly, daring her to challenge him.

Sharon just let out an exasperated sigh...And met his eyes with an equal amount of unrepentant stubbornness.

“Look Steve. I've known Tony a long time. He means well and has changed a lot since Afghanistan, but Tony's not the most aware person socially. He doesn't really know how healthy relationships, friendships or otherwise work...But what he does know is business, politics, and how to read the public climate. He wouldn't have been able to resist eventually bringing up the Accords, ergo, causing a conflict between the two of you due to his poor impulse control and timing” Sharon
declared, just as confident in her own reasonings, “Will Aunt Peggy haunt me from beyond the grave until the day I die? Probably. But I did what I thought was best at the time”

Steve couldn't deny the possibility that Tony would've likely brought up the Accords after the service.

But even if he had and they were arguing, the two of them would've been together when the bombing in Vienna had taken place...And maybe...No...Things would have been different if that had been the case.

“He still had a right to be there” Steve stated firmly, remaining unmoved on the matter.

“What's right isn't always what's best” Sharon countered, “And it was better for the two of you to be separated”

“Yeah. Well look where that got us” Steve declared bitterly.

Sharon let out a sigh.

“Maybe it's time the Avengers took a break from the limelight Steve” Sharon advised calmly.

“What?!” Steve declared, wondering where the hell that had come from.

“After everything that's recently gone down there really isn't an Avengers anymore” Sharon pointed out, holding her hand up to stop him from cutting her off so she could continue, “At least not right now there isn't...You're all so divided, and as of right now with Tony out of commission only three of you are actively on duty”

As much as Steve wanted to deny it he couldn't.

They were already hard-pressed before.

Now with Tony out of commission (because of him) they don't have enough members to be properly deployed out...Not to mention even if he and the rest of the members on parole were given special exceptions, he didn't think any of them could work effectively as a team right now.

“I know it's hard to hear, but maybe this is a sign that everyone needs to take a step back for a little while so that things can settle down...So that everyone can heal. Physically and emotionally” Sharon advised.

“The world needs the Avengers” Steve retorted, though the childish reasoning hurt even his own ears.

Sharon gave Steve a pitying glance.

“The world needs heroes who can help them” Sharon corrected, “And how can you help the world if you can't even help yourselves?”

She wasn't wrong.

But it didn't lessen the sting any less.

“I don't think you should be there when Tony wakes up” Steve declared, softly yet firmly, lashing out slightly as he brought things back to the real reason he had search her out to begin with.

“That's not for you to decide” Sharon retorted sharply, narrowing her eyes at him, “But then I guess
you still haven't learned how not to be a hypocrite”

Steve tried not to flinch at that.

“You've betrayed him too” Steve pointed out firmly.

“And we both thought we were doing the right thing” Sharon countered back just as stubbornly.

“And we were both wrong” Steve declared.

Sharon just tilted her head slightly in exasperation and md disappointment, gazing at him like he was some stubborn child.

“Nothing is ever so black and white” she replied softly.

And again she wasn't wrong.

She and Tony were very similar that way.

They both saw things in shades of gray and practicalities with a mix of morals thrown in, and the stubbornness to stand by what they believed.

He admired that about her (and Tony).

Though apparently like with Tony when their views clashed it was like fire between them.

“Think about what I said Steve” Sharon implored, walking around him towards the entryway, pausing right before she was about to exit the room.

“I do care about you Steve...Come find me again when your guilt is no longer fueling you” she declared softly, leaving him alone with his thoughts.

(Tony's POV)

My feet crunched against the shattered remains of the glass as I cautiously navigated through the cracked sidewalks and upturned streets.

Where was I?

Buildings were nothing but piles of rubble.

I hacked up another portion of my lungs as gusts of dust and debris made its way into my face.

Where was the Team?

As I made my way around what I thought was another corner (if what looked to have been a old bent street sign was any indication), only to freeze in place, my blood running cold through my veins.

Though it was nothing but a mashed up pile of metal and glass now, there was no mistaking the giant A atop it all.

I'm in New York?

“Or what's left of it” my mind supplied.
What happened here?

“You did” a voice answered.

My heart stopped at the familiar robotic tenor.

The glass of the decimated windows crunched beneath my feet as I turned to face my worst creation.

“Vision destroyed you” I stammered out in horror.

“He almost did” Ultron agreed as he hovered above me, smugness resonating through his tone, “But I’m good at escaping bad situations...Much like my dear old Dad”

“What did you do?” I demanded, horrified.

“What you created him to do” a familiar Sokovian accent declared darkly.

I spun around to see Wanda step out from behind an overturned vehicle, her smokey eyes and dark lipstick giving her that creepy witchy vibe she had embraced back during her tenure in Hydra.

“Because humans are inefficient. Impractical and complicated” Wanda continued, the red of her powers outlining more and more of her body as she stalked closer to Ultron’s side.

“Technology is reliable. Better. Right?...You can lie to yourself all you want Stark, but this is what you wanted...I know. Because I saw it” Wanda declared, her body dissolving into red mist and propelling itself towards me like a whirlwind.

As I flailed trying (and failing) to get away from the mist I tripped on a slab of upturned concrete.

I braced myself for the hard impact only to find myself free falling into darkness.

Suddenly I passed through an all too familiar distorted loop, a vision of stars and fleets of warships waiting mockingly on the other side.

You think you’re ready for what’s really out there?

Because you’re nothing in comparison.

Just as I passed through another wormhole, dreading what I’d see next on the other side, I found myself dropping into a body of water.

After a moment of shock I tried swimming to the top...Only to meet solid Plexiglas.

I was trapped like a fish in a bowl without any space left for oxygen.

Feeling around in panic I realized that I was imprisoned in a giant cylindrical tube.

“Oh Tony” Obie dralled in amused disappointment as he circled the container, “In this world there are only two kinds of people. Those who use, and those who are used”

I banged my fists ineffectively against the glass.

“And despite your best efforts you will always be the one who is used” Obie mocked, grinning like a shark, “Your money, status, intelligence”
I tried to yell at him to shut up, but I only succeeded in choking on water.

“People tolerate you because of what you can do for them” Obie continued, an evil glint appearing in his eyes, “What would happen if your precious hands were taken away?”

NO!

I banged against the glass in fear...But this time the glass did shatter around me, and an unbelievable pain overtook me for the briefest of moments as I landed with a thud onto my lower legs.

After I took a moment to gasp in relief at finally being able to breathe, shaking away the droplets of water still in my face, I looked down in front of me only to see two stumps where my hands had just been.

Suddenly I couldn't breathe again, as if I were back in the tank.

No.

No.

No!

This couldn't be happening.

“Iron Man: Yes. Tony Stark: Not recommended” yet another familiar voice echoed, the coldness of the words sending a shiver up my spine.

Suddenly Cap bent down in front of me.

I gave him a pleading look.

Please help me.

“You've outlived your use Tony” Steve assessed calmly, detached, sounding like he did when he was outlining details in a situation, “We don't need you anymore”

Suddenly a metal arm wrapped around my throat from behind me, lifting me up into the air.

I flailed at the lack of oxygen, my stumps only ineffectively knocking against the cold unforgiving titanium.

I took my last breath gazing into the dead icy eyes of the Winter Soldier.

My body fell back against the ground between my Mother and Father.

“Mission complete. Stark family no longer useful. Neutralization complete” the Soldier declared robotically as he walked away with Steve.

Suddenly, the ground engulfed us, and I saw darkness once more.

(Scott's POV)

I stared down at Tony anxiously.
His body had already fully healed.

His heart had started pumping on its own a few hours ago.

It had started out a just a weak Lub-Dub once every few minutes and had increased steadily since then.

Now his heart rate was normal and stronger than I'd ever heard it in the time I'd known him.

He would awaken soon.

I felt it.

“Be ready for anything” I advised Derek, Hayden, Stiles, and Morrell.

While I hadn’t really wanted Morrell here I couldn't deny that we may need her expertise. Especially since we don't know what type of were-canine Tony will be.

Kira was with Wanda, Lydia was with Barton, and Nolan was still guarding Dr. Cho.

Frankly I was very concerned about what Tony's mental state will be when he wakes up.

Lydia told me that Tony was essentially trapped in Bardo as his body revived.

I fought the urge to shutter at the thought.

Bardo was not a fun place to be.

It forced you to face the darkest parts of yourself over and over again no matter how much you wished for it to stop.

And it would either grant you insight...Or madness.

I hoped it'd be the latter, though I doubted it.

Tony was already going to have a (metaphorical) scar across his heart as a consequence for defying the natural order just like me, Stiles, Derek, Hayden, Corey, and Jackson.

Definitely not a good way to start off as a were-canine when you have to learn control.

“No matter what he is, he's still your beta Scott” Derek said, breaking me out of my thoughts, “We just need to keep him calm long enough to explain to him what's going on”

“I still say we should tie him to the bed” Stiles commented.

“Because that worked out so well with Liam” I said sarcastically, rolling my eyes at him.

“Considering his history with torture and kidnapping it wouldn't be the wisest of ideas” Morrell pointed out.

They didn't need to cause him to lash out after all.

His mental state was already going to be a huge unknown once he finally awakens from Bardo.

“So we just pin him down then?” Hayden questioned.
"I'll be able to snap him out of a rage" I assured her.

Suddenly Tony's body stirred, shifting the sheets slightly on the bed.

It was time.

Just as I stood up to make my way over to my new beta, his eyes shot open, glowing blue.

_Tony's POV_

Awaken.

Awaken the pull called to me, yanking me out of the darkness yet again.

"So we just pin him down then?"

“No more” my mind begged, “I can't take any more”

“I'll be able to snap him out of a rage”

No. I'm not a threat I swear!

My eyes opened.

But even as the light momentarily blinded me I knew I wasn't awake.

I was never awake.

“Tony?” a calm voice called out.

An unfamiliar one this time.

The tone though resonating with me right down to my bones.

I liked that voice.

It made me feel safe.

That was wrong.

I shot upward (Out of bed?...A gurney?).

Rolling left, removing the sheets, feeling the cold sting of the tiled floor on my bare feet.

Growling echoed in my ears (It was me?) and I wildly scanned my surroundings.

Five people.

All of them holding their hands out in a placating gesture, repeatedly saying “Calm down”, “It's okay”, “You're okay”

I didn't understand.

I looked down to see that while this time I did have my hands...they were claws.
I was a monster.

“Tony” the voice called out again, snapping my attention to the Latino male in front of me.

Suddenly I felt less...afraid...angry...confused.

I was safe.

He was safe.

“You're okay” he said, slowly making his way over to me.

I decided I liked his voice.

It wasn't cold, mocking, or accusing.

When he took a hold of my hands I realized that they weren't claws anymore.

“You're not in Bardo anymore” he assured.

Bardo?

Like in Buddhism?

“You have more than ten fingers in dreams” he told me.

I knew that.

Someone told me that.

….The kid with moles told me that?

“Count with me” he said, moving my hands up.

“One” I said, holding up my left index finger.

“Two...Three...Four...Five” I counted slowly.

That's one hand.

“Six...Seven...Eight...Nine....Ten....Ten” I repeated in disbelief.

“I'm awake” I muttered softly, “I'm awake”

“You're awake” the young man agreed, smiling softly.

“Scott” my mind supplied.

It's Scott.

Taking another look around I realized that the other people in the room had been Stiles, Derek, Morrell, and a girl I didn't really recognize.

“......What happened?” I asked, thoroughly confused.

Taking a better scan of my surroundings I realized that I was in the med-bay.
“You died from heart failure” Scott explained carefully.

“Died?” I inquired skeptically, “Then how was I resuscitated?”

“The AED didn't work. With no other options Colonel Rhodes made a call” Scott continued, sounding like he was wording things carefully.

“What call?” I demanded, my anger shooting up.

Why was I so angry?

“He asked me to save you” Scott replied, looking like he was trying to placate me, “But what I had to do to save you...Changed you”

……What?

“....Changed me” I began carefully, the image of claws flashing into my mind.

I was awake…

“Change me how?” I demanded horrified.

“You're like me now...Like us” Scott replied carefully, gesturing to Derek and the girl.

“And what exactly are you?” I demanded, my ire rising again.

“.....Werewolves” Scott replied seriously, though reluctantly.

Silence.

I blinked about twenty fucking times.

Looking at each of their faces I realized they actually believed Scott's words.

I couldn't help it.

I full-on cracked up laughing.

Werewolves!?

That's what they were going with?!

“I don't know if that's better or worse than what we expected” I heard Stiles say.

My laughter slowed down to slow chuckles.

“Better” the girl chose, “I punched Liam in the face when I found out”

“Sounds like a story” I said amused.

“It's definitely easier than bratty teenage denial” Derek said, though I'm guessing it was a light jab at Scott considering I heard him mutter “Thanks”

Wait…How did I even hear that so clearly?

“You expect me to believe that you're werewolves?” I declared skeptically.
Scott let out a huff.

“You teammate was the basis for Norse mythology. Stories have to come from somewhere” he explained, though it sounded a bit rehearsed.

His statement though made me pause.

Thor was an alien.

They came to Earth a thousand some odd years ago and met the Scandinavians, becoming their ‘Gods’.

In theory it was possible the myth of werewolves came from a legit source if going off that vein.

“Prove it” I said slowly, looking at each of them.

Scott nodded over to Derek.

Suddenly hair sprouted from nowhere on the sides of Derek’s face, his brow becoming more pronounced, his eyebrows disappearing, and his teeth elongating into fangs.

His nails extended into claws, and when he opened his eyes they were now glowing blue.

Silence.

“Well? Believe us now?” Stiles asked, almost mockingly.

My eyes stayed locked on Derek as his face transformed back into the one I recognized.

Looking down in a panic I saw that they were normal.

“What did you do to me?” I demanded, looking accusingly at Scott.

“He did what your friend asked him to, even though he didn't want to” Derek defended, stepping forward slightly.

“I didn't ask for this” I stated, my anxiety and fear rising again.

Scott looked at me with sorrow in his eyes.

“I know” he said softly, “I was turned without my consent too...But you're not alone...You have us to teach you. To help you...And your family is waiting to see you outside”

“My...family?” I questioned.

“Colonel Rhodes, Ms. Potts, Mr. Hogan, and Vision have been waiting outside your door all day” Scott explained with a small smile.

Family.

Yeah.

They were my family.

I moved a step forward to leave, only to be blocked by Scott.
“What? I'm your prisoner now?” I demanded irately.

“No” Scott corrected quickly, “You can see them, but you just need to make sure that you stay calm or else you might hurt them”

Hurt them?!

“You don't have control over your powers yet...But you'll learn. Like we did” Scott tried to reassure.

I sucked in a shaky breath.

“I'm going” I declared, stepping around him to move out the door.

He let me.

Never since I was rescued from Afghanistan have I felt more relieved to see Rhodey, Pepper, and Happy.

(Friday's POV)

Boss was alive.

I had been vigorously scanning his vitals ever since he had collapsed the day before.

_I_ was the first to pick up on the first weak pump of his heart.

_I_ was one to realize that he had brain waves again.

And now he was awake.

He was a...werewolf now?

I needed to acquire more data in order to effectively assess Boss’ new needs.

But right now I needed to inform the other members of the Compound.

My Father had come back to me.

(Maria's POV)

“What are they?” I demanded, crossing my arms across my chest, not caring if I gave the impression of an petulant teenager as I stared Fury down.

I had the utmost respect for the man, but only a fool would trust anyone 100%.

“All secrets come out in due time” he replied, stalling.

“Then why not just tell me now?” I retorted, narrowing my eyes at him, “And don't tell me it's because you're waiting for the opportune moment”

“If the shoe fits” Fury replied simply, not looking like he was going to give an inch.

“You know I remember when being your right hand woman actually meant something” I jabbed at him in frustration.
“This is bigger than you. Bigger than all of us” Fury reminded me, a hint of scolding in his tone.

“SEA may not be SHIELD, but we are supposed to function in a similar manner” I reminded him, “We can’t do our job here on the ground if you only give me half of the information to prepare with”

“Patience is a virtue” Fury dismissed calmly.

I resisted the urge to huff out angrily.

“Ms. Hill, Mr. Fury. Boss has awakened” Friday relayed quickly.

As I was immediately about to make my way over to the ICU I felt a hand firmly grip my upper arm.

Turning my head back I saw that Fury had been the one to stop me from leaving.

“What?” I demanded, mildly confused and slightly irritated.

“Scott asked for privacy” he said, an edge of warning in his tone, “I’d be wise to obey”

I decided I didn't like the dark ominous look in his eye.

(Third POV)

Rhodey swore his heart stopped the second they heard the door slide open.

The four of them immediately shot to their feet, Pepper grabbing onto Rhodey's arm for support.

The second Tony's familiar face appeared in the doorway Pepper immediately sped over to him.

“He looks...healthier” Vision noted curiously as he took in Mr. Stark's appearance.

The stress and age lines that had become more and more prominent over his tenure as Iron Man had disappeared.

In all he looked closer to as he did during his first years as Iron Man.

“Tony” Pepper called out, wrapping her arms around him in relief.

Tony quickly got over his shock and wrapped his arms around her.

“She smells like vanilla and...strawberries ironically enough” Tony thought, “Why haven't I ever noticed that before?”

He was feeling a lot more at ease and less like he wanted to growl in frustration (which now might actually be a literal thing...).

“Sharing is caring Pep” Rhodey stated teasingly, though he really did need to reassure himself that Tony really was alive.

Pepper huffed out a laugh on Tony's shoulder.

“I'm a selfish woman” Pepper retorted with a smile, slowly pulling herself away from Tony and gently placing her lips to his temple.
“And I'm not above being petty. I've known him longer than you” Rhodey countered with a smile of his own, moving in to grip Tony in a vice like hug.

“Aw. No kiss honeybear?” Tony teased, just as happy to see him.

“How about a punch to the nose for scaring me?” Rhodey retorted into his shoulder.

“What's this world coming to that after a person comes back from the dead they can't even get a kiss from their best friend” Tony teased.

Rhodey smacked him on the back for the dark joke.

“Too soon?” Tony inquired, the two of them pulling back a bit.

Tony looked over at Happy who had gravitated a bit closer.

“I'm not kissing you either” Happy declared with a grin, pulling Tony in for a bear hug and a few pats of his own.

“Mr. Stark” Vision addressed, greatly relieved to see the man up and standing on his own again.

“I've told you a million times Viz. Call me Tony” he replied with a smile.

“One hundred and seventy-three times actually” Vision corrected.

“You were actually keeping count?” Happy asked, raising an eyebrow at Vision's statement.

“I am able to store any information my senses come across and retrieve them more easily and efficiently than any man's long term memory banks...Minus taste however” Vision elaborated.

“....”

“Yes he was keeping track” Tony told Happy with an amused smirk, seeing the confusion on the other man's face.

Technology really wasn't his forte.

THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP

Tony clamped his hands over his ears, trying (and failing) to block out the sounds pounding in his ears.

It was as if he was right next to a drummer's speakers at a concert.

Suddenly people were touching him.

Yelling.

It was too much.

It was all too much!!

“Back up!” Scott commanded, leaving no room for arguments in his tone.

Everyone (i.e., the Avengers, the rest of the Shadow Guard, Sharon, and Steve and Bucky who were off a bit further away) immediately backed up.
Scott was mildly annoyed that all of them were even here considering he specifically told them not to be until he gave them the all clear.

But he understood the need to make sure your friend was okay (especially after word had gotten around that Tony was an as of yet unidentified species of shapeshifter).

“Tony” Scott called out, using his 'wolf voice’ to get Tony to snap out of his disorientation and get him to focus on him instead of the sounds he couldn't control yet.

Tony cracked open his eyes to look at Scott.

“You need to dial back your hearing” Scott said very softly so that he wouldn't hurt Tony's ears, “Try focusing on your vision instead. Focus on your sight”

Dial back his hearing?

If he had enhanced hearing then it would make sense to try focusing on something else.

Tony breathed in...and out, focusing first on Scott's eyes.

Dark chocolate eyes.

Smooth light tanned skin.

A small scar on his cheek.

An interestingly uneven jaw.

Short curly hair with a slight sheen to it.

Hair gel most likely.

“Why are his eyes blue?” Natasha asked softly, in case Tony's hearing was still too sensitive.

She was relieved that Tony was alive again, but they still knew very little about the changes done to him, and she wanted to be able to assist him if she could.

Tony's (glowing) eyes snapped to hers.

“What?” he asked confused.

His eyes were brown. Ambery depending on the lighting.

“It shows your designation” Derek explained, “The leader, the Alpha’s eyes glow red. And if you're a beta or omega your eyes will glow either yellow or blue”

“Yeah but why blue over yellow? Is it like, a genetic thing?” Clint asked curiously, getting tired of all the lack of details.

They did say if Tony survived then they would start giving them some real answers.

“Yeah, that's what I thought too, but no” Stiles replied.

“Then what does it mean? That he's turned instead of born?” Sharon inquired, trying to infer from the information she did know.

“No” Derek replied simply, flashing his own blue eyes at them.
Hayden followed suit, her eyes glowing their signature yellow.

“Okay…Then under the assumption that there's some kind of significance behind the difference, what does it mean?” Rhodey asked, not liking the ambiguity.

Each of the Shadow Guard looked at each other warily, unsure if they should reveal such a sensitive topic so soon.

“What does it mean?” Tony demanded firmly, his voice letting them know he wasn't going to let this go.

Scott huffed out a breath.

He had hoped to have some time before having to explain this to Tony (to everyone).

“Scott” Stiles said warningly, seeing how his friend was caving.

“This is ridiculous. You guys are acting like having to explain this marks the end of the world” Sam exclaimed in exasperation.

“It can be seen as...stigmatizing” Lydia reluctantly revealed.


She didn't want Tony to be outcasted from a species he was forced to become a member of.

“Because having blue eyes means you've taken a life” Scott revealed solemnly, his gaze directed at the floor.

Silence.

Nobody said a word as they tried to process just what Scott had said.

“Murderer...It let's everyone know I'm a murderer” Tony said, his voice void of any emotion, though his eyes screamed a heavy kind of self-loathing Stiles immediately identified with.

“What the fuck…” Bucky mumbled from around the corner of the hall, “Tony’s not some cold-hearted killer!”

Frowning, Steve couldn't help but agree with that sentiment.

To have such a discriminating identifier like that was wrong on so many levels.

“What kind of messed up species does that!” Rhodey shouted indignantly, furious for Tony's sake.

“It's not something we can control” Derek declared, narrowing his eyes at Rhodes, “It's rooted in the origins of our species”

Sharon narrowed her eyes at that ambiguous tidbit.

Despite scanning his memory banks Tony failed to come up with a single case in what he knew of mythological literature where Werewolves were described as having blue eyes.

“It's bullshit is what it is” Clint muttered angrily.

Vision, while displeased added the information to the storage unit he had compiled in his memory
banks on his theories as to what species Mr. McCall and Mr. St- Tony are.

“Fitting” Wanda muttered (almost) inaudibly.

For a species who placed so much emphasis on controlling their powers and anger so that they do not cause harm to others, she supposed that it would make sense that they had a way to differentiate those who had caused undue harm and those who hadn't.

And considering Stark only just woke up it seems that whatever forces decide their eye color also take into considering whether or not they've harmed/killed anyone prior to being...turned.

And while she had accepted that Stark wasn't to blame for the death of her parents, and Pietro (and that the creation of Ultron was really on her), it was a well known fact that if you went after Iron Man that you would likely end up dead or ruined.

The Ten Rings holding him captive: Dead.

Stane: Dead.

Vanko: Dead.

Hammer: Imprisoned.

Killian and his army: Dead.

While she's felt Stark's own immense guilt and huge capacity for empathy and generosity, she also knew that he could be just as merciless and ruthless.

While she's learned that he doesn't in fact kill everyone he faces against, he's more than okay with killing if he sees fit (not unlike the rest of them).

Tony flinched at Wanda's comment, still having heard it due to his hearing.

“What did you just say you hypocritical bitch!!” Hayden demanded furiously, her eyes glowing yellow and her fangs popping into place.

Nearly everyone jumped at Hayden's sudden outburst.

“Hayden” Scott said firmly, holding his hand out in a stop gesture.

“What did she say?” Kira asked curiously, her hand moving towards her belt in case it was needed.

“She said fitting” Hayden growled, pissed off that the bitch actually had the gall to make a comment like that.

“Wanda” Clint said reproachfully, narrowing his eyes at her in both anger and disappointment.

“Wow” Sam muttered in disbelief, rubbing his eyebrows in frustration.

Happy was barely managing to hold Pepper and Rhodey back from doing something that might get them hurt (he didn't trust that the Witch wouldn't hurt them).

Natasha narrowed her eyes at the her, sending dark vibes her way.

Kira and Lydia were no better.
Sharon merely gave her a deep scrutinizing look, annoyed with the lack of maturity in the room (a feeling Derek agreed with).

Vision just shook his head at her in disappointment, causing a painful stab at Wanda’s heart.

Clang. Grrriiiinnndd.

The sound snapped everyone's attention to the corner of the hallway where Steve and Bucky had been hiding out.

“No Buck” Steve managed to grumble out as he grabbed onto Bucky before he could make an attempt on Wanda's life.

Tony's mind went numb.

“*Did you know?*”

“..........*Yes*”

“Let go” Bucky grit out, trying to muscle his way out of Steve's grip, the plates on his metal arm grinding from being pulled backwards.

That Hydra bitch was going to pay for that comment!

“I already knew of you...from Hydra”

“And it doesn't bother you...having me here?”

“I know she should be reprimanded for what she said, but killing her's not the answer” Steve ground out, straining against Bucky's strength.

“I didn't mean it like that!” Wanda shouted out desperately, “I meant that it was fitting how they would have something to show who was a killer and who wasn't with how much they emphasize control!”

“I'll show you what a killer looks like” Bucky declared darkly, ripping his arms away from Steve in a surge of anger.

“SHUT UP!!!”

Everyone froze.

In the silence they all looked over to see that Stiles was actually huffing and puffing as he tried to breath through his seething fury.

The wild grief, raw emotion, and wrath in his eyes was not something anyone other than his Pack had ever seen in him before.

Making a decision, Scott decided to let Stiles handle things for now.

He'll step back in if things start to spiral again.

“All of you SHUT UP!” Stiles declared again, moving forward a stepped as he glanced at all of them wildly.

“NONE of you have a right to judge him! Every single fucking one of you would have blue eyes!
“Every fucking one” Stiles shouted viciously, jabbing a finger in the air in the Avengers’ direction.

“You’re a bunch of assassins-”

(Natasha and Clint)

“Soldiers-”

(Rhodes, Sam, Steve)

“And ex-Hydra agents”

(Wanda and Bucky)

“Even if Barnes hadn't been mind-fucked by Hydra he still would have blue eyes!” Stiles ranted, flinging a hand out in Bucky's direction, “He was a fucking sniper in the army!”

Nobody said anything as Stiles ranted accusingly at them.

And Natasha couldn't agree with him more.

When you really got down to it none of them were innocent.

They all had less than shining pasts.

“A hero in a time of war is a killer in a time of peace” Rhodes thought to himself.

There was always two sides to a war.

“In the end we are all just people killing another person's son or daughter because we were told to do so because it is in best interest of our country” he thought jadedly.

Wanda flinched at Stiles’ rant.

She hadn't meant to cause any of this.

She already knew that they'd all have blue eyes.

But of course she had to shove her own foot in her mouth.

“And just because someone has blue eyes doesn't mean they're stone cold killers” Stiles declared, narrowing his eyes at all of them.

“Do you know why his eyes turned blue?” Stiles challenged them, pointing at Derek.

Derek's face went blank.

That information was personal...But he wasn't going to stop Stiles either...They needed to know about the nature...and unfairness of their eyes.

“When his girlfriend Paige was dying an excruciating death from Bite Rejection” Stiles emphasized, causing many of them to flinch, “She begged him to kill her…And he did”

Derek turned his gaze to the floor not wanting to have to deal with their pitying looks.

The pain he suffered from killing Paige still haunted him to this day.
They weren't his Pack.

The pain in his eyes was not something they were allowed to see.

“He was fifteen when that happened” Stiles continued mercilessly, daring any of them to comment negatively on it.

“Christ” Sam muttered, rubbing his temples, a sentiment echoed by Clint.

“Kira's eyes would be blue” Stiles declared harshly, making everyone’s attention snap back to him in disbelief.

“But she wasn’t-” Bucky started to justify.

“It doesn't matter if she wasn't in control. It was still her body” Stiles declared coldly, cutting him off.

Bucky’s stomach churned at the unfairness of it.

“No mercy. No exceptions” Sharon noted thoughtfully, her mouth thinning to a line.

“Mercy kills, mind control, accidents, possession...It doesn't take extenuating circumstances into consideration” Stiles ranted, though grief was now just as transparent in his eyes as the anger.

“If your body did it, your eyes are blue...No exceptions” he concluded, his tone softer, more broken.

His eyes would be blue too after all.

Silence.

No one knew what to say after that.

The only sound permeating the hall was the occasional awkward shifting of clothes.

“....”

“We should all go” Steve suggested softly, almost wincing as his voice cut through the silence like a knife.

They all should have listened to Scott to begin with when he had told them no visitors.

This wasn’t (they weren't) what Tony needed right now.

Tony’s head snapped around to look at Rogers and Bucky, remembering for the first time since Stilinski’s rant that they were there.

“Did you know?”

“........Yes”

“He lied” Tony thought, the pain, the anger resurfacing.

*Not even a fraction of a pause as the Winter Soldier beat into his father’s skull.*

*The unmoving neutrality as he strangled his mother to death.*
“He killed my *mother*” Tony’s mind roared, his vision turning red.

Suddenly the sound of a vicious animal permeated the space.

(Was that him?)

Steve and Barnes’ shocked faces didn’t deter him in the least.

They were going to pay.

With a roar Tony lunged at the two super soldiers.

Reacting quickly Derek caught the enraged man by the throat, lifting him up into the air and up against the wall, much like he had done to Liam years ago when they had first met.

The Avengers (and affiliates) looked on in horror as Tony sprouted fangs and claws, snapping and growling at Derek as if he was some kind of wild animal.

“I did this” both Steve and Bucky thought in tandem, horrified by the scene before them.

Natasha’s hand twitched, the instinctual urge to inch her hand near her gun was not unlike Clint’s own, though in his case his hands moved towards his back.

Neither knew what to do.

They didn’t want to hurt Tony...But both of them were at a loss.

Sam and Happy actually took a step back in shock, a sliver of fear making its way forward for the briefest of moments.

“What have I done?” Rhodey thought despondently as he held onto Pepper (who was currently curling in on herself in shock and horror).

Sharon’s shock however quickly turned into anger.

What had Rhodes done?

Wanda was engulfed by a pit of despair and overwhelming primal fury, covering her mouth in shock from all Stark’s emotions rolling over her.

Vision gazed upon the scene with a mixture of concern, fascination, and realization.

“I know what they are” he realized.

“Tony” Scott called out softly, his ‘wolf voice’ echoing into Tony’s ears.

An Alpha calling out to his beta.

After a moment Tony stopped trying to claw at Derek in order to get loose and rip apart Rogers and Barnes.

His snarls slowly to angry huffs.

His fangs and claws retracting back.

His eyes returning to their natural brown as his gaze met Scott’s.
As Scott’s calm became his.  
His huffs slowed.  
His anger while still present like a buzz in the back of his mind, was no longer consuming him.  
“What the hell?” Bucky thought, not liking the implications of what he just saw.  
“Everybody leave” Scott commanded, his tone making it clear that he wouldn’t be accepting no as an answer.  
When nobody so much as twitched Scott turned his attention to them.  
“Now” he demanded firmly, letting his ‘Alpha’ voice filter in his tone.  
They’d done enough damage already.  

(Third POV)

“Is this true?” Vargas asked in quiet horror as she gazed upon the contents of the screen.  
Haigh had managed to swipe out Zemo’s flashdrive from the JCTC with another similar looking drive, and quickly had it sent to one of their European Bases.  
Monroe's composed aghast at the drive's contents slowly turned into smug relief.  
“This is what we've been waiting for” Monroe declared, a small smirk adorning her lips.  
Rollins’ eyes gazed upon the screen with a hardness diamonds would be jealous of.  
“There'll be no bouncing back from this” he thought, “Once that information is out there…”  
Monroe slowly removed the drive from the computer in careful reverence.  
“See that that a copy of the drive's contents make their way to Senator Nadeer's contact” Monroe ordered, having already made several copies for herself.  
“Yes ma'am” Vargas replied, moving to the desk chair, immediately typing away.  
“Tomorrow will mark the true start of the fall of an Era” Monroe declared, holding the drive as if it was the most precious treasure in the world.  

Chapter End Notes  

HOLY CRAP!! (I think that sums up this chapter pretty well)  
What is Monroe planning?
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Hi all!

Sorry this was a day late! I had a lot going on and this was a long and involved chapter! So read carefully!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Third POV)

“Eyes up. Americans” Nakia whispered as she lifted her glass to her lips, “I count three”

“Five” Okoye corrected, her tone quiet but sharp, “How could you miss them, they are behind you?”

“Six” T’Challa muttered as his gaze met the shocked face of Agent Ross, “Just spotted an old friend who works for the CIA. It just got a little more complicated”

T’Challa sauntered casually over to the roulette table, placing himself next to the older man.

“Agent Ross” T’Challa acknowledged casually.

“Your Highness” Agent Ross replied in kind, not happy in the least by the new development.

If his hunch was correct it meant that the King was likely here on a sting operation of his own.

Which only spelled trouble for him.

“You are buying from Klaue” T’Challa stated assuredly, placing down a stack of chips.

“What I’m doing or not doing on behalf of the US government is none of your concern” Ross retorted semi-irately, ignoring T’Challa’s amused and decidedly unconcerned smile, “Now whatever the hell you’re up to. Do me a favor, stay out of my way”

The last thing he needed was another ‘enhanced’ and his team causing more deaths and property damage.

“Wakanda has been searching for Klaue far longer than the United States” T’Challa pointed out, his words making it clear that he was not just about to back off.

“Length of time has no bearing on jurisdiction. And frankly you’re still on thin ice with the rest of the world for your little stunt in Bucharest. So unless you want another international incident you really need to leave now” Ross advised pointedly, not ashamed in the least to have resorted to the low-blows (it was true after all).

T’Challa’s lips thinned out to a line in his displeasure.
While bluntly stated Agent Ross was not wrong.

He still supported the Accords and the need for accountability, especially after the damage he himself had caused in Bucharest.

Right now many of the other countries did not see him in a good light, thinking he was too young and reckless to be King.

He had won back some favor when he had taken responsibility for the bridge reparations and medical compensation for those injured.

But as Ross had said, he, and by extension Wakanda, were being observed very closely.

The countries of the world didn't want (or need) a King who was ‘no better’ than the Avengers.

But even still. The US had no idea the just what Klaue knew that they didn't.

And he couldn't risk that information coming to light.

“Klaue is leaving out that door with me” T’Challa stated firmly, “You’ve been warned”

Just as T’Challa moved away, hoping his little power play would show Ross he wasn't backing off, he heard his number called.

“Hey you won” T’Challa heard Ross softly called to him.

Inconsequential. He needed Ross to come to him. To collaborate with him (he didn't need the money anyway).

“Okay heads up. The King of Wakanda is here. He cannot leave with Klaue” Ross declared into the communicator in his sleeve.

Ross knew what T'Challa was doing.

As loathe as he was to admit it he needed to cave to the King's play and try to collaborate with him (he sure as hell wasn't going to tell his agents to back off).

“Hopefully his Majesty can restrain himself from destroying anything this time” Ross thought disbelievingly as he walked over next to the King.

“Vibranium from the attack on Sokovia links back to a person that I’m not actually saying I’m here to make a deal with, but that deal will not be called off. When the dust settles we can work something out” Ross said, trying to meet in the middle, silently hating that he had to compromise.

“I’m not here to make a deal” T’Challa informed him, making sure to sound like vibranium.

He knew he would have to compromise, but he needed to make sure Ross compromised more.

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**Location:** Castle Dracula Sighisoara, Romania (formerly known as Transylvania)

Sitting by his castle fireplace Vlad Tepes found himself once again pondering the state of the ever changing world around him.

Being centuries old he has seen Empires rise and fall. The discoveries and impacts that came from Expansion. Experienced countless Wars, the Enlightenment, and every Technological Revolution
since the 1400s.

However nothing has ever concerned him more than the changes taking place now.

Humans and Supernaturals have always had a complicated relationship.

Up until the last hundred or so years humans still believed in what they now call myths and superstitions.

He growled in annoyance.

They used to be worshipped! Revered! Feared and respected!

But because of the Assimilation Movement supernaturals had faded from existence and were relegated to nothing more than *fairytales*.

It was disgraceful!

Now with the threat of the Monroe Republic and the formation of the Accords supernaturals had a chance to take back their place in the world.

Suddenly, the flames of his fireplace flickered wildly, a puff of flames exhaling an ember into the air.

The tiny flames died out, and the message gently wisped into his fingertips.

*By request of the Ancient One an emergency Council meeting has been ordered to convene noontime tomorrow July 3rd.*

“The time I have waited over a hundred years for is upon us” Vlad declared with a sharp grin, the orange flames glinting off the snow white of his fangs.

*Location: Atlantean Royal Palace Atlantis, Atlantic Ocean (between North America and Europe)*

Saying that his Majesty King Namor despised land-dwellers would be like telling someone water is wet.

The despicable Lung-men do nothing but take, use, and destroy with no concern for the consequences.

For Neptune's sake there was a mass of trash the size of Texas in the northern Atlantic!

They think they're so superior. Ha! The notion itself was ridiculous!

Granted the land-dwellers have begun developing creatures and men with great power, but their constant in-fighting against each other leaves them as underdeveloped children in comparison to the magnificence that was Atlantis.

Suddenly bubbles swirled in front of him as he was making his way to relieve his boredom in the combat arena.

As each of the bubbles popped one by one he was left with a single bubble encasing a message, protecting it from the waters of the deep.

*By request of the Ancient One an emergency Council meeting has been ordered to convene*
noontime tomorrow July 3rd.

“It never ceases to amaze me how those vile creatures think they can order me around as they please” Namor noted blandly, brushing the bubble away with his hand as if it were a pesky garra rufa, “When will they learn that it is not I who is at the beck-and-call?”

Though he supposed it may alleviate the drollness of the past few days.

Location: Forest of a Thousand Sorrows Avalon, Otherworld (pocket-dimension between Britain and Ireland)

He'd already felt the shift.

He may not be of Earth’s dimension, but theirs ran parallel.

Connected to one another through in part the Nemetons.

So when the messenger bulb finally bloomed he hadn't been surprised to hear its message:

By request of the Ancient One an emergency Council meeting has been ordered to convene noontime tomorrow July 3rd.

King Oberon wondered just who had shifted the balance so.

Location: Shinto Temple Takamagahara, Ama (pocket-dimension adjacent to Earth, specifically the Island of Honshu, Japan)

Kana sat in prayer.

Pleading with the Ancestors to guide the new path of the universe and keep it safe from destruction.

The astral message sent to her still plaguing her thoughts.

By request of the Ancient One an emergency Council meeting has been ordered to convene noontime tomorrow July 3rd.

The bells of the Temple chimed, promising protection from evil and lifting her worries by a trace amount.

Location: Shadow Guard Base of Operations San Francisco, California

Patting his beard dry, Argent couldn't help but be grateful for the showers having been added to the barracks.

He finally had the chance to expel his Uncle Alexander's ghost from the Glen Capri Motel.

The son-of-a-bitch hadn't gone easily.

It had taken him 3 clips of iron bullets and 1 iron dust bomb, but at least now the suicides will stop.

Ding.
Argent looked over at his laptop to see that he had gotten a new email.

Re: Emergency Meeting

*By request of the Ancient One an emergency Council meeting has been ordered to convene noontime tomorrow July 3rd.*

“That doesn't bode well” Argent murmured, not liking the timing at all.

---

**Location:** Guest Room Avengers Compound, upstate New York

Hoo.

Nothing.

Hoo. Hoo.

Maybe if he didn't move it will go away.

Peck.

“Ow!” Scott yelped, grabbing his ear as he lifted his head up to glare at the offending owl.

“You couldn't have waited another hour?” Scott grumbled, glancing at the clock.

7:01 AM.

Peck.

“Ow! I get it!” Scott declared, sitting up a bit more so he could take the message tied to the bird’s leg.

Stiles was adamant that the only reason the Council chooses to message him this way was because of some running Harry Potter joke that amused them.

Frankly he was inclined to agree.

Unrolling the message he glanced at the contents on the page.

*By request of the Ancient One an emergency Council meeting has been ordered to convene noontime tomorrow July 3rd.*

Scott let out a sincerely annoyed groan.

Now?

This was the absolute worst time.

Of course that seemed to be the story of their lives.

---

(Everett Ross’ POV)

“Your father told the UN that Klaue stole all the vibranium you had, but now he’s telling me you have more?” I stated accusingly.
“And you believe the word of an arms dealer strapped to a chair” T’Challa countered firmly, trying to poke holes and cause doubt.

To bad the only thing I doubted was him.

“How much more are you hiding?” I asked him suspiciously.

Every country has its secrets.

Case in point: Russia. The Black Widow Program.

And the US was no different.

If T’Challa actually thought I was stupid enough not to think that Wakanda was hiding things, especially when vibranium has been connected to them already then he’s either desperate or delusional (or perhaps both).

Suddenly the door flung open, the woman, Nakia I believe, barging in, hands out in the universal non-threatening gesture speaking in T’Challa’s direction in what was likely Xhosa.

Before she could even finish an explosion rocked the room, making us stumble.

Suddenly Klaue’s wild screams echoed throughout the interrogation room.

Straightening myself out I saw a masked gunman raise his automatic weapon into the air through the one-way mirror, firing blindly and shattering the glass.

Recognizing that Nakia was dead center of the intruder’s firing zone I quickly sprinted over to her.

Fighter or not, she was still just as stunned by the events as most people would be.

“Get down!” I shouted, just reaching her in time as the next round of bullets came at her.

Wrapping my arm around her waist I twisting myself in front of her, shielding her and pulling her down to the ground.

As I did a sharp pain shot up my back like electricity, only it felt like was burning.

“-nt -oss”

I couldn’t focus.

The pain was too much.

“-an -o -ear me?”

I begged for the pain to stop.

The darkness was welcome.

(Vision’s POV)

I focused on the rhythmic up and down movement of the cutting knife as I diced the peppers for the omelette.

Mr. St-Tony had enrolled me in a nearby cooking class this past week.

Friday had been my first class under my new chosen secret alias Victor Shade.

*Flashback*

“Victor Shade?” Mr. Stark inquired, when I informed him of my choice of alias.

“Based on the John Shade of Vladimir Nabokov’s Pale Fire” I explained to him.

I found the book to be intriguing.

“And why Victor?” he asked curiously.

“As a...homage” I hesitantly revealed.

*He gave me a curious, confused gaze, tilting his head slightly to the side.*

“A homage to what?” he prodded gently.

“...The name Victor means to conqueror. I felt it was a...fitting selection as Jarvis’ programming conquered Ultron's” I detailed, explaining my reasoning.

I watched as a myriad of emotions flickered quickly through his eyes, pain and shock being two of them.

“Yeah that—that works” Mr. Stark stammered a bit, looking like he was fighting the the well of emotion lacing his voice.

*He turned slightly (likely to hide the emotions still coursing through his expressions) to manipulate the documents on his holoscreen falsifying my new chosen alias.*

I knew that to Tony Jarvis had been more akin to his child.

Losing him had been an enormous blow.

One that almost none of the Avengers, save Colonel Rhodes, had even acknowledged.

Logically I understood why.

*Jarvis, while a member of the Avengers in his own right, he was predominantly seen by the other Avengers as merely an intelligent computer program and not the sentient and sapient being that he was.*

*Unfortunately there are no laws currently dictating that Artificial Intelligences had rights or were ‘people’ in the eyes of the law.*

A predicament I myself currently found myself in.

*The United States, UN, and world at large had no idea how to classify me.*

*Mr. Stark insisted that I was indeed a ‘person’ too, and much better than a majority of the “fleshy” kind.*
“Mr. Stark?” I said, gently requesting his attention once more.

“Ye-Yeah” he said, clearing his throat a bit, though he did not remove his gaze from the holoscreen.

“I would like to take you up on your offer to assist me in claiming personhood in the eyes of the law” I declared bluntly.

His eyes immediately snapped up to meet mine, using his one hand to flick away the holoscreen as if it were a gnat.

“You sure?” he asked me, sounding surprised by my request.

“I am” I told him assuredly.

I wanted this.

“Then let’s redefine humanity” he declared smirking, “Friday, make a reminder for me to email Jennifer and Matt. If we’re going to do this we’re going to need the best of the best lawyers” Jennifer Walters and Matt Murdock. Logical choices indeed.

“I am aware that we are working on an alias for me to use with my chosen shifted form, however, I would appreciate a...true given name as well. A birth certificate of sorts?” I inquired uncertainly.

“What name were you thinking?” Mr. Stark inquired curiously.

“Vision Banner-Stark?” I suggested to him.

I believe I was...amused by his stunned expression.

“Stark?” he questioned, sounding disbelieving, “Why would you...?”

“My creation came from the union of Ultron and Jarvis’ programs. Jarvis was created by you, as was the original Ultron program prior to its hijacking, and my brain-scans were modelled after your own and Dr. Banner’s-” I began reasoning out.

“I’m gonna stop you right there” Mr. Stark stated, sounding slightly overwhelmed, “I am too young for that-that...word”

I tilted my head in confusion at his emphasis.

“What word?” I inquired confused.

“You know...The word you were alluding to before I prevented you from uttering such blasphemy aloud” Mr. Stark said hesitantly, eluding the term of the word he was alleging I was referring to.

I thought back to my explanation...

“I am unsure to which term you are referring to. I was merely stating that due to how I came to be, you and Dr. Banner are what I would equate to-”

“Don’t say it!” Mr. Stark declared, trying to cut me off again.

“Grandparents” I concluded anyway.
“What did I just say?!” Mr. Stark declared in almost comical exasperated annoyance.

“I am unsure of your reasoning behind such aversion. To my knowledge most are elated to know they are having grandchildren” I questioned.

“Not when they shouldn’t be legally allowed to interact and taint impressionable minds. Hell I’m not even parent material” Mr. Stark declared self-deprecatingly.

My face scrunched in confusion at his description.

“None of the data I possess supports such hypothesis” I tell him, making his attention snap back to mine, “Your AI’s are your children are they not? They have all learned and grown through you. In addition, your interactions with Harley and Mercedes Keener, and Peter Parker indicate that while perhaps a tad unorthodox due to you not wanting to officially usurp a former hole left by a parental figure, that you possess fairly innate paternal instincts of your own”

Mr. Stark once again looked choked up with emotion...Though this time...happiness seemed to be the most dominant.

After a moment’s shock Mr. Stark rubbed at his nose, making a sniffing noise.

“Well if you’re going to insist on making me an old man than I demand a ‘Foxy Grandpa’ shirt” he declared, pointing a finger at me with an amused smirk.

*End Flashback

I took a hand-full of the peppers and spread them about the omelette, and used the spatula to flip the one side over the other.

“You’re getting pretty good at cooking” a familiar voice sounded.

“Mr. McCall” I addressed, turning to face him, “The omelette is for you actually”

“Me?” he inquired curiously, “Thank you...But why?”

“As an icebreaker I suppose. I wanted to speak with you this morning regarding Mr.-Tony, and I’ve read people are more relaxed with food” I told him, sliding the omelette onto a plate and placing it in front of him.

I watched as Mr. McCall cut the omelette with his fork and take a bite.

“It's good” he praised, chewing the bite a bit more before he spoke again, “So why the need for me to be relaxed?”

“I believe I know what your species is” I revealed bluntly, causing him to choke on the next bite in his mouth.

“Judging from the information given and observed I believe that you, Mr. Hale, Ms. Romero, and now M-Tony are werewolves” I reasoned to him.

Mr. McCall let out a huge sigh, pinching the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger.

“You assumption would be correct” Friday announced, having listened in to their conversation, “I heard Mr. McCall say so himself when Boss first woke up”

Mr. McCall proceeded to bang his forehead on the countertop.
“It's too early for this” I heard him mumble miserably.

“I must admit I am fascinated by the idea. On what is truth and what is not. The idea that, like the Asgardians, there is an interpretation in mythology for the basis of an actual species that has influenced our culture is fascinating” I told him, desiring to know more.

“You'd be the minority” Mr. McCall huffed out, lifting his head up to meet my gaze, “A majority of the world wouldn't be so accepting...or calm about our existence”

I considered that for a moment.

“I am not so sure” I told him, “Certainly history has proven that the revelation of the existence of those 'different' has generally never started out well. Mutants used to be feared, discriminated against and persecuted, and now they are protected under the law and mostly accepted as a part of the general population. Inhumans however are seen in much of the same way mutants used to be, and there is some distrust in the recent years of enhanced individuals though I'd say the general consensus is still in favor of the enhanced”

“It's not the same as telling everyone that all the scary stories you were told growing up have a measure of truth to them” Mr. McCall retorted despondently.

Well that was an interesting matter I'd like to discuss more in length with him later.

If he was indeed telling the truth then that may mean that 'humans’ may not in fact be the dominant species on Earth like they like to think that they are.

“Not necessarily. The reveal that Thor was in fact the same 'God' in Norse mythology caused quite a controversy, however the majority of the world finds the revelation more fascinating than something to fear” I countered.

“Thor doesn't have claws and fangs” Mr. McCall countered back, “And he's seen as a hero”

I could see how the skill-set differences would concern him. But still.

“The Shadow Guard are seen as heroes as well” I reminded him, “Press has expressed to the world that the Shadow Guard is a legit government organization made up of a mix of enhanced and non-enhanced. Your roll in discovering the truth behind the bombing in Vienna, the capture of Helmut Zemo, and your mediation of the Avengers has left the vast majority of the world singing you praises”

Mr. McCall paused to contemplate my words, nodding slowly after a minute.

“Even if we reveal ourselves...There isn't anything to protect our rights” he admitted sadly.

“.....”

“And now Tony doesn't have rights under the law either” I realized in sad disbelief.

(Third POV)

“Yes Bambi I'd like to cancel all of Tony's appointments and appearances for this week. Reschedule them if you can” Pepper informed her secretary through her cell.

“Friday inform Bambi that she is to not cancel any of my appointments and appearances. I will be
attending them on schedule” Tony declared walking closer to Pepper though very obviously keeping his distance.

“Bambi I'll call you back shortly” Pepper stated in an exasperated tone, ending the call.

“You are clearing your schedule” Pepper declared firmly, crossing her arms and giving Tony a pointed glare.

“Well since I'm healthier than I can ever remember being I don't really see an excuse why I should” Tony countered.

“You have fangs and claws now. What if you get mad at one of the meetings? It's a well known fact that the board of directors are very irritating!” Pepper retorted.

“I won't kill them” Tony tried to assure her, “Maim maybe. But not kill”

“This isn't a joke Tony! God this” Pepper said sounding slightly hysterical, “I don't know what to do! You were growling and snarling like a rabid animal Tony! Can you even function in society like this? Is there a cure?—”

“Pep” Tony said gently, taking her hands in his.

“I'm not some dog that needs to be put down” Tony relayed to her sadly.

*Flashback*

“What the hell did you turn me into!” Tony demanded as the ICU door was shut behind them.

“Anger is a trigger. You just need an anchor” Scott advised him calmly, “It'll keep you centered. In control”

“Piss off” Tony snarled at him.

“Now I know how Bruce felt that day on the helicarrier” Tony thought miserably.

“You're not a mindless animal” Hayden tried to placate him.

“Aren't I?” Tony scoffed.

“No” Scott said firmly, staring him down with conviction.

“You're a werewolf. Like us” he declared, “And if we're not monsters, than neither are you”

*End Flashback*

As loathe as Tony was to admit it, Scott was right.

He wasn't a monster.

Though technically by human mythological standards he was…

And then there was that whole issue with Scott admitting that he wasn't exactly a werewolf.

But even still.

He hated his predicament.
And he refused to talk to Scott and his ‘Pack’.

He didn't want their help.

He had Pepper, Rhodey, Happy, Vision, and Friday.

He was Tony Stark for Christ's sake!

He didn't need a Pack.

He already had one.

“You don't see McCall and his little band of puppies using anyone as a chew toy. I just need to find something that grounds me, and that something is you” Tony pleaded gently, bringing her hands to his lips, gently kissing her knuckles.

“Tony” Pepper pleaded sadly.

“I know we're on a break right now. And I'm not asking for us to get back together...But I need you Pep” Tony pleaded softly, desperately.

His eyes screaming, “Please don’t leave”.

“I wouldn't even begin to know how to help you Tony” Pepper whispered sadly.

This. Whatever he was now, she had no idea what to do.

“I'm still me Pep...I just might want you to scratch behind my ears every once and a while now” Tony said, trying to get her to smile.

Which it did (urged him on).

“And fleas may or may not be an issue. I never really got around to asking before I ran off” he continued, pulling Pepper a bit closer to him.

“And I mean I ran” he emphasized, wrapping his arms around her, relieved that she was letting him.

“I had to have beaten some kind of record” he continued, still a bit in awe (and horrified) about just how fast he had actually gone.

He really needed to ask Friday to clock him next time.

Pepper placed gentle hands on the sides of his face, halting his thought processes.

“I don't know if I can handle all this Tony” she admitted ruefully.

She didn't know if she could do this again with him.

“Honestly. Neither can I” Tony commented in kind, his voice as soft as hers, all traces of levity gone.

“But I'll figure it out. I always do” he told her assuredly, kissing her forehead.

And he would.

Because he needed to.
(Wanda's POV)

The Lagos interview was today.

I would have to go in front of millions of people and apologize for my wrongs.

With Steve.

Before, knowing that he would be there with me was a comfort.

Now it just made me want to run off even more.

“All you've done your whole life is use people in order to get what you want. And when they're no longer of use to you you toss them aside” Dr. Cho accused.

Isn't that what I was considering now?

“They covered for you. Made you one of them. They made you feel better about yourself like you had wanted...And now that the public is scorning you you're going to toss aside everything they did for you and run away again” Dr. Cho accused knowingly.

As much as I wanted to deny it, her accusations were true.

I did want to run off and start off new somewhere else, away from all of this.


I moved away from my open closet (where I had just been staring at my selection clothes ‘trying’ to decide what to wear for the interview) and opened my apartment door.

I surprised to see that Scott was early...and was with Hayden.

“Sorry to bother you. Do you have a moment?” Scott asked politely.

“Shouldn't you be with Stark until we have to leave?” I inquired.

With how things ended yesterday I figured he would be.

“He's forty-six years old. He doesn’t need a babysitter” Scott replied, giving me a disarming smile and sounding mildly amused.

“Besides. If anything happens I'll sense it” he continued, sounding unconcerned.

I nodded.

I had felt the echoes of the bond between him and Stark, so his claim had some merit.

“But that's not why I'm here” Scott stated, turning his head to glance at Hayden (who was crossing her arms), “Hayden has something she needs to say”

I didn’t have to sense her emotions to be able to tell that she didn’t want to be here.

When Hayden tightened her jaw and stubbornly kept quiet, looking anywhere but at me, Scott nudged her forward slightly with his shoulder.

When she turned back to stare at him like some annoyed petulant teenager Scott just gave her an
an expectant look that said, “Now”.

Hayden huffed out in annoyance, tightening her grip on her arms, but turning to face me none-the-less.

“I’m sorry” she stated quickly though she didn’t sound 100% sincere.

“For?” Scott prompted.

“Calling you a bitch and jumping to conclusions” she said sounding slightly annoyed.

I blinked in surprise.

The whole thing was unexpected...and odd.

It kind of reminded me of when a parent would make their child apologize for something they had done wrong.

“Um” I stammered, still in shock that Scott was having her apologize to me at all.

“Hayden got defensive and assumed that you were insulting Tony” Scott expanded, “She’s sorry” Yeah. She sure sounded sorry.

“And you assumed differently?” I questioned him skeptically.

Everyone else had jumped to the same conclusion as her after all.

“Derek and I heard your heartbeat when you tried to explain what you had meant. You weren’t lying. Plus we smelled your desperation and shock. No malice or ill intentions at all” Scott explained calmly.

…….What?

“Heartbeat?” I questioned confused.

“Because of our enhanced hearing we can usually tell if someone is lying by listening to their heartbeat” Scott replied simply.

“Oh...And you can...smell emotions too?” I inquired uncertainly.

“Amongst other things yeah. Emotions play a big part with our abilities” Scott alluded cryptically.

“...”

“Um thank you...For apologizing” I muttered slightly, still taken aback.

For the most part everyone now seemed to be overly critical of me.

A complete 180 of how it used to be.

So Scott having her apologize wasn’t something I had expected.

“Is this a bad time?”

We all turned to see Steve inching uncertainly towards us.
I quickly looked over at my digital clock.

10:00 AM.

Damn.

I had really gotten lost in my head earlier if it was already this late.

“Sorry. Give me a moment. I still need to get dressed” I told him awkwardly.

He nodded (albeit stiffly).

“Thank you again” I told the two of them.

“I’ll wait as well” Scott said nodding, giving me a genuine smile while Hayden was quick to walk away at my dismissal.

I closed my door for some privacy.

Maybe I could do this after all.

I just need to make sure that I watch what I say this time.

(Third POV)

“Sorry we’re a bit late” Lydia apologized, she and Kira taking a seat on the outer edge of the conference table.

They had been seeing off Scott and Stiles.

“That’s quite alright Ms. Martin. Friday already informed us of your delay” Maria relayed in a professional tone, “Now that you’re here we may begin”

Of the Avengers only Tony, Rhodes, Nat, and Vision were present as they were the only ones not currently on probation. Which incidentally was the topic they were here to discuss.

“It has been brought to our attention that it may be best to suspend missions until further notice. With half of the Avengers on house arrest, and Stark’s temporary leave of absence there just isn’t enough members to be actively or safely deployed” Maria began, taking a moment's pause to let her words sink in.

To her relief she was met by silence.

It wasn’t anything any of them hadn’t already concluded for themselves, even if they didn’t look particularly happy about it.

“Unfortunately we do not have an exact date when the other Avengers will be taken off house arrest, nor do we know when it will be deemed safe for Stark to return to active duty” Maria continued.

“Soon” Tony thought determinedly.

“So we need to recruit” Natasha stated bluntly, sick of all the eloquent beating-around-the-bush.

Maria nodded.
“If the Avengers are to be deployed again any time soon, yes you will need more members” Maria confirmed.

“Well. We have one applicant” Tony declared placing a manila file folder onto the table, pushing it towards Natasha.

After a moment of glancing at its contents she looked up at Tony in curious interest.

“Does Lang know about this?” she asked, passing the folder over to Rhodes.

“The FBI and UN are currently breathing down Pym Tech’s neck. Hope’s made it clear they’re on thin ice as it is, so contact was kept to a minimum of none” Tony relayed.

“Pym has another suit?” Rhodey questioned, raising an eyebrow at him, passing the folder to Vision.

“Yup. Different from the one Lang uses. Better if you ask me” Tony replied.

With flight capabilities and stingers it was far more versatile.

“She is trained in its use I presume?” Vision inquired, scanning the documents.

“From what we know she’s far more qualified then Lang” Tony detailed, his logic coming off slightly insulting without meaning too.

“And she volunteered for the Initiative?” Natasha inquired, having an inkling as to the woman’s motives.

“Yup. Pym tech is under major scrutiny, and even though Pym probably would rather go on the run than let the government have access to his tech, Hope thinks signing the Accords and joining the Avengers as the Wasp would help return some of their Company’s credibility” Tony explained.

He wasn’t friends with the Pyms by any means.

At least not anymore.

Prior to whatever falling out Pym had with his father he remembered going with his mother to visit Janet van Dyne and her daughter Hope.

He was ten years older than her so they never really had been close prior to her father cutting off everything Stark.

Besides. He wasn’t one to let someone else’s opinion of him stop him.

Hope came to him for assistance.

So he would help.

“She wouldn’t be able to start in right away” Rhodey noted, thinking practically, “We’d have to run a lot of simulations, test her capabilities, and work on team cohesion”

“I’m glad you think so Colonel, because until further notice you are now the Leader of the Avengers” Maria announced.

“Me?” Rhodey questioned, surprised by the development.
He had thought Tony was the new Avengers leader.

“You’re the best candidate Honeybear. Even when I come back we’ll still be co-leading” Tony relayed, sounding both proud and confident in his friend.

And semi-relieved.

He didn’t want to be the leader of the Avengers.

Snapping out of his shock Rhodey gave Maria a confirming nod, accepting his new position.

It was a hell of a lot of responsibility...But he really should have seen it coming.

“Any other ideas for potential additions?” Maria inquired, looking at all of them.

“I would say T’Challa would be a good part-timer, but his standing isn’t all that great right now” Natasha noted.

“I’ll have him marked down as a maybe then and reach out to see if we can arrange a meeting” Maria wrote down on her Starkpad.

“Jennifer Walters” Tony declared suddenly, almost regretting saying it as the words came out of his mouth (But they were really hard-pressed right now).

“The lawyer?” Vision questioned curiously.

“Bruce’s cousin?” Natasha questioned, narrowing her eyes suspiciously at Tony, “Why her?”

“Bruce has a cousin?” Rhodey muttered, though he was largely ignored.

Tony hesitated slightly, his reluctance obvious.

“Green and angry runs in the family” Tony finally replied, trying to bring a little levity into the situation and failing.

“She’s a hulk?” Rhodey blurted in shock.

“How?” Natasha demanded sharply.

Did Secretary Ross kidnap and experiment on her after Bruce got away?

“During the Chitauri invasion she had gotten severely hurt. Since Bruce was her only family the hospital contacted him...She needed a blood transfusion and they didn’t have enough of her blood type in stock” Tony explained carefully.

Since Bruce had stayed with him for a while after the invasion he had been there during the whole ordeal and made sure to erase any footage and documentation that would put Jennifer at risk.

“And the serum in Dr. Banner’s blood in turn was transferred to her as well” Vision theorized.

Tony nodded grimly.

He and Bruce had been worried that his blood would either kill or turn her...With the latter happening.

“However unlike Bruce she retains her consciousness and intelligence even while transformed, and
is able to transform back and forth at will” Tony detailed carefully, knowing that this was the important part in why they should consider her inclusion into the Avengers.

“So all the pluses and none of the negatives” Natasha inquired skeptically.

Why was it different for her than it was for Bruce?

“I wouldn’t say none. She still has to watch her temper or else she’ll start turning green, but she won’t lose herself to it like Bruce” Tony corrected.

He really hoped that they accepted the idea to include her.

She was one of the few he could think of that might actually join the Avengers right now.

And with Thor gone for who knows long, and Bruce gone to parts unknown they needed some more heavy hitters on deck.

“If everyone is in agreement I’ll send her an application once the other absent members agree?” Maria inquired after giving them all a moment’s deliberation.

Tony let out a sigh of relief when each of them nodded.

“Any other suggestions?” Maria inquired, looking at all of them.

“Bobbi already declined my offered back when SHIELD fell. I could reach out again, but I doubt her answer’s changed” Natasha thought, shaking her head no to Maria’s question.

“The Defenders were pretty adamant about staying on the streets, but considering my upcoming meetings with both Matt and Rand maybe I can get them to change their minds” Tony considered thoughtfully, remaining silent at the question.

“No one military comes to mind Colonel?” Maria inquired curiously, addressing him directly.

Rhodey shook his head.

“I looked into some of the military names on Project Insight’s list to see if there was anything there” he admitted.

“And” Maria inquired.

“A few caught my eye, but other than ROTC Elijah Bradley none of them really hold any Avengers potential as of right now. And the kid’s too young” Rhodey relayed.

He had a few hunches that the kid was physically enhanced, but the kid was still in high school.

“I may have an idea about that” Tony commented casually, figuring this was as good a time as any to bring up what he had been working on since his talk with Agent Papa.

“Which is?” Rhodey asked, giving him a questioning eyebrow.

“The Accords allow us to take in and train young heroes and enhanced. But we don't actually have a protocol set in place for that” Tony began, Parker now at the forefront of his mind.

“But you have an idea how to fix that” Natasha stated (it wasn’t a question).

“A kind of Young Avengers Initiative. They'll get all the training and mentoring they need and in
emergencies they can help us with disasters” Tony explained.

There was more to it, but basically that was the gist.

“So that’s the little pet project you’ve been working on...For Spiderman I’m assuming” Natasha commented in understanding.

Tony nodded in confirmation.

“I have two other potential candidates for it too” Tony stated, looking pointedly at Rhodey.

“You and I will be talking about that later” Rhodey ground out unhappily, narrowing his eyes at Tony as he realized exactly who he was silently pleading permission for.

“I actually might have another Young Avengers candidate for you” Kira announced, speaking up for the first time, “She’s actually a huge Hawkeye fan. And good with a bow and arrow herself”

“Kate?” Lydia asked skeptically.

That could work.

She was one of their New York branch’s trainees.

Kira nodded.

“Give me her name and I’ll be sure to send her an application for review” Maria declared simply.

“Will do” Kira replied.

“Then if there is nothing further, consider this meeting adjourned” Maria dismissed.

---

(T’Challa’s POV)

I stared grimly out the jet’s window as we phased through Wakanda’s barrier, injured passenger in tow.

Shuri had not been pleased that we were bringing a “colonizer” to Wakanda, but had agreed to assist with Agent Ross’ injury none-the-less.

I stared down at my magnificent home and not for the first time I dreaded whether I was making the right decision in bringing a high ranking member of the US CIA into my country.

To say it put Wakanda at great risk would be an understatement.

If Ross does not agree to keep quiet about what he sees here I may have to have him killed...Which could potentially cause more problems for Wakanda if his murder was traced back to us.

I prayed to Bast that it would not have to come to that.

I felt a light hand touch my shoulder.

I turned to see Nakia.

Her gaze was one of understanding and pity.

But not one of regret.
“You are doing the right thing T’Challa” she said assuredly, gripping my shoulder comfortably.

I truly hope that she is right.

(Danny's POV)

“Really? A homework date?” Kitty questioned in exasperation.

“You can’t get a doctorate just by showing up to class” I retorted with a grin.

“If only it were that simple” Bobby muttered miserably, “I can’t even figure out my pre-calc packet”

“Which is why I’m here” I reminded him.

“I guess it is kind of sweet. You two did get closer because Bobby needed someone to tutor him after all” Kitty relented.

“I say when the two of you are done we grab Rogue and John, and we all head to the arcade” Jubilee suggested, sounding excited.

“Ooo now that’s a plan!” Kitty declared excitedly.

I couldn’t help but chuckle a bit at their excitement.

Being at the Mansion reminded me of the early days at Beacon High before I broke up with Ethan (minus the constant threats to our lives).

ERT ERT ERT ERT ERT ERT ERT ERT

I looked down at my laptop in horror as my Red Alert popped up on my screen.

“No” I thought in terror.

I quickly started keying through my systems and logging into the program Stiles and I had developed to identify messages and downloads being transferred into the public streaming system by the Monroe Republic.

“Danny what’s going on? What is that?” Bobby questioned, sounding extremely concerned.

I ignored him.

Monroe was downloading several video files directly to a public server.

Whatever the videos were, cutting the transmission was my top priority.

“Danny!” Bobby called out to me desperately.

“Not now” I told him sharply.

I felt bad, but I’d apologize later.

Anything Monroe wanted the public to see couldn’t be good.

“Got it!” I declared relieved, sitting back in the couch a bit.
“What the hell was all that?” Kitty demanded, crossing her arms.

“I had to stop a hacker-” I started explain (partially lying of course), when my screen flashed again.

ERT ERT ERT ERT ERT ERT ERT

“That’s impossible” I muttered in horror, returning to the program, trying once again to halt the download...Only to realize that it was pointless.

“She’s streaming from a hundred different locations” I muttered in disbelieving horror, “There’s nothing I can do to stop this in time”

“What seems to be the matter? I could sense the turmoil all the way from my office” Professor Xavier inquired, the motorized chair wheeling him into the room, and the man, Erik (?), moving in beside him.

“Danny what’s going on? You’re scaring us a bit here” Bobby said in increasing soft concern.

“The first of the downloads is going to...Park Avenue, New York City? Why?” I muttered trying to figuring out just what Monroe’s endgame was. What the videos were.

“That’s where Captain America and the Scarlet Witch are doing their interview” Jubilee pointed out slowly.

My head snapped up immediately.

“Shit! I forgot about that!” I declared, pulling out my phone.

“Come on Scott pick up. Pick up” I muttered, into the receiver.

I growled as it went to voicemail.

“Scott you have to answer. Monroe is hijacking the interview with a whole bunch of videos and I can’t stop it! You can’t do the interview!” I declared quickly, ending the voicemail, and trying Stiles’ number.

“They’re probably not going to answer” Jubilee said carefully, pointing to the TV, “The interview’s already started”

I turned my head in horror at the screen.

Sure enough the Avengers Interview was currently already underway.

The reason I hadn’t noticed was because the TV had been muted.

“Unmute it” I demanded.

“Danny. What’s really going on here?” Bobby asked, looking very concerned.

“We’re about to find out”

(Third POV)

“Thank you all for coming. After both Mr. Rogers and Ms. Maximoff have spoken a quick Q & A will be allowed afterwards. With that, I will turn over the microphone first to Steve Rogers” Scott
announced, moving away from the podium.

He and Stiles were both extremely uncomfortable.

The two of them were made to attend the interview as they were the parole officers keeping Steve and Wanda in line.

If the interview was going to go on as planned they needed to be there.

Though the problem itself wasn’t their attendance.

It was the fact it would be a very public interview.

Even if they were of background importance, their faces would still be broadcasted across the world.

Scott just hoped that Vision was right, and that the publicity would be good for them.

Steve took a deep breath and moved over to the podium, the television screens now displaying his face.

“Thank you all for coming. What we are here for is long overdue, and I apologize first and foremost for that” Steve began, grateful that the journalists and news reporters were currently respecting the no flash request they had made earlier on.

“Almost a month ago I led a team consisting of myself, Black Widow, Falcon, and the Scarlet Witch to a search and scout mission in Lagos, Nigeria following a lead we had that a former Hydra agent was within the city. When the identity of the former Hydra agent was discovered to be Brock Rumlow, also known as Crossbones, I altered our mission plans in order to bring him in” Steve detailed calmly, much in a way an officer would debrief the details of a mission.

The fact that the mission had already started off as an unsanctioned mission to search for Bucky was where everything had first gone wrong.

“When we discovered that Rumlow was supposedly going to steal a bioweapon we made plans to intercept him. We managed to contain Rumlow’s attack on the facility for a time. Unfortunately he eluded capture and with his remaining men they split up within the marketplace” Steve continued almost impassionately.

If he had just included the Lagos police department in their operation the area at least could have been evacuated.

“We managed to retrieve the bioweapon, however Rumlow’s personal grudge against myself incited a fight between the two of us. After I defeated him I regrettably allowed myself to be distracted from searching him down for any other weapons, which was exactly what he had hoped his words would do” Steve admitted grimly.

Bucky had always been his weak-spot.

And Rumlow knew it.

“Because he was successfully able to distract me, he was able to activate the explosives on his person, forcing Wanda Maximoff, also known as the Scarlet Witch, to use her powers to contain the blast” Steve continued.
It was his fault that Wanda was put in that position and everyone needed to know that.

Wanda on the other hand was torn.

*This* was the Steve who had mentored her. The good man she had thought he was.

Not the liar who kept secrets for his own benefit.

“While Wanda’s abilities are powerful they require both experience and self-assuredness to work at their most effective. Because of the suddenness of the explosion and her lack of experience in containing both fire and concussive blasts under pressure she did not have the focus or assuredness at that moment in time to contain the explosion properly. She sent the explosion into the air to prevent casualties, however because it took all she had to contain the blast she was not able to focus properly on her trajectory, causing her to send Rumlow too close to the Aid and Relief Center” Steve said, making sure to explain the entire situation in thorough detail.

He had specifically made sure to take the time to discuss with Stilinski exactly what his determinations had been during the time of the Incident.

“Wanda’s powers and capabilities were subjected to review by the members of the Shadow Guard sent to act as our parole officers by the UN. Specifically by Agent Stilinski, behind me” Steve declared, gesturing to Stilinski behind him, who in turn nodded to the audience.

It was important for the world to know that what he was saying had legitimate merit, and was not just his opinion.

“Lagos was a horrible tragedy. That is undeniable. I made the choice to pursue an unauthorized mission, and chose not to inform the Nigerian government of our plans” Steve continued, making sure to apologize for his errors that resulted in the twenty-six dead, “While I cannot say for sure if informing the Nigerian government of the intel we possessed would have changed the outcome, it would potentially have placed less civilians at risk”

“Allowing myself to be distracted gave Rumlow the chance to activate his explosive devices, forcing Wanda to be placed in the position she had been” Steve made sure to emphasize again.

He knew Wanda was going to continue getting backlash in the upcoming days, so he wanted to take as much heat off of her as possible.

“As team leader the deaths in Nigeria are on me and I apologize for my oversight” Steve declared sincerely, stepping away from the podium so that Wanda could say her piece.

Wanda made her way hesitantly up to the podium.

“I can do this” she silently encouraged herself, “I can do this”

Taking a deep breath, she wasn’t proud to say that it took her a moment to find her voice, but everything was just so overwhelming!

“I cannot apologize enough for the damage my actions have caused” she began, her voice a bit shaky and uncertain.

“I know what it feels like to have a group come into your country, causing death and destruction. Only to tell you that they are here to help” Wanda relayed sadly.

Yes she now knew that many of the riots she attended going against the invading forces in Sokovia
were staged by Hydra as a way to both cover up their experimentation and get willing volunteers.

But it still didn’t change the hate she had for those who came into her country and turned their home into a warzone.

“I can’t bring any of your loved ones back. But I can try and make sure something like this never happens again. Agent Stilinski-” Wanda apologized, gesturing back to Stiles once again, “Has been teaching me more about my powers in order to make certain I am more appropriately trained in the ways that I need to be”

And she was getting better.

Willpower and emotional control truly was the key.

“If only I had that confidence in Lagos” Wanda thought unhappily.

“I apologize again for those whose loved ones were lost in Lagos…” Wanda declared softly, awkwardly trailing off, unsure of what more to say.

Taking that as his cue Scott moved over to the podium, placing his hand gently on Wanda’s shoulder and gesturing with his other hand that she may go.

A dismissal she was happy to take.

Taking her spot alongside Steve again, she couldn’t help but feel uneasy.

The two of them still haven’t spoken since it was revealed that Steve had lied about the Stark’s deaths.

“You did great” Steve muttered encouragingly, giving her a small smile.

“…”

She didn’t know what to say.

She was still mad that Steve could lie about something so important to someone he was supposedly close to…

...But wasn’t she the same?

She never told any of them that she had mind-raped Stark.

And they were giving her a second chance…

“Thanks” she replied softly, giving him a small smile of her own.

Steve’s grin in turn grew wider at the metaphorical opening door.

“That concludes the main part of the discussion. Those of you who would like to ask questions may do so in an orderly and calm manner otherwise we will have to ask you to leave” Scott relayed calmly, yet firmly.

The last thing they needed was for everyone to start shouting out their questions at once.

Immediately every single reporter and journalists’ hand shot up, eager to picked.
“The gentleman in the front” Scott called on, pointing to the man who, if his hunch was correct, was from Nigeria.

“What gives the Avengers the right to think that they are free to come into other countries as they please only to leave the damage they have dealt behind?” the man demanded stonily.

Steve stepped forward, the small microphone on his shirt turning on.

“In the past Avengers missions have always been sanctioned. Prior approval by the governments of the countries we sought entry to usually being given. However a select few missions, headed by myself, for missions of a more personal matter were not. Lagos being one of those missions” Steve bravely admitted.

“You” Scott said, pointing to a man from Vanity Fair in the middle of the crowd.

“And just what was this personal matter? If I may ask?” the man inquired dubiously.

Steve hesitated for a moment before answering, knowing it would likely cause a bit of an uproar.

“I was searching for my former friend, Sergeant James Barnes, who had been freed from his brainwashing by Hydra approximately two years prior. We thought the former Hydra agent spotted in Lagos could be him” Steve answered tightly.

“Wasn’t your assault against the Taskforce in Bucharest because of your connection to the former Winter Soldier as well? Would you say that his presence is compromising your effectiveness and judgement as a leader and hero?” the man continued unmercifully.

“Bucharest was another grievous error in judgement, and full details on the complexity of the matter will be discussed separately at a later interview that I am sure a majority of you already are scheduled to be at” Stiles cut in quickly and concisely.

“Can’t it be said that many decisions made by the Avengers that they say are for the ‘best’ all seem to contain erroneous judgement causing them to frequently leave more destruction in their wake than necessary?” the man from Vanity Affair continued doggedly.

“As much as we are placed on a pedestal we aren’t perfect. We’re still very much human. And like with everyone else in the world mistakes will always be an unfortunate possibility” Steve replied.

“And yet it seems like the only people paying for those mistakes are us” a woman declared, standing up from her spot in the front row.

“Ma’am. I’m going to ask for you to please wait your turn” Scott stated calmly, yet firmly.

“Just who are all of you supposed heroes? What makes the lot of you qualified to protect us?” she continued, ignoring Scott’s statement, “We know that some of you come from military backgrounds, are former government spies and assassins, and scientists hoping to right past wrongs”

Seeing that she wasn’t backing down Scott decided to just have security on standby in case of an incident.

“But what about her?” the woman demanded, glaring sharply at Wanda, “The Witch”

Wanda flinched a bit at the vitriol in her voice.
“We have an inkling of who a majority of you are...Except her” the woman continued, her accusations cutting sharp, “All we know is that she sided with you during Ultron’s attack on Sokovia...But just where did her powers originate from? How did you encountered her in the first place?”

“Shit!” Stiles thought in a panic, gritting his teeth.

Wanda couldn’t breathe.

This had been what she was afraid of!

“Ms. Maximoff is a mutant” Scott covered smoothly, even though it only answered part of the woman’s question.

“But how exactly did her powers activate?” the woman prodded unmercifully.

“She knows” Steve thought grimly.

They need to end the conference now before things get out of hand.

But before he could make any kind of move the woman continued.

“I’ll tell you how. She and her brother willingly joined Hydra and allowed them to experiment on them so that they would be able to enact revenge against the Avengers, particularly against Tony Stark” the woman loudly declared, grinning like a shark as the entire area burst in an uproar of voices.

“We need to go” Steve declared, looking over at Stiles, grabbing onto Wanda’s arm to try and settle her panic.

Wanda felt like she couldn't breathe.

“Of course that is not all she has done...But rather than tell you I’ll show you exactly just who Wanda Maximoff is” the woman declared viciously, her voice loud enough that they suspected she had some sort of tiny mic on her as well.

Suddenly the screens on the stage flickered, a video clip playing in its place.

“What can I do?” Pietro asked, holding onto Wanda’s shoulders.

“It hurts” Wanda declared, gasping in pain as she rubbed her head.

“I’m gonna kill him. I’ll be right back” Pietro stated, about to run off, but Wanda’s hand stopped him.

“I’m over it. I want...I want to finish the plan. I want the big one” Wanda declared through her gasps, looking over piercingly at Dr. Banner who was staring at the two of them curiously from the quinjet.

“That’s a video from the quinjet’s security cameras...How does she have this?” Steve demanded in horror, knowing exactly what the audience was about to see.

Wanda stood unsteadily on her feet, the red mist surrounding her hands.

With a cry Wanda let the mist extend forward, advancing quickly on the defenseless scientist, engulfing his head, and sinking in, his eyes shining a mix of red and green.
With an Earth shaking roar Dr. Banner became the Hulk.

“And in case you all cannot infer what occurred from here, the Hulk went on to attack Johannesburg” the woman elaborated, grinning sadistically in Wanda’s direction.

Wanda’s breathing was coming out in pants.

She felt helpless. Powerless. Terrified.

“What the hell do you mean you can’t stop the videos?” Stiles demanded irately, having immediately called Danny when the videos had started playing.

“We need to go” Steve stated firmly, still holding onto Wanda who had covered her head with her hands in her guilt, trying to hide herself away, and calm herself.

“Leaving’s not gonna do a damn thing if we can’t get the videos to turn off” Stiles snapped back.

“Security isn’t obeying my orders either” Scott declared grimly through clenched teeth.

This had been a set up.

Suddenly the screens changed to another clip.

“No” Steve thought, recognizing the clip in horror.

“Thor. I got eyes on the prize” Tony declared softly, making his way closer to Loki’s Scepter, completely unaware of Wanda’s lurking presence behind him.

Just as Tony Stark paused in front of the Scepter Wanda silently made her way around him. Her eyes and hand glowing as she propelled the bloody red mist into Stark’s head, his eyes momentarily glowing the same red as her hands.

Then Stark’s expression fell, his eyes going both blank and consumed by horror.

After what felt like minutes Stark came back to himself, looking around in a panic, searching for something no-one but him knew of.

In a corner of the room Pietro appeared next to his sister, and Wanda held up her hand to stop him from going forward, shaking her head no.

Stark then grew a look of resolution on his face, reaching his hand out to call his gauntlet to him.

“You’re just going to let them take it?” Pietro quietly demanded.

Seeing Stark move toward the Scepter a malicious smirk adorned her lips.

Using his now gauntleted hand Stark grabbed for the Scepter, swinging it around in front of him, and gazing upon it as if it held all the answers he was searching for.

The area was silent.

Dead. Silent.

No one could believe the implications of what they just saw.

“Stop it!” Steve demanded at Stiles.
“If you think you can do better, than please by all means!” Stiles retorted in sarcastic anger.

Wanda was collapsing in on herself.

The world knew her sins.

This needed to stop.

Everything needed to stop!

“You’re wondering why you can’t look inside my head” the blanketed figure stated, as he sat in the former priest’s chair.

“Sometimes it’s hard. But sooner or later every man shows himself” Wanda bit back, her red eyes fading back to brown.

“Oh I’m sure they do” Ultron declared, revealing himself, his appearance surprising the twins.

“But you needed something more than a man. That’s why you let Stark take the Scepter” Ultron declared, walking down the steps to stand in front of Wanda.

“I didn’t expect…” Wanda began, nodding slightly up at him, the ‘you’ being implied, “But I saw Stark’s fear. I knew it would control him. Make him self-destruct”

“Everyone creates the thing they dread...Men of peace create engines of war. Invaders create Avengers. People create...smaller people?...Children. Lost the word there” Ultron went on, “Children designed to supplant them. To help them end”

“Is that why you’ve come? To end the Avengers?” Wanda questioned, sounding a bit unsure as to his motives.

“I’ve come to save the world...But also yeah” Ultron replied casually, almost like an afterthought.

And with that Pietro and Wanda Maximoff left the church behind Ultron.

After the video clip concluded the screens faded to black.

Steve held onto Wanda as she curled into his chest.

Nobody said a word.

Nobody breathed.

When the screens remained black reporters and journalists shot to their feet, stampeding closer to the stage, crowding them, suffocating them.

Flashes of cameras blinded them.

The roar of voices was near unintelligible as everyone spouted off question after question.

Each of them demanding answers as to what they had just seen.

Scott and Stiles placed themselves in front of the two Avengers in order to shield them from the frenzy as much as possible.

“Why wasn’t the world told that the Hulk was innocent?”
“Captain Rogers. Were the Avengers aware of Ms. Maximoff’s transgressions before she was made an Avenger?”

“Why was a terrorist allowed to become an Avenger?”

“Mr. Rogers I thought you were against Hydra, not a sympathizer?”

“Captain America. Why would you let someone on your Team that mind-raped two of your colleagues?”

“Does this mean the Scarlet Witch is truly the one responsible for Ultron?”

“Ms. Maximoff are you mind controlling the Avengers now?”

“Make it stop” Wanda muttered pleadingly, her voice barely audible and cracking.

“We need to go” Steve declared firmly.

As much as he wanted to stay and clear some things up, this entire interview had been rigged from the start.

For all he knew they had other videos to play if they tried to defend themselves now.

And to make matters worse, with each biting question Wanda could hear her shaking got worse.

Red was starting to appear.

The last thing they needed now was an incident here on top of everything else.

“Why isn't the Scarlet Witch in prison?”

“Is she the reason why Dr. Banner disappeared and Iron Man retired?”

“Make it stop” Wanda muttered pleadingly again.

She wasn't safe.

She was powerless.

Helpless.

“Mom! Dad!” she called out pleadingly, begging for them to answer.

_Her voice had gone horse hours ago._

_Dust and debris burning her throat and eyes._

_“Somebody! Help us!” Pietro cried out._

_When their rescuers finally found them she vowed never to be helpless like that again._

Stiles lips thinned grimly at the alarmingly increasing amount of red outlining Wanda's hands.

Her mental state was causing her to lose control.

They needed to leave. Like yesterday.
Seeing the potentially catastrophic situation Scott scanned his surroundings.

“The stairs in the back of the stage” Steve declared, remembering the emergency exit.

“Why are you defending her?”

“Arrest her!”

“Terrorist!”

“Hydra bitch!”

“Murderer!”

Stiles felt it before he saw it.

“STOP IT!” Wanda screeched desperately, the mist exploding outwards to defend her from her perceived assaulters.

“Contain!” Stiles mentally commanded, his belief diamond firm.

He couldn't waver now.

Red collided with gold.

The thud of the mist's concussive force making an audible boom as it crashed against the spherical barrier like a wave crashing against the rocks of the shoreline.

The reporters and journalist momentarily scuttled back a bit in shock and fear from the unexpected blast.

“Fortunately the attack dissipated after it was blocked” Stiles thought grimly.

To say that Wanda was now effectively screwed would be an understatement.

“Wanda you need to get yourself under control. I know this is overwhelming, but losing control and attacking innocent people no matter what they are saying isn't going to making things stop” Steve told her firmly, grabbing onto her arms and making her face him.

“I know. I know I just...I just wanted it to stop” she said miserably.

“Emergency stairs now” Scott commanded, leaving no room for suggestions.

As Stiles, Steve, and Wanda went out the back Scott stepped up to the mic.

“Questions regarding Ms. Maximoff's past affiliations, and her involvement in the incident with Johannesburg, and Ultron will be investigated and answered at a later time due to the overwhelming intensity of the questions and the unplanned illegal hijacking of this interview. Thank you” Scott declared, making sure to keep his tone and face neutral.

But before he left the stage Scott caught sight of the woman who had incited the riot out of the corner of his eye.

Looking calm and smug. Having sat back down in her chair to watch the results of her actions unfold as she had wanted.
She mouthed two words to him.

Humans first.

(Danny’s POV)

“Danny what is this?” Bobby asked me in horror as each of the videos were played on loop on every News station.

“A Declaration of War”

Chapter End Notes

Holy crap!!!!

It has BEGUN!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!!
Hi all!

Sorry for the late post! Enjoy!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Danny's POV)

“Danny what is this?” Bobby asked me in horror as each of the videos were played on loop on every News station.

“A Declaration of War”

Oh God.

This was the start of everything we feared would happen.

Monroe didn't involve herself with 'heroes'.

Just us.

This was a complete change in MO.

And it didn't mean anything good.

“War? What the hell is that supposed to mean?!” Kitty demanded, sounding tired of my unwillingness to elaborate.

“Just that” I replied numbly, quickly shoving all my supplies into my backpack.

“Uh no” Kitty declared, grabbing my pack before I could put it on my back.

Before I could even tell Kitty to let go she had already used her powers to phase the backpack out of my hands.

Solidifying herself, Kitty stepped back, slinging the backpack over her shoulder and crossing her arms over her chest.

“You're not leaving until you tell us exactly what the hell is going on. How do you know the agents guarding the Avengers? Why do you even have a program on your computer to detect hackers? And who the hell is Monroe?” Kitty demanded, her voice making it clear that she wasn't kidding.

Taking a subtle look around I saw that no one (not even the Professor) was going to just let this go.

“We want to help...But first you have to tell us what's really going on” Bobby said softly, giving me an apologetic look.
“It’s not that simple” I retorted, letting out a frustrated sigh.

“Then start talking” Kitty demanded, narrowing her eyes at me.

I growled in frustration.

I couldn't even use the excuse that it didn't involve them anymore!

Maximoff was a mutant.

Backlash against her will likely affect the mutant community as a whole too.

I pulled my phone back out of my pocket and clicked on Scott's name.

“What’re you doing?” Jubilee asked curiously.

She had been oddly silent up till now.

“I need permission before I tell you anything” I clipped back, pressing the speakerphone button.

“Permission?” Xavier inquired curiously.

Erik narrowed his eyes suspiciously at me.

Right. Now I remember.

Erik Lehnsherr.

FML.

“I'm a consultant for the FBI” I reluctantly clarified.

“You're a member of the Shadow Guard!” Bobby realized in awe.

“I am” I confirmed blandly, glaring at the phone, willing Scott to answer.

“McCall” Scott replied on the other end of the line, his voice sounding tight and stressed.

I can relate.

“Scott you're on speaker phone...I was at Xavier's when I got the alert about Monroe...They want answers” Danny detailed unhappily.

“FUCK BALLS!” Stiles exclaimed loudly over the speaker.

“Language!” a gruff voice sounded (likely Steve Rogers).

“I'M FUCKING TWENTY-TWO AND THE CO-LEADER OF AN FBI TASK FORCE! I'LL FUCKING CURSE IF I FUCKING WANT TO!” Stiles shouted, sounding like how he usually gets when he's pissed, stressed, worried, and annoyed.

“Stiles enough! We get it...Sorry... Stiles wanted to talk to you too so you're on speakerphone as well” Scott explained, sounding both exasperated and slightly embarrassed.

“Yeah I got that” I replied nonchalantly (sadly this kind of stuff wasn't anything new).

Taking a glance at everyone each of their expressions contained various degrees of shock and
“Oh I'm definitely introducing him to Logan” Kitty declared, looking amused as hell.

Figures she'd like Stiles right off the bat.

“So uh...Who exactly am I speaking to?” Scott asked, sounding a bit unsure.

“Hello Scott. My name is Charles Xavier. I'm hoping you'll be able to shed some light as to what is going on” Professor Xavier politely jumped in.

“Hey Professor” Stiles greeted, sounding worlds calmer (it was almost comical).

“It's good to hear from you Mr. Stilinski. Or I suppose I should say Agent” Professor greeted in kind.

While Stiles and Lydia aren't as close to them as I am, they did know the Professor, Dr. Gray, and Dr. McCoy.

Whenever the three of them came to MIT as guest lecturers the two of them would always stay behind to talk to them.

“You and I both know that the circumstances behind this call are anything but good” Stiles quipped back grimly.

“Unfortunately no. As you can imagine we all have many questions” Professor replied, sounding just as grim.

“…”

“It does involve them now” Scott pointed out softly, mostly likely having a silent debate with Stiles wherever they were.

“Fine” we heard Stiles grumble.

“What do you want to know?” Scott inquired.

“How bout starting with what the hell just happened on TV?” Kitty snipped.

“It was a set up. Monroe planned to ambush us with the videos. Most likely as a way to both make a move against the Avengers, and to start inciting more heat against individuals with powers. Something she's never done before” Stiles replied, analyzing the situation.

“That's bothering me too. Monroe's never targeted either the mutant or enhanced community...She's made it known that she's against the Inhumans, but she's never actually targeted them...At least not to our knowledge anyway” I observed.

Why the change in MO now?

“I don't think she's working alone in this” Scott declared.

“What'd you mean?” I heard Stiles ask him.

“I mean right before I exited the stage I caught sight of the woman who incited the riot. She mouthed two words to me: Humans first” Scott detailed grimly.
Shit.

“She allied with the Humans First Movement” I realized despondently.

That changes everything.

It means that now she is going to be targeting the Inhuman community.

“And chances are not just them...The Humans First Movement are known as staunch supporters of the Watchdogs” Stiles pointed out.

“The attack on the Compound” I heard Rogers state gruffly, not sounding happy at the sudden realization.

“It could have been a coincidence…” Scott said trailing off, though he didn't sound like he believed it.

“But not likely” Rogers finished, coming to much of the same conclusions.

“And just who is this Monroe?” Lehnsherr demanded, cutting into the conversation.

He and the Professor had been silently taking in our every word, analyzing every detail spoken and not spoken through our back and forth of the situation.

While the Professor's expression was grim, Lehnsherr's was dark and lethal.

If there was a coming threat he was going to make sure it was neutralized.

By near any means necessary.

“…”

None of us said a word.

How could we?

We knew of the X-Men.

The Brotherhood.

Their fights against prejudice.

How the hell do you go about telling two supergiants like them, about someone like Monroe?

And to make matter worse, all this had to happen on a day Erik Lehnsherr happened to be visiting.

A fact neither Scott or Stiles knew.

This isn't going to end well.

When the silence continued Lehnsherr turned his piercing gaze on me, causing me to immediately look away, unable to meet his gaze.

“Well?” he demanded, his tone not compromising at all.

“Tamora Monroe” Scott began reluctantly, “She's the leader of an extremist organization known as the Monroe Republic”
“Never heard of’em” Kitty declared suspiciously, curiously.

“Neither have I” Bobby chimed in softly.

I wasn't surprised by their confusion.

Monroe did damn well keeping the Republic out of papers.

It was one of the benefits of having civilian allies.

“They’re basically a neo-nazi organization hell bent on the global genocide of a specific group” Jubilee spoke up, her voice cracking.

All eyes snapped to her.

Her pain filled gaze however was locked on the plastic cup on the table.

Suddenly a tingling sound rang throughout the room, the entire building starting to shake.

“What?!” Lehnsherr demanded, his voice was low and controlled, but there was no mistaking the blazing fury in his eyes.

“How do you know that?” I asked her in disbelief.

I ignored the fact that everyone's eyes were snapping back and forth between us in disbelief.

“...Three years ago my parents were killed in a hit and run...But it was a mistake...They meant to shoot out our neighbor’s house...Their name was also Lee” Jubilee began, her voice heavy with grief.

“Back when Monroe first started gathering followers...Before she cared about killing in broad daylight” we all heard Stiles muttered over the speakerphone.

Jubilee nodded, still keeping her gaze locked on the plastic cup.

“That day I lost my parents...Found out I was a mutant...That my neighbors weren't human...And there was a terrorist group trying to kill them, and others like them” she detailed, unshed tears welling in her eyes.

Seeing her grief made my stomach twist in knots.

There was a reason her nickname was Jubilee.

She was always so full of life, energy, and happiness.

Seeing her so run down and upset was both foreign and terrifying.

“You're one of them aren't you?” she asked, sounding assured as she gazed over at me, meeting my eyes firm and strong, “You and rest of the Shadow Guard”

“Not all of the Guard” I corrected softly, keeping my gaze locked on hers.

I knew I was outing us.

But I wasn't going to lie to her.

Not after that.
“One of who?” Bobby demanded, sounding confused, “I mean I thought you were...Ya know?”

“Human?” I finished for him, mildly amused at his stammering, “You never really asked”

Silence.

“So... What are you?... All of you?” Kitty asked, addressing all of us.

“Um...” I stammered a bit.

How the hell do you go about explaining something like this?

“You know how Thor and Asgard are the basis for Norse mythology” Scott began, taking charge of the explanation.

“Oh thank God” I thought, breathing out a grateful sigh of relief.

“Yes” Professor replied, sounding very curious about where this conversation was going.

“Well. All stories and mythology have to come from somewhere” Scott started off, seeing if they could follow his line of reasoning.

It was like watching a bunch of lightbulbs flicker on.

“No way” Bobby muttered, looking at me in awe.

I couldn't help but look away, feeling the slight burn of a blush rising to my cheeks.

He wasn't afraid of me.

He was amazed.

“Are you telling us that vampires, Werewolves, and ghosts are real?” Kitty demanded, skeptically.

“You all live in a Mansion where people can walk through walls, move objects with their mind, and shoot fire out of their hands” Stiles retorted sarcastically.

“Touche” Kitty caved, raising an amused eyebrow.

“Then what are you?” a woman's voice sounded over the phone.

Shit.

I had forgotten that Rogers and Maximoff we're likely in the same room as Scott and Stiles.

“...”

“Well?” the woman (Maximoff) demanded, sounding very suspicious.

“... I'm an Alpha werewolf and Stiles is a Druid” Scott reluctantly revealed.

“You mean you're a real werewolf?” Kitty demanded curiously, her eyes sparkling with interest, “Uncontrollable transformations, howling at the moon, weak to silver?”

“We don't have to shift during a full moon, or lose control at all. We're not compelled to howl at the moon either, and the thing about silver is a myth. It actually stems from the name of a werewolf hunting family that means silver” Scott explained, sounding mildly amused.
“It would make sense that over time facts would become more misconstrued” Professor observed, looking incredibly fascinated.

I wasn't surprised.

He is a geneticist after all.

“Argent…” Rogers muttered in realization, sounding dumbfounded.

How the hell did he know that?!!

“…Huh. Guess you're not just another pretty face after all Captain Crunch” Stiles muttered, sounding mildly impressed.

“So this Monroe is against the beings who are the basis for myth and stories?” Lehnsherr inquired, sounding like he wanted some kind of clarification.

“Supernatural” I corrected, “We're collectively called supernaturals”

“Basically we're the descendents of humans who evolved from either their encounters or crossbreeding with beings from other pocket dimensions connected to Earth or from space like the Asgardians” Stiles explained more in depth.

“So what humans had claimed were Gods, deities, and monsters were actually other dimensional beings or aliens” the Professor clarified.

“And bingo was his name-o” Stiles replied sarcastically.

“And now Monroe wants the complete genocide of anyone not human” Lehnsherr theorized angrily.

“I wouldn't go that far” Scott cut in, “Monroe has told us that she sees mutants and enhanced as humans who've evolved to protect themselves from us”

Yeah.

Judging from Lehnsherr's pissed off face I wasn't touching that topic with a twenty foot pole.

“If that’s the case, then why is she targeting the Avengers?” Bobby inquired, sounding extremely confused.

“Because anyone who she sees as a threat to the safety and welfare of humans is an enemy of hers...The Avengers might be heroes and 'human’, but their actions have caused a lot of damage to regular people” Stiles reminded everyone pointedly.

“She's making an example out of us” Rogers realized, his voice deep and grim.

“And that's why you never informed myself or any of us of the issue” Professor stated understandingly, “You didn't want to risk bringing Monroe's ire upon us”

“It was our fight. Not yours” I replied.

“Well it's our fight now” Lehnsherr declared, determined righteous fury burning in his eyes.

(Clint's POV)
“How’re the kids?” I asked, gripping the phone tighter than strictly necessary.

If my time was right then they should just be getting home.

“Missing you…Though that’s nothing new” Laura lightly jabbed, exhaling a bit.

“I’m sorry”

I really was.

“I don’t know if I can keep doing this Clint” Laura breathed, sounding more tired than angry.

“I know” I replied sadly.

“Do you?” Laura questioned softly.

Vaguely I wondered if this was how Tony and Pepper felt.

It was clear that they both loved each other, but Pepper couldn't handle Tony being Iron Man.

It had always made me grateful that Laura was so understanding of me being Hawkeye...Now I realize just how blind I'd been.

Laura truly has the patience of a saint.

“I knew what I was getting into when I married you Clint. With you as an agent of SHIELD it was like being a military wife...Granted more isolated” she huffed out.

I couldn't help but flinch a bit at that.

The farm was just about in the middle of nowhere.

It was intentional in order to keep outside contact and possible identification to a minimum.

For the most part the farm was self-sustaining.

Solar panels. Wind turbines.

We grew all kinds of crops.

Some we did sell for additional income (And Laura's sanity - it gave her an excuse to leave the farm for short periods of time).

There was a chicken coop.

Well water.

I taught Laura and Cooper how to hunt duck and deer, and there was a river nearby to fish.

Of course Cooper and Lila went to school and hung out over their friends’ houses.

But I can count on both hands how many times both of them had ever brought a friend over to the house.

I always felt guilty about that.

“Things will be different when I get back. I promise. If everything goes well I'll be cleared for
house arrest soon like Lang” I reminded her, my voice hopeful.

“If you don't shoot first and ask questions later this time” she retorted back, sounding like she was giving me the verbal equivalent of an unamused raised eyebrow.

“I deserved that” I admitted wincing slightly.

“I guess it can't be helped. Your amazing spy powers of deduction have been getting rusty after all” she teased, bringing the conversation to a lighter topic.

“I'm never gonna live down the Nat and Banner thing am I?” I asked her, smiling into the phone.

“Not a chance” she retorted back playfully.

“Mommy mommy! Is it true that Wanda hurt Tony and Uncle Bruce?” I heard Lila ask.

What?!

“Honey where did you hear that?” Laura asked her calmly, though I could hear the concern in her voice.

Yeah, where?! Lila shouldn't know anything about that!

Hell Laura didn't even know!

“On TV. The woman had videos” Lila replied, sounding confused and slightly scared.

TV? Woman?

Was she talking about some kind of news report?

How did they even get that kind of information?!?

“Show me” Laura told her, likely following our daughter into the living room.

I immediately crawled across my bed to reach for the remote on my nightstand.

“Oh my God” I heard Laura gasp in horror.

“What's going on?” I demanded, my concerns rising, “What channel?”

“Mom is this true?” I heard Cooper ask, sounding choked for words.

Shit!

“What channel?” I called out through the phone again, my panic increasing as I clicked the On button.

“Every channel” Laurel whispered in horror.

(Third POV)

“What are you two doing?” Rhodey asked, eyeing Tony and Vision suspiciously as he entered the lab.
“I suggested that we go through all documented mythological facts about werewolves, and make a list of questions to ask Mr. McCall” Vision replied, as if such a phrase was normal to say.

“Why? You get offended by Twilight or something?” Rhodey asked, both amused and confused.

“You are correct in that I do not have the level of interest in the trilogy that others seem to possess, nor do I quite understand it's appeal. However, we are asking for Tony's benefit” Vision exclaimed.

“For Tones? I know he revived on the day of a full moon, but that doesn't mean that werewolves actually exist” Rhodey declared, raising an eyebrow at the two of them.

“Remember you said that when I'm turning in a ferocious beast and want to chew on your femur” Tony teased with a serious face.

“We do not actually know whether or not you will become feral on the night of a full moon” Vision pointed out, “That is question number three”

“I feel like that should be question one” Rhodey exclaimed, deciding to play along.

“That would be the myth about silver” Tony corrected, pointing his stylus at me.

“Why?” Rhodey asked curiously.

“Cause it's totally bogus! I've touched every single silver thing I have at the Compound and zip. Nothing!” Toney exclaimed, sounding both exasperated and confused, “I think it's one of those old wives tales that people make up to make themselves feel better”

Rhodey shook his head in fond exasperation.

“Come on Tony. Werewolves really?” Rhodey smirked in amusement, “You expect me to believe that?”

When Tony and Vision's expressions didn't change Rhodey stopped smiling, all hints of joking smashed into the ground.

“Tell me you're kidding” he demanded, looking both and forth at both of them, praying on of them would say “Gotcha!”

“I can confirm that they are not in fact punking you Colonel” Friday's voice spoke up, sounding mildly amused.

Rhodey pinched the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger.

“I miss the days when the strangest thing was seeing you in a speedo” Rhodey exclaimed.

“Hey! We agreed never to discuss that!” Tony screeched, glaring at Rhodey.

“Because that was one bet we both lost” Rhodey countered.

“Boss you have an incoming emergency call from Ms. Potts” Friday relayed.

“Patch her through Fri” Tony replied, setting the stylis down.

“Why did you lie to me about Ultron?!!” Pepper shouted furiously.
The three of them flinched in surprised, not expecting the amount of vitrole thrown at them.

“Pepper honey wh-”

“Don't ‘Pepper honey’ me!” Pepper snapped, cutting Tony off, “Why didn't you have that Hydra bitch arrested for mind-raping you?!”

“…”

“Anthony Edward Stark you answer me right this instant!” Pepper shouted.

“First off please never sound like my Mother again”

“Tony!”

“Secondly. I didn't know for certain back during the trial that Wanda had in fact mind-whamied me” Tony continued before she could start yelling at him again, “Besides, how did you even find out about that? Even we only found out about that a little over a week ago”

“Everybody knows” Pepper exclaimed.

“…What?” Tony questioned, “What do you mean everybody knows?”

“I mean the Lagos interview went pear shaped when someone hacked the monitors and played video clips of the Scarlet Witch mind-raping you and Bruce, and basically confessing to being behind Ultron's creation in the first place!” Pepper ranted.

“What!!!??”

_____________

(Sam's POV)

“On your right” a familiar annoying voice announced from behind me on the track.

“Steve told you didn't he?” I said with an exasperated groan as he passed by me.

Barnes slowed down and turned around, the smug bastard smirking as he continued to keep pace in front of me while running backwards.

“That you can’t run? I can see that for myself” he said, giving me another cheeky grin before taking off once more.

He and Derek have been running circles around me for the past twenty minutes.

Of course a few minutes later the annoying itch was back.

Expecting him to pass me I was surprised when he actually stayed at my right, running with me side-by-side.

“So what's on your mind? Your form's sloppier than usual” Barnes quipped, though there was a tiny note of concern in his tone (tiny).

“And you're not usually this chatty” I countered, keeping my focus forward so I wouldn't trip over my own damn feet.

I'd never hear the end of it from him if I did.
“Well?” he prompted.

“Well what?” I stated, playing dumb.

“I already slowed myself down for you, so you might as well just say it” he retorted, sounding unperturbed.

Considering he used to be friends with Steve he's probably used to dealing with stubborn assholes.

“Well forgive me for lowering his Majesty to the level of us lowly peasants” I quipped sarcastically, silently hoping he'd just drop it.

“Apology accepted” he replied with a slight smirk that dropped almost as quickly as it appeared, “But in all seriousness, what's eating at you?”

Well...Talking was good for the soul.

“... Everything” I admitted, dropping the sarcasm as I thought about the last couple days, “In the field you have to be able to trust your orders. Your CO…”

“And you can't trust Steve” Barnes finished.

“Can you?” I questioned him, unsure of what he was thinking from his tone of voice.

“Right now? No” he admitted, not sounding hampered down by the admission as I did, “But we're...Relearning ourselves...Each other”

“And that's the other thing. I don't know what I'm going to do now that I can't counsel anymore” I stated despondently.

I hadn't felt this lost since I retired from the military.

Back then I had felt like I didn't have a purpose anymore.

I spent most of my time learning how to reacclimate to regular society and how to deal with my PTSD.

From there my counselor inspired me to help other soldiers like me, giving me a new purpose and direction in life.

Then I met Steve and I thought I found my true calling as an Avenger.

Now I was was benched from hero duty for an undetermined amount of time, and as of today I was officially 'let go’ from the VA.

I literally had no idea what to do next.

“Well maybe it's time you relearn yourself too” Barnes replied simply, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

Relearn myself huh...

“Get running to the landing pad” Derek ordered, running towards us at incredible speeds.

“What? Why?” I questioned, almost skidding to a stop as Barnes and I turned around to follow him.
“I'll explain on the way. Just *move*” he commanded.

(Natasha's POV)

I needed to find Fury and ask him if he knew of any former SHIELD agents that would be amendable to joining the Avengers.

More often than not these days Maria can be found heckling him over information about the Shadow Guard.

So my best bet of finding him right now would be to first find her.

Turning the corridor and into the office wing I saw that Maria's door was closed.

“Good” I thought, “That means she's there. And no red on the handle means she's not in a meeting”

I walked inside the room with so much as a preamble, pausing in miniscule shock when instead of Maria, I saw Sharon at the side of the desk.

Nothing about her demeanor was odd or suspect.

But what caught my eye was the slight swish of a few strands of her hair as they flattened at the lack of movement.

It was brief, barely noticeable, and it could almost be easily passed off as likely being from the turn of a head.

The problem?

The distance she was from the keyboard of Maria's computer…

And the fact that the door had been closed.

“What were you doing?” I questioned casually yet accusing, preparing myself to fight if needed.

Former ally or not, nobody was completely trustworthy.

“I'm getting papers for Hill to sign” Sharon replied, sounding unconcerned.

A believable excuse.

Though she looked to be at ease, from what I knew about Sharon's skills I knew she was just as prepared to strike as me.

“You know exactly what I meant” I countered, circling closer to the desk, eyeing her carefully, “What were you doing on Hill's computer?”

Sharon was silent for a moment, her casual mask dropping as she narrowed her eyes at me.

“The same thing you already have done. Hacking into the FBI to get more information on the Shadow Guard...Only unlike you I have to go about it a little bit differently since I'm being just as monitored as the rest of the Rogues” Sharon admitted, her words almost challenging me to disagree with her.

“Don't bother. There's nothing there” I replied, baiting her, not bothering to deny the accusation.
“Nothing of use anyway” she agreed.

“I wouldn't say that” I countered, raising an eyebrow at her dismissiveness.

It wasn't very like her to ignore pertinent information just because it wasn't what she was looking for.

“Theyir diversity, the varied cases, and how widespread they are despite nobody having heard of them” I pointed out, hoping I could get her to reveal a bit more of her intentions.

“And yet nothing on the species Scott and now Tony are” Sharon countered, sounding mildly annoyed, “Fury’s been stonewalling me as much as Hill so I decided to take matters into my own hands”

I'd say bold of her, but that was exactly something that she'd do.

“Agent Romanoff, Boss has ordered for an immediate meeting at the hanger” Friday exclaimed.

“Why?” I demanded, immediately exiting the room, Sharon hot on my tail.

The impromptu interrogation can wait.

“Videos of the Scarlet Witch's hand in Johannesburg and Ultron have been revealed to the public” Friday relayed, sounding unconcerned that Wanda's future was in jeopardy.

“...”

Well. I should've figured something like this was going to happen sooner or later.

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(Third POV)

Maria's jaw dropped in disbelief and horror as she flipped from station to station.

She could feel the migraine forming already.

“It's begun” Fury stated simply, unsurprised by the turn of events.

“What's begun?” Maria demanded quietly, shifting her pointed stare to him.

“I think now is the opportune moment”

---

(Wanda's POV)

It was over.

The world knew of my mistakes.

What was going to happen to me now?

“What've you got?” I heard Steve ask behind me.

“Danny got a name. Irene Merryweather. Apparently she had her mind scrambled by a telepath a few years back. Left her partially immune to telepathic attacks and with a burning hatred for powered humans. Joined the Humans First Movement as soon as she got out of the psych ward”
Stiles relayed.

I tried not to flinch at the mention of the attack on her mind.

What if the world found out what I did in order to train my powers?

What would they do to me then?

Of course with my hand in Johannesburg and Ultron already made public, anything they find on my time with Hydra was just icing on the cake.

It pisses me off just how the world can love you one moment and yet not even hesitate to turn on you the next!

I'm not with Hydra anymore!

I'm an Avenger now dammit!

Mistakes or not, they have no right to treat me like I'm no better than some kind of psychotic mass murderer!

I glared out the quinjet windows.

We were almost at the Compound.

Hopefully the other Avengers could help salvage this.

(Peter's POV)

“Come on Happy answer!” I thought near hysterically.

*Are the videos true?*

*How come Mr. Stark never told anyone?*

*Why is the Witch an Avenger?*

*Is she going to be arrested?*

*She better be.*

*Will Mr. Stark's trial be appealed?*

Our history teacher had thought I'd be a good idea to have us watch the interview on Lagos.

The second those videos started playing my classmates had their phones out, scrambling to get on their social media or call their friends.

*Is Mr. Stark okay?*

I pressed send and prayed that this time he would answer.

If not then Spider-Man's going to be paying the Compound a visit.

(Harley's POV)
I looked on at the diner TV in fury as the News once again played the proof of the Tony's innocence in Ultron.

I knew he wasn't responsible for that monster!

Sure his trial had basically proven that, but the stupid courts still ruled him negligible!

They barred him from making anymore AIs because that Bitch had used him to cover her own ass!

“She's scary” Mercedes whispered, looking fearfully up at the TV.

I immediately reached my arms around her shoulders to give her some semblance of comfort.

“What's scarier is the fact that she was actually made an Avenger” one of the diner regulars scoffed angrily from his barstool, arousing agreement from the other patrons around him.

It was a well guarded secret that the ‘Mechanic Tony’ was actually the famous billionaire Tony Stark.

Before the disaster that was Ultron, Tony used to visit Mercedes and I under the guise of a traveling mechanic.

Of course everyone knew who he really was, but nobody dared say a word.

In Rose Hill it wasn’t Iron Man that was a hero.

It was Tony Stark.

It was Tony Stark who fought the Mandarin’s soldiers.

It was Tony Stark who found out the truth behind Chad Davis’ death.

It was Tony Stark who saved me from Eric Savin.

It was Tony Stark who resuscitated E.J with his own Arc Reactor, nearly causing himself to die if I hadn’t put it back in him.

It was Tony Stark who paid the Sheriff’s medical bills and got him the best care money could buy.

And it was Tony Stark who helped repair our town.

Tony Stark.

Not Iron Man.

So you better believe that anyone who hurts Tony, was an automatic person non grata in Rose Hill.

But I was done just sitting around and listening to the townsfolk talk and rage on the behalf of our beloved ‘Mechanic’.

I needed to get out of here and call Tony.

Right as I was about to leave the booth my Mom stopped me.

“You're staying here until my shift is over. Then we'll see what we can do about contacting...the Mechanic” my Mother declared firmly, leaving no room for argument.
“Fine” I mumbled through grit teeth, sitting back down next to my sister.

I could always sneak off when Mom went into the back to get the food trays...But I couldn't risk getting grounded.

The Mechanic needed my help again.

And I was going to help.

(Lila Rhodes’ POV)

“I knew it!” I shouted indignantly, “I knew there was no way that Uncle Tony was in any way responsible for Ultron!”

“We already knew that Lil” Grandma pointed out calmly, though her fierce glare at the TV was anything but calm.

“But he was still found guilty by the courts!” I reminded her angrily.

“And they were wrong then, and they are still wrong now. Anthony has never been one to shy away from responsibility, even if it is not necessarily his place” Grandma commented sadly.

“He always take the hit for things he didn’t do” I retorted irately.

“The world loves him, and loves to vilify him...I believe that is how Anthony described it once to me” Grandma noted wistfully.

“Well I think it’s time we put the world in its place” I declared resolutely.

(Lang’s POV)

“If Maximoff is truly responsible for all these crimes then why was she even made an Avenger? Did they even know? And if they did, did they even care that she is responsible for the deaths of thousands? That she hurt two of their own?” the reporter questioned harshly.

I wanted to feel bad for Maximoff. I really did.

It really sucked for her...But I couldn’t say that I wasn’t slightly pleased by the evidence coming to light.

I was sent to prison because I went against VistaCorp and brought their larceny to light (and because I got caught driving Zorick’s car into his Mansion’s pool).

I’ve broken the law countless times with good intentions.

But I still broke the law.

Some people may have called me the modern age Robin Hood, but a thief is a thief, whether you steal from criminals or not.

I never pretended to be blameless.

I never shoved my sins into a corner and ignored them.
I knew eventually that one day I would be caught.

You always were.

Maximoff never seemed to realize that.

And yeah she’s going to go through a lot of hell now, but she made her choices and she has to accept the consequences.

I may have uncovered criminal activity in VistaCorp, but I still broke several white-collar laws and burglarized (the scum-bag) Zorick’s house.

And because I chose to handle things outside the law (and got carried away) there were consequences.

I was arrested. Divorced. Lost custody of my daughter. And now I have a criminal record that will cling to me like a leech for the rest of my life.

Fair or not, the law is the law.

No matter how fast you run it will always catch up to you.

---

(Matt Murdock’s POV)

I knew Tony had been hiding imperative facts from me.

Not that I hadn’t already suspected that it was something along these lines.

Jess was going to knock him through the ringer though.

“Damn” I heard Foggy muttered, “Well, you know what they say about the hot ones”

---

(Jennifer Walters’ POV)

Crack!

The splinters of my pen scattering across my desk and floor.

Knowing that the Hydra Bitch was the one responsible for Bruce’s rampage on Johannesburg was one thing, seeing it was another.

I hadn’t even known that Bruce had vanished again until it was mentioned in Tony’s trial that he was currently MIA.

Afterwards Tony had called and told me everything.

I was as green as I was now when Tony first told me that Rogers ‘convinced’ him to not press charges against Maximoff for her hand in the destruction of Johannesburg, letting Bruce take all of the blame while she got off scott-free!

Well, you know what they say. What goes around comes around. And karma is an unforgiving bitch!
“Questions regarding Ms. Maximoff’s past affiliations, and her involvement in the incident with Johannesburg, and Ultron will be investigated and answered at a later time due to the overwhelming intensity of the questions and the unplanned illegal hijacking of this interview. Thank you”

Liam looked over at Argent in horror.

“Would this be a bad time to collect on all the vacation days I haven't used” Liam inquired sarcastically.

“Somehow I don't think any of us are getting a vacation any time soon” Argent noted seriously, cursing the horrible timing.

He and Scott needed to attend the Council Meeting tomorrow.

They didn't have time to be dealing with this shit!

“I'm going” Theo declared, speaking up for the first time in a while, though he was still glaring at the TV screen, concentrating on the news feeds.

Liam and Argent gave him wary looks.

A quiet Theo was a plotting Theo.

And a plotting Theo usually meant trouble in some form.

“Go where?” Argent inquired (demanded).

“The Compound...Scott's gonna need a replacement for the Meeting” Theo clarified, an almost sadistic smirk crossing his lips as he smiled in anticipation.

(Peter Hale's POV)

“I want to take a moment to point out just how well the Shadow Guard handled the chaos surrounding the enlightening Lagos Interview” the talk show host began, “Agent Stilinski was not only able to protect everyone from the Scarlet Witch's attack, but Agent McCall remained professional even when making his closing statements toward the rioting reporters”

Click.

“If I had to choose between the Avengers and the Shadow Guard protecting me, right now I'd choose the Shadow Guard. At least I know they've got their powers under control and think before they act”

Flicking off the television I couldn't help but scoff at the stupidity of the world.

The courts had already proven that Tony Stark was innocent of Ultron. His sentencing was just a prime example of the world's pettiness and fear.

“And for once it is not us who's the biggest monster around” I thought amused, “And Monroe now knows that too”

Oh don't get me wrong.
I know she's still got a plan in store for how she'll reveal our kind to the public.

But right now she has two options.

Act now and add to the chaos.

Or more likely...She'll wait.

And when public opinion of us is at its height, she'll rip the rug right out from under us.

Making a decision I pulled out my cellphone and started browsing through airfare websites.

---

(Untitled POV)

I watched as rioters carried picket signs with various unsavory phrases such as 'Scarlet Witch Hydra Bitch’, all calling for Wanda Maximoff’s blood, and justice for Iron Man and the Hulk.

“What are you going to do?” Professor asked, rolling up next to me.

I glanced wordlessly at the screen.

I always knew that this would happen eventually.

But the real question now was: Whose side am I on?

---

(Shuri’s POV)

“His Majesty has arrived” Griot relayed.

I immediately halted my work on my gauntlets to make my way into the corridor.

The medi-protocol was already prepped, and I made sure to have the hovergurney ready for their arrival.

I was not happy about my brother bringing a foreign intelligence operative into our home, but leaving the man to die after he saved Nakia felt just as wrong.

Hopefully with Ross’ experience in the Military and CIA he understood that some secrets needed to be maintained.

And if I had to play up that he owed us for saving his life, than that is neither here nor there.

First and foremost I needed to see to the critical injury dealt to his spine.

Meeting my brother halfway I removed the blanket covering Ross’ face (so that no one would know that an outsider was brought into Wakanda).

“Great. Another broken white boy for us to fix” I commented sarcastically as we walked to my lab, “This is going to be fun”

First my brother wanted me to see if I could help Sergeant James Barnes, and now he wants me to save Agent Ross.

I’m starting to think that my brother has a complex compelling him to fix any white ex-military
who gets injured on his watch.

As the hovergurney laid itself atop the medtable the systems sparked alive, scanning Ross’ body.

Ding.

“Scans complete” I muttered to myself, placing my hand above Agent Ross’ chest and lifting it upwards in order to pull up the holographic image of where the damage on his spine was determined to be, and expanding it.

Glancing critically back and forth between the image and the data on his health and vitals I breathed out a small sigh of relief.

“He will live” I informed my brother assuredly.

Not for the first time I was grateful to have been born in Wakanda.

Vibranium was the most versatile substance on Earth.

It made our thinnest looking clothing into bulletproof armor.

We used its ability to absorb kinetic and mechanical energy to power our cities, our technology.

And medically it could be used to bind to damaged cells and assist us in facilitating cellular regrowth.

Which was what Agent Ross needed now.

Suddenly my kimoyo beads chimed.

“W’Kabi is here” I announced in worry to my brother.

His face turned grim as he walked away to confront him, Nakia and Okoye going with him.

W'Kabi was not going to be happy about Klaue's escape.

Hopefully my brother had enough sense to keep his mouth shut about Ross for now.

“Emergency world news protocol activated” Griot announced, bringing up a holographic screen for me to observe.

A sense of dread tingled up my spine.

The last time the protocol had been activated was when my brother had been involved in the bridge collapse in Bucharest.

“And to think Tony Stark had taken the fall for Ultron, letting himself be crucified by the public for actions that were very likely not his own” the CNN news anchor declared.

“Very likely? We all saw the videos. Let’s just call it what it really is. Tony Stark was used as a scapegoat by the Scarlet Witch so that she didn’t have to face the death penalty for her own actions” the co-anchor countered in disgust.

What?

“Play the video clips they are referring to” I commanded Griot.
I needed to know what in Bast’s sake was going on.

Wordlessly Griot complied, bringing up three more screens for me to observe.

“I’m over it. I want...I want to finish the plan. I want the big one”

“You’re just going to let them take it?”

“But you needed something more than a man. That’s why you let Stark take the Scepter”

“I didn’t expect...But I saw Stark’s fear. I knew it would control him. Make him self-destruct”

“My Goddess...” I silently prayed in horror, not believing what I had just seen.

The screen switched to the Nigerian News, subtitles scrolling along the bottom.

“It would seem that Lagos was not in fact the Scarlet Witch’s first act of terrorism” the news anchor reported callously, “Nor was it in fact her second or third. As it has recently come to light, the Scarlet Witch is responsible for the Hulk’s rampage in Johannesburg, and more shockingly, the creation of Ultron itself. And it is due to these revelations that the President of Nigeria is demanding her immediate arrest”

I clenched my teeth in anger.

I couldn’t blame the Nigerian President for deciding to follow through with the charges against the Scarlet Witch after seeing video clips like those.

Frankly a petty little voice in the back of my head was telling me that Wakanda should pursue its own charges against her for the eleven Wakandans killed in Lagos.

Though rationally I knew that likely would not happen, nor was that strictly fair on her. Besides, if the videos were indeed true than Lagos would be the least of her problems.

The screen changed once again. This time to the very birth-country of the Scarlet Witch herself.

“I am deeply ashamed” the President of Sokovia began, “We Sokovians, while still fighting for our standing alongside the countries of the world, take great pride in our country and value patriotism. To learn that the monstrosity that rained destruction upon our own city of Novi Grad was in fact potentially brought into creation by one of our own...I stand here humbled in regret, and personally apologize to Dr. Stark for the unjust slander and charges that were brought upon him by the country of Sokovia”

If the implications of videos were indeed true, than I cannot imagine how embarrassed the President of Sokovia must be to learn that the person they had been flinging their ire at for the destruction brought upon their nation because of Ultron, was in fact because of someone from their own country.

A traitor like that would receive no less than death in Wakanda.

Griot changed the news feed once again to a report from the US.

“I mean it makes sense now doesn’t it? I mean we’re talking about a man who’s been creating artificial intelligences since he was sixteen-seventeen years old. He got one of his doctorates because of his revolutionary work in the area...That’s thirty years worth of advancements, and despite initial fears, nothing remotely like Skynet ever happened!” the CNN news anchor ranted.
“Until Ultron and Dr. Stark is arrested” his co-anchor pointed out.

“And even though the courts ruled that Ultron wasn’t an AI of Dr. Stark's creation they still barred him from ever being allowed to create another AI again” the anchor piggybacked, “Barred! They barred the expert in artificial intelligences, and punished him for something he hadn't done just for the sake of making the world feel better!...And until now nobody's even questioned the unfair ruling!”

I couldn't help but whole-heartedly agree.

Of course I'm smarter than him, but even I had to grudgingly admit that Tony Stark is the foremost expert in artificial intelligence.

The man was able to take natural-language UIs and program them to learn, to develop, to feel.

His AI we're just as much people as anyone else.

I was fascinated by the prospect of an AI, so of course I tried my hand at creating my own.

And while I am not ashamed of him, Griot was not developing as I had hoped.

While I programmed him to speak English with a Wakandan accent, his phrasing, speech, and thought patterns were still very robotic, and he has yet to display any real emotional range, or really think for himself.

Right now he's only slightly above that of a NLUI.

Of course my lack of current success (not failure!) only fueled my interest in the field.

And as horrible as Ultron had been, his existence had fascinated me.

And in watching Stark's trial, hoping to learn more about the rogue AI, I found myself enraged by the pathetic (un)justice system of the US.

'Ultron’ had not been Stark's creation and yet they still prohibited him from ever making another AI ever again!

The logic was ridiculous!

As a fellow scientist I had been appalled by the verdict.

“At least now real justice can be served” I thought, deactivating the holograms so I could continue working on Agent Ross.

“When I'm finished with him perhaps I'll take a look at those brain scans Stark gave to my brother and see if I can come up with anything to help Sergeant Barnes” I silently pondered.

(Coulson’s POV)

This wasn’t what the Avengers were supposed to be.

This wasn’t what I had died for.

I had kept my distance even after my memories had returned so as to keep that initial push to get them to assemble alive.
It was a mistake.

They had needed oversight.

A liaison keeping them in line.

My death brought them together.

Maybe my revival can keep it that way.

---

(Mitchell Carson’s POV)

“It’s a shame” I said softly, a tone of disappointment in my voice as I observed the latest scandal on the Avengers, “If Strucker had played things differently she could have been the perfect Asset”

Strucker had been so narrow minded with the use of the Maximoff Twins.

The Scarlet Witch had the potential to be one of the most power individuals on the planet.

Her affinity for mind control and mental torture alone made her invaluable.

Now she was just an example.

Hydra has been secretly feeding crisis, reaping war, causing conflicts, and altering history to suit our needs for decades. Infiltrating every and all governments and organizations that can help us keep both hands on the wheel of the world.

Rogers thinks that Hydra is gone.

Well won’t everyone be in for a surprise when they discover that’s not true.

But for now, Hydra will sit back and do what we do best:

Feed into the crisis.

---

(Third POV)

Scott sprinted out of the quinjet, jumping up and over the descending ramp before it even had the chance to open a third of the way.

“What’s wrong with him?” Steve against worriedly, he wasn’t sure if he could handle any more crisis right now.

“I have idea” Stiles muttered unhappily, silently hoping he wasn’t right (though let’s face it, he usually was).

Stiles, Steve, and Wanda quickly made their way down the ramp and onto the tarmac, immediately walking over to the group that had gathered outside.

“You need to calm your heart-rate. Adrenaline of any kind can make you shift” Scott advised, placing his hand over Tony’s heart.

“For future reference, I don’t like to be touched” Tony declared sharply, moving his chest away so that Scott’s palm was no longer resting on his suit vest.
“What happened?” Natasha demanded firmly, wanting to know exactly every detail that had gone down.

“Turns out our enemy Tamora Monroe allied herself with the Watchdogs and the Humans First Movement. Somehow she got her hands on the video clips showing Wanda’s hand in Johannesburg and Ultron, and got Irene Merryweather, a former victim of mind control and a member of the Humans First Movement to head the hijacking of the interview during the Q & A. Unfortunately Wanda lashed out at the crowd before we could exit the stage, though I blocked the attack so ultimately no one was hurt” Stiles relayed, sounding like he was giving a mission summary.

“Great. So not only was it a set up, the whole interview was for nothing” Rhodes exclaimed in frustration.

“What do you mean?” Wanda inquired in confusion.

“He means that any sincerity you had in your apology for the incident in Lagos was not only completely overshadowed by the videos, but now nobody is going to believe that your apology was legit” Tony clarified through clenched teeth.

God he just couldn’t get a break!

“Can’t you fix this somehow?” Steve asked, almost imploringly.

Steve realized his mistake the second Tony turned his attention to him, his eyes flashing blue.

“Fix this?! Fix this?! I gave you a way to fix this months ago after my sentencing was completed!” Tony raged, his teeth sharpening to points, his nails elongating to claws.

Scott immediately stepped between Tony and Steve, placing one hand on Tony’s chest and the other gripped lightly on his upper arm as he kept Tony from moving forward.

“I told you that this was going to fucking happen! I warned you that hiding her involvement with Ultron and Johannesburg was going to bury her! But you had the gall to throw my past sins in my face as a way to guilt-trip me into hiding her fuck-ups!” Tony roared, his voice more animal than human.

Steve flinched at the accusation.

Rhodes couldn’t help but get a small amount of smug satisfaction at Tony finally sticking up for himself to Rogers. Tony’s let Steve walk all over him for far too long.

“I told you that I would get her the best fucking lawyers money could buy! That I could make it so that she could be placed under house arrest either here or at Xavier’s! That she could work off her debt to society by doing community service in Johannesburg and Sokovia while being supervised by the Avengers! That we could work it out so that she could be trained by the Avengers, so she could show the public her willingness to change by working with us! Instead you told me to fucking cover it up!” Tony ranted furiously, pushing against Scott’s strong hands.

Breathing heavily through his fangs Tony took a small step back, his glowing blue eyes still boring holes into Steve.

“For someone who always thinks they know fucking best, you’re sure wrong a hell of a lot Rogers!...And it’s never you who seems pay for it” Tony declared viciously, his claws and fangs retracting.
Tony wasn’t wrong.

He had been afraid that the courts would sentence Wanda to die for her actions, rather than give her the chance to atone for them.

So he ordered Tony to cover it up. To not say anything in defense of Bruce, even when news reports all across the world were slandering his name.

He thought he had been making the right decision in keeping Wanda’s past a secret.

But Tony had been right.

More than right.

If they had just gone forward earlier neither Monroe or the Humans First Movement would’ve had the ammo that they did to use against them.

And Wanda wouldn’t be vilified like she is now.

His decision to omit information hurt Wanda.

Just like it had hurt Tony.

God what had he done (again).

“Figures there was another deal Stark gave you that you just so happened to omit” Sam stated bitterly, “I’m starting to sense a pattern here...Do you just disagree with him on principle, or are you really just that arrogant?”

Steve closed his eyes, bowing his head slightly in the direction of the ground at the metaphorical stab.

“I thought she’d get the death penalty. That they wouldn’t give her a proper trial” Steve defended weakly.

“Tony would have made it so that if they so much as tripped her on the way to the courthouse they’d be sued out the ass Steve. Why do you think nobody hurt or abused him when he was in lockup during his pending trial?” Natasha pointed out harshly, not tolerating any sort of poor excuse anymore.

Steve’s gaze shot to her’s in alarm.

“What?!?” he demanded, looking back and forth between her and Tony, “Lockup?”

“Tell me he’s fucking kidding” Rhodes deadpanned, wholly unamused by Steve’s willful ignorance.

“I was arrested for my involvement in Ultron Rogers! Of course I was put in prison while I awaited trial. A supermax to be specific” Tony declared, just as unamused by Steve’s lack of apparent knowledge, and offended that he apparently wasn’t important enough to the other man for him to check the details of his trial.

No...

He shouldn’t be surprised.
He was never truly Rogers’ friend after all.

That had been a lie too. An illusion of his own construct.

“I didn’t…” Steve was lost for words, completely dumbfounded.

“Know that I was placed in prison? Do you even know how the criminal justice system works?” Tony demanded mockingly. “Yeah. I was placed in prison while I awaited trial. No bail since I was being charged with crimes against humanity and was a huge flight risk...I was straightjacketed, put in a padded room, couldn’t feed or dress myself or even take a wiz without someone acting as my hands-”

“What?!” Steve roared furiously.

How dare they treat Tony like some psychotic mass murder!

“No. You don’t get to be pissed off on my behalf when you apparently didn’t care enough to even pay attention to my trial” Tony growled (literally).

“They had no right to treat you like that!” Steve shouted indignantly.

“What did you want them to do?! I have a history of escaping imprisonment and creating weapons out of nothing! If I wanted to disappear I could!” Tony countered, fangs appearing once again.

“I thought you were innocent until proven guilty!” Steve retorted back bitingly.

How can Tony just defend the justice system when it treated him like that!

“You don’t seem to have a problem with them doing that to the criminals we hand over to them” Clint pointed out, annoyed by Steve’s hypocriticism.

“Because-”

“I believe you were about to say, Because they are criminals” Vision said, cutting Steve off, “But at the time Tony was believed to have been behind the creation of Ultron, which led to the deaths of thousands in Sokovia alone. And like the individuals we bring in, Tony was taken into custody and given the chance to prove his innocence in court. However like the other individuals we bring in precautionary measures are always taken. And like in the cases with higher profile arrests special measures have to be taken into account depending on the skill set of the individual being arrested”

“But Tony isn’t just some criminal” Steve grit out.

“It doesn’t matter if he’s a hero Steve” Bucky declared, stepping forward, a cold irate glint in his eyes, “People died Steve. Died. Their lives matter! Even if Tony had created Ultron, just because something is an accident doesn’t mean they don’t have to face the consequences of their actions...The law is what keeps order. Makes people feel safe. Gives them the answer why, how something happened...And no one is exempt from it’

Steve ran his hands frustratingly over his face.

“I get what you’re saying. I really do...But I can’t just accept how they treated you” Steve declared with an emotionally exhausted huff.

If they did that to Tony he couldn’t trust that they wouldn’t mistreat Wanda too.
“You saying you would've broken me out of my tower?” Tony scoffed, rolling his eyes, his fangs retracting once again.

“Had I known? Yes” Steve replied unwaveringly.

Tony’s face blanked out, his eyes boring into Steve’s, searching for any hint of untruth.

He didn’t find any.

“Damn him and his stupid morals” Tony mentally cursed.

“They didn’t abuse me Steve. I made it clear that if they so much as left a dot of yogurt on my face that I couldn’t wipe away I’d sue their asses. I would’ve done the same for Wanda. She’d have cameras on her twenty-four seven. Any hint of abuse or mistreatment and their ass would have been grass” Tony bit out.

“And now?” Wanda inquired in trepidation.

She wasn’t going to let herself be locked up!

To be straightjacketed and imprisoned because of other people’s fear!

“We do all that and more” Stiles cut in, “We can’t stop you from being arrested. That’s an inevitability. But what we can do is make sure you get a fair trial and that biased assholes don’t try and take advantage of you while you’re awaiting trial”

Wanda’s fear surged like wildfire.

No.

“If you run we can’t protect you” Vision declared, recognizing the look in Wanda’s eyes as the same one she possessed right before she sent him through the floors of the Compound.

“I won’t be trapped again” Wanda bit back, her anxiety and fear building.

“Even if you ran, there isn’t anywhere for you to go...You’re currently person non grata in every country” Sharon pointed out casually, joining in on the conversation for the first time.

“She’s right. You leave and it won’t be a pair of handcuffs. It’ll be a sniper bullet to the head” Natasha impassionedly reasoned.

Wanda sucked in a few deep breaths. It was getting harder for her to breathe.

“I know it sucks” Clint said, walking over to her, bringing his hands up to squeeze at her shoulders, “But we won’t let anything happen to you. I promise”

Wanda gave him a dubious look.

“You run you’re telling the world that you are a threat that needs to be taken care of” Clint advised, giving her a firm resolute look, “Prove them wrong. Stay”

(Third POV)

“How nice of you to have her ready for me at the tarmac” Secretary Ross mocked, signalling the agents behind him to surround Maximoff (and by extension the Avengers and company).
Wanda glanced uneasily at all the guns pointed at them.

“Stick to the plan” Steve reminded her firmly, whispering into her ear as he took a firm grip on her wrist to make sure she didn’t give the agents a reason to escalate things.

When Friday had alerted them of Secretary Ross’ impending arrival they had decided to leave all the talking to Tony, Stiles, and Natasha.

The rest of them would remain as witnesses.

Stiles threatened to magic his mouth shut if he didn’t stay quiet.

Steve believed him.

“Secretary Ross. I don’t remember sending you an invite to our little get-together” Stiles noted sharply.

“I’m not the unsavory guest you need to worry about Agent Stilinski” Secretary Ross fired right back.

“Do you have a warrant for her arrest?” Tony demanded.

“Now I know she’s messing with your heads” Secretary Ross scoffed.

“I'm just making sure you're crossing your t's and dotting your i’s” Tony mockingly advised, narrowing his eyes at Ross.

“The videos alone are enough to warrant bringing her into custody to be questioned” Secretary Ross declared, all false pleasantness gone from his voice.

“Do you have verification that the videos are legit and undoctored?” Natasha questioned, raising a speculative eyebrow at him.

“I'm sure that Mr. Stark is more than capable of figuring that out for us” Secretary Ross pointed out unflustered.

“I'm pretty sure the courts would agree that'd be a conflict of interest” Tony retorted coldly.

“You're really going to interfere with the investigation” Secretary Ross questioned in disbelief.

“I'm telling you with a high profile case like this I'd be a shame if the book wasn't followed to the letter” Tony threatened, keeping his expression neutral.

Ross narrowed his eyes at the group.

He hated them.

He hated what they were.

What they represented.

But they had him by the balls.

“I’ll be back with a warrant” Secretary Ross declared, signalling for the agents to retreat.

“And we’ll be waiting Mr. Secretary” Tony challenged right back.
Let the war of politics begin.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Theo Raeken arrives at the Compound!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Hi all!

Sorry I haven't posted in a while! I'm currently getting ready to defend my Thesis so I've been pretty busy!

I hope the chapter is worth the wait!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Tony's POV)

I resisted a groan as I tried to rub away the familiar sting of sleep deprivation.

I had been up almost all night dealing with Maximoff's impending arrest...and researching more into Supernaturals.

God that name sounded so hokey.

*Flashback*

“So what can I do for you?” I asked flippantly, intentionally being dismissive.

With Thunderbutt gearing up for a fight I had about a million and seven things to do before he came back.

Scott let out a huge huff of air, his eyes gazing at me in both regret and guilt.

The sight immediately made my hackles rise.

“You know the Meeting I'm supposed to be going to tomorrow?” Scott inquired carefully.

“You mean the super secret meeting of mythical creatures?” I said, narrowing my eyes at him, crossing my arms over my chest protectively.

I didn't like how Scott was beating around the bush.

Scott nodded.

“...Your presence was ‘requested’ at the Meeting as well” Scott hesitantly replied, cringing slightly as he ripped off the metaphorical band-aid.

For a moment I just stared at Scott. My face going blank as I slowly began to comprehend the meaning of his words.

“He has to be joking” I thought in disbelief, though Scott's puppy eyes said otherwise.
I ground my teeth together in frustration.

“Well you can tell them that Cinderella doesn’t want his invitation to the Ball” I retorted bitingly

They can keep their little woodland fairytale tea parties to themselves.

“The first time I declined to attend a Council Meeting I found myself falling through a portal and onto the council room floor...Trust me, the invite isn’t optional” Scott relayed in exasperation, absentmindedly rubbing his stomach.

“Trust you? Why should I?” I demanded, my eyes sharp, “Whatever’s going on in the land of mythical magical rainbows is your problem, not mine”

Scott's expression tightened up a bit in disappointment, though he didn't seem too surprised by my answer.

“I know this isn’t what you wanted. I didn't want this either” Scott said gently, as if he were talking to a frightened rabbit, “But trust me when I say pushing it away into a dark corner and pretending that everything is the same isn't going to work...Whether you want to accept it or not, you're not human anymore”

“And who's fault is that!?” I shouted, my eyes burning in fury, my nose scrunching slightly in anger as my teeth tightly clenched together, “I didn't ask for this!”

“I know” Scott said appeasingly (or rather trying to be), “I was Changed without my consent too and the last thing I wanted was to take that choice from you-”

“Well you did!” I loudly declared, cutting Scott off, my vision now tinted red, “And I'm getting fed up with people making choices for me on my behalf!”

“Tony, you need to calm down. You're eyes are glowing” Scott calmly informed me, as if something like that actually mattered.

“Calm down? Calm down?! Do you people not understand what's going on?! There are rioters outside the Compound! Our phone lines are being bombarded by News stations and reporters across the world demanding interviews! Hell the UN is debating on just coming in with an aerial strike and arresting all of us!” I shouted, the build up of all the stress from the last few days causing me to lose control, my fangs and claws appearing (which only served to piss me off more).

“You don't get to tell me what to do! I'm a forty-six year old man! You're status as an alpha means nothing to me!” I roared challengingly, lunging at Scott.

Unfortunately I had attacked blindly on my anger, only reacting instinctively and without finesse.

So Scott easily grabbing onto my upper arms, and flinging me around so that my back was up against the windows, and my arms pinned to the glass, shouldn't have been as surprising as it was.

I snarled at him in frustration.

“Enough” Scott demanded firmly, shifting his eyes to Alpha red, projecting an aura of dominance at me, causing me to cave to his presence, submissively turning my head to the side (barring my neck as a sign of vulnerability and submission my animal mind supplied).

Instinctively I understood what had just happened.
I had challenged the Alpha and lost.

“I understand that you're upset and stressed. But you need to calm down” Scott commanded, his voice sending a wave of calming clarity into the angry fog of my mind.

After a few huffs of frustrated animalistic breaths I slowly began to calm, my animal side receding back to the recesses of my mind.

Slowly Scott released his grip on my arms, giving me some space.

I growled in frustration (though the sound was distinctly human).

I punched the back off my hand against the glass, my legs giving out as I felt the slow descent of my back sliding down the windows until my butt settled on the tiled floor.

I thought I'd been doing so well!

What was it going to take to get this shit under control?!

“I know it's hard, but ignoring this isn't going to make it go away. I can help you find an anchor so that I don't have to...do this every time your heart rate picks up” Scott advised, almost pleading me to accept his offer to help this time.

I refused to meet Scott's gaze, choosing instead to bore holes into the floor.

I knew I needed to get my shit together.

Sure in an emergency I can fly the suit remotely, but I couldn't physically go out into the field until I was no longer at risk of being mistaken for a rabid animal.

I had watched and rewatched Scott's lecture to Wanda in the gardens countless times, hoping to be able to figure out the whole 'anchors' thing on my own, but to no avail.

“You don't have to do this alone” Scott implored me, holding out his hand.

I stared at it for the longest time.

What if I took it?

What would it mean if I did?

Did it have to mean anything?

......No. It didn't. I decided stubbornly.

Besides. I can't do anything without all of the data.

Coming to a decision I smacked my palm into Scott's hand, gripping it tightly as he pulled me up off the ground.

I tried hard not to think of the metaphors surrounding that.

*End Flashback*

So I made a deal with the devil (or rather Wolf-Man) in order to get myself up to par again.

Now if only I could find someone to represent Maximoff in her case.
I'd been calling all kinds of lawyers since yesterday, but to no avail.

“And there's no way I can get you to reconsider?” I grumbled in exhaustion.

“I'm afraid not” Matt replied unrepentantly, “Since the verdict in your case is being appealed by the higher courts it would be a conflict of interest for me to act as Maximoff's lawyer considering the evidence brought forward”

I growled in frustration.

I knew he would decline, but I still had a fraction of a hope that maybe he'd consider it.

No dice.

“There are other very good lawyers out there Tony” Matt reminded me, sounding like he was raising an eyebrow at me.

“Yeah well Maximoff needs the best of the best right now and both you and Jennifer are off the table” I ground out.

“You actually asked Ms. Walters?” Matt inquired, sounding a mix between bewildered and amused, “I can't imagine that went very well”

“It didn't” I confirmed, huffing out a laugh.

I knew it was a long shot (Like deep space long shot), but I had to ask.

Needless to say Jen was now pissed at me, and was probably looking into her psychologist contacts to get me that eval she so adamantly declared I needed.

“If you honestly think I'm going to do anything but turn her into splatter art then maybe you're the one who needs psychological help! How can you even defend her after everything she's done?!” Jennifer roared furiously.

“Regardless Maximoff still needs a damn good lawyer, and frankly I can't imagine anyone good willingly taking her case. Which means unless something is done she's going to be stuck with a lawyer provided for her by the courts, and you and I both know those lawyers suck and won't do her case justice” I pointed out knowingly.

“That's because it would be career suicide!” I heard Foggy yell into the phone.

“Well he's not wrong” I commented bitterly.

The chances of finding anyone competent and willing to take her case was near zero.

I don't even think Benjamin Donovan would take her case and he's known for defending high-profile criminals!

“I'm sorry I can't help you Tony. But with your appeal I'm not sure we'll even have time for challenging Vision's personhood in the eyes of the law” Matt pointed out objectively.

And I hated that he was probably right, but if I wanted to go a step further and include AIs in Vision's case then I first have to get my own verdict repealed.

There was also the matter of my own...personhood.
“Yeah about that…” I said awkwardly, “We're gonna need to make a few...additions to that case”

(Wanda's POV)

“It’s the prime example of a wolf in sheep’s clothing. She marauded around as a hero all the while hiding her true colors”

Click.

“That woman is a monster! If she’s shot on her way to the courthouse it wouldn’t surprise me”

Click.

“There has to be a reason Wanda Maximoff was made an Avenger despite all the allegations against her. Extenuating circumstances?” Will Adams suggested, playing devil’s advocate.


“But she did help save the people of Novi Grad. And Captain America doesn’t just let anyone join the Avengers. I can’t imagine him willingly letting an ex-Hydra agent join unless she truly regret her choices” Will pointed out.

“Considering some of Captain America's past decisions I think it’s safe to say that his judgement is skewed” Christine countered, grinning like a shark circling its bait.

Click.

“I was watching that” I grit out, glaring at Kira’s reflection in the blackened television screen.

“It didn’t really seem to be helping your mood” Kira observed softly, wincing slightly as she replied.

“So what? I’m not allowed to watch tv anymore? What other limits then? I'm already basically confined to my room” I growled out in frustration.

They had no right to treat me this way!

I had agreed to stay. And what did it get me?

They treat me like I’m some unstable criminal who’s going to attack them and make a prison break!

“We can go to the pool or spa room?” Kira suggested, sounding guilty.

“Yes, because I need to make sure my nails look nice for when I’m taken away in handcuffs” I grit out sarcastically.

“I am really sorry...Getting arrested-“

“Don’t give me another one of your life examples! I’m sick of hearing your so called advice! I’m sick of everyone’s opinions!” I shouted furiously, sneering at her.

“Take it easy. She’s just trying to help” Clint cut in firmly as he entered my doorway.
“Well I’m sick of everyone’s help” I declared bitingly.

Every time I accepted someone’s help it always seems to backfire in my face.

SHIELD turned out to be Hydra.

Ultron wanted humanicide.

Steve telling me I had a second chance as an Avenger if I wanted it.

“I know it must feel like your life is spiraling, and that you don’t have control over how any of this will end up...But you do Wanda” Clint tried to assure me.

The key word was tried.

“I have never been in control of my own life Clint! It’s always powers outside my control dictating my life!” I declared, my eyes boring into his.

The bomb that fell on our house.

The war rampant across the streets of Sokovia.

I first joined Hydra believing their lies that they were SHIELD.

They offered us the chance to have power like the Avengers.

Agreeing to be a part of their experiments made me feel like I was in control of my own life for once.

Even after SHIELD fell and we realized that the so called SHIELD agents were actually Hydra, I didn’t care.

They were a means to an end.

And with my powers I was the one truly in control. Not them.

At least that’s how I felt.

“I am sick and tired of my fate always being out of my hands” I exclaimed, trying to hide my chagrin behind my anger.

I was tired of having to rely on others to decide my fate.

Waiting for the rescuers to save us from the rubble of our home. Trembling in fear as we waited expectantly for the bomb to go off as they removed each brick.

Relying on the government to bring peace back to my home. Rioting, protesting when their actions changed nothing (And neither did our protesting).

Relying on the Avengers to give me a second chance...

And now this time I will be at the mercy of the courts.

Stuck in handcuffs while they judge me and decide my punishment.

Was it worth it to throw myself on the pyre when I was only going to burn for a world who hates me and can’t see past their fear?
(Third POV)

“So who’s going to be relieving you?” Steve asked, folding his arms across his chest into a more comfortable position as he gazed at Scott from his spot on the lounge chair.

“Theo Raeken. He’s from our Division” Scott informed him, ignoring Stiles’ annoyed glare.

“Is there a particular reason why Stilinski looks like he’s trying to develop heat vision?” Bucky asked, raising an eyebrow at the two of them.

Though technically this was just supposed to be an informal meeting between Scott, Stiles, and Steve, Bucky had been wanting to talk to Scott about his so called bond with Tony for a while now.

And with Scott and Tony leaving today for some kind of supernatural meeting, there was no way he was going to just let Tony leave with Scott before all his questions were answered.

So he made a spot for himself leaning against the windows of the Avengers’ lounge, adding in a few commentaries here and there when he felt it was appropriate.

And considering Stilinski’s openly unhappy reaction to Scott’s temporary replacement, he’d say his question was well warranted.

“Because it’s a horrible idea” Stiles answered, glaring pointedly (and disappointedly) at Scott.

“No its not. You just don’t want to deal with him” Scott countered calmly, sounding unphased.

“I don’t want to have to deal with the aftermath of whatever bullshit he’s planning for Maximoff. You know he’s going to start trouble!” Stiles retorted.

He was getting a headache just thinking about it.

“Do I have to worry about him hurting Wanda?” Steve demanded, not happy in the slightest with what he was hearing.

“He’s not going to hurt her” Scott tried to assure him.

“Physically” Stiles quickly tacted on, earning him an annoyed glare from Scott.

“You know he’s going to intentionally push every single one of her buttons” Stiles countered, daring Scott to contradict him.

“We need him here” Scott declared firmly, his tone indicating that the conversation was done.

Stiles just huffed out an annoyed breath, turning his head away from Scott.

He understood Scott’s reasoning. He did.

But that didn’t mean he had to like it.

“If he’s going to antagonize Wanda then you should send for someone else” Steve suggested (read: ordered) firmly.
“I chose him for Wanda’s sake” Scott countered, just as firmly.

“How is antagonizing her what’s best?” Bucky inquired suspiciously.

A pissed off Maximoff was the opposite of what they needed.

“Because right now Wanda’s at a crossroad” Scott declared pointedly, “She can either face her past actions, or run...And right now unless we do something she’s going to run”

Scott wasn’t wrong.

Bucky had seen the look in Maximoff’s eyes on the tarmac.

A self-serving look fueled by desperation, and fear.

Bucky had no trouble believing that she was going to run in order to protect herself from those ‘wronging’ her.

Right now Wanda was definitely a flight risk.

And a dangerous one at that.

She had already willingly used excessive force against her allies in the past when she had felt that her freedom had been compromised.

God knows what she would do now.

And unknowingly to Bucky, Steve's thoughts were very similar to his own.

Steve knew that if they pushed Wanda the wrong way, even in the slightest, that there was a high possibility she may lash out at them.

He hated thinking the worst of her...But he couldn't willfully ignore past incidents anymore either.

They needed to make sure that she understood that they would protect her...But so far they’d had little to no luck, which left him no choice but to agree to having both Stilinski and Yukimura keeping an eye on her at all times.

He felt bad...But if she ran it would be so much worse for her.

And God did that make him feel even worse knowing that this was probably how Tony felt when he had insisted that Wanda should stay at the Compound until her affairs were gotten in order.

Karma truly was an unforgiving mistress.

“And if she runs it’ll be a kill on sight order” Stiles finished grimly.

Steve clenched his jaw at that.

He hated the injustice of it, but it was fact.

If Wanda ran she wouldn’t be able to stop running...And she would have to hurt a lot of people to keep herself safe, ultimately only making things worse for her.

“With those videos going viral and her impending arrest, she's completely shut everyone down” Scott pointed out, imploring them to understand, “We can't get through to her anymore, but if
anyone has a chance of convincing her that she needs to stay it's Theo”

Steve gave him a dubious look.

Their initial descriptions of the man's personality didn't match with what they were saying now.

“Scott's not wrong. Theo's an ass, but he's the only one of us that can really get her to understand” Stiles reluctantly admitted.

“How?” Steve demanded, still extremely skeptical.

“Because sometimes a good smack of reality from someone who understands almost exactly what you've gone through is just what the doctor ordered...Right Mon Capitan?” Stiles snarked, giving Steve a sarcastic smile.

And Steve had no counter for that.

“I wanted to stop you from making the same mistakes I did” Scott told him truthfully, “I didn't want you to have to hit below rock bottom before you realized that you needed to change”

He was still crawling his way up from the depths his own actions had buried him.

Albeit slowly, but he was still making his way back up.

And now it was Wanda who was free falling to rock bottom...And unless someone could get through to her she was going to land hard.

“She can help. He's just going to be, as I said, an ass about it, hence why we wanted to try playing nice with her first. Unfortunately we can't afford that luxury anymore” Stiles continued unrepentantly.

A sentiment Scott agreed with.

Steve resisted the urge to huff in annoyance at the entire situation.

Regardless of whether he approved or not Raeken would be coming here to replace Scott.

He would just have to be on guard for when he finally arrived.

“Well, if you'll excuse us, Stiles and I have some things we need to get done” Scott stated awkwardly, standing up from his spot on the couch.

“Actually there's somethin I wanna talk to you about” Bucky cut in, pushing himself up off the wall.

Scott and Stiles turned their attention to him in confused interest.

“About what?” Scott asked curiously.

“Your Bond with Tony” Bucky replied, narrowing his eyes at Scott and Stiles when they tensed defensively at his words, “How bonded are we talking here?”

He had seen the way Scott calmed Tony down with his voice alone, how for a moment Tony seemed to have been in a sort of trance.

And he didn't like for a second what it implied.
Scott shifted uncomfortably on his feet, his eyes shifting back to Stiles in an 'oh shit' way.

He knew that this would eventually come up...But he hadn't even told Tony about this...facet of his abilities yet.

Steve narrowed his eyes at Scott, not liking his silence on the matter.

“Well?” Steve demanded firmly.

“It's...complicated to explain...There's so many different facets to the Pack Bond” Scott tried to explain, pinching his nose in frustration.

This wasn't a matter that could be easily explained in a few sentences.

It was social, biological, emotional, psychological, physical, 'mystical’, and dynamic related.

“Fine then I'll be more specific. Can you control your Pack members?” Bucky demanded icily.

“You mean can I control Tony?” Scott corrected, meeting Bucky's challenging gaze.

“You've already proven that you can influence him with your voice” Bucky pointed out coldly, “What I want to know is if you can control his mind or actions in any way?”

Scott clenched his teeth.

This wasn't a conversation he wanted be having with a former Winter Soldier.

But Barnes’ frigid predatory gaze made it clear that he wasn't just going to let Scott walk away from this conversation.

“......I can” Scott reluctantly admitted, tensing his body and bracing himself to either attack or defend in case Barnes lashed out at him.

“What?!” Steve demanded furiously, damn near launching himself up out of the lounge chair, his posture aggressive and threatening, his anger burning hot and flickering in his eyes like flames.

Bucky's fury in contrast was cold and vicious. His eyes as sharp as the coldest winter wind, slicing against exposed skin like knives, as they promised no less than the most agonizing of slow deaths.

Bucky unconsciously flexed the knuckles of his titanium arm.

“Can doesn't mean I will. I've never used my Alpha commands on another person like that nor do I ever plan on doing so” Scott quickly (yet firmly) defended, before one of the super soldiers could attack him.

“Then do pray tell what do ya call whatever trance ya put him in to calm him down from attackin Steve'n me” Bucky demanded icily, his former Brooklyn drawl coming as speech sped up in his anger.

“That wasn't an Alpha command. That was Pack calling out to Pack” Scott countered firmly, standing his ground while trying not to seem overly threatening, “Pack members can use their 'wolf voice’ to snap fellow Pack members out of a state of bloodlust, or if they're stuck in their own mind, or in a state of panic. The call echoes through the Pack Bond and disrupts the state they're in by triggering a different part of their consciousness and bringing them back to full awareness”

“The man on the bridge...Who was he?”
“It...reminds them...of who they are...” Bucky grit out slowly.

Scott nodded in confirmation, “It's not controlling them”

“I knew him”

“It brings you back” Bucky reluctantly finished.

“You’re my mission!”

“Then finish it...Cause I’m with you till the end of the line”

“Scott had to do it for Kira several times when her animal spirit took control” Stiles detailed, hoping the example would give them a slightly better understanding.

Bucky's eyes snapped between Stiles and Scott, his eyes widening with a faint hope.

“You can break mind control...” Bucky muttered lowly in amazement.

Does that mean he can...?

“It's limited to Pack...I'm sorry” Scott apologized with a pitying grimace, intentionally cutting off Barnes’ train of thought before it could progress any further.

He wanted to help him. But anything he attempts would likely cause more undo harm to Barnes’ mind rather than help.

Scott watched sadly as the light in Barnes’ eyes dimmed, his expression falling.

It was like watching a doctor tell their patient that there were treatment options, only to tell them that they weren't viable for any of them.

And the only thing worse than not having hope, was having it ripped away.

“And...if you Bit me too?” Bucky hesitantly asked, knowing Scott wouldn't like the suggestion (But he needed to know).

Scott gave Barnes a sad look, pursing his lips slightly in his guilt.

“Even if I did and you survived, I'd only be able to snap you out of the brainwashing. It wouldn't remove the triggers” Scott slowly explained to him.

Bucky nodded slowly in understanding, his shoulders slumping slightly in defeat.

It wouldn't be a cure. Only a bandaid.

Even if Scott 'turned’ him he couldn't very well follow Scott around his entire life on the off chance that someone might trigger him...That was no way to live.

Steve felt crushed for Bucky.

He knew that Bucky wanted the triggers removed so that he wouldn't be a threat to anyone like that again.

So that he could get his bodily autonomy back.

But with his and Bucky's strained relationship with Tony right now Bucky hadn't followed up on
any of Tony and Helen's research into BARF.

Bucky didn't want to push, Steve didn’t want to push, and Tony (understandably) didn't want to be in the same room as either them longer than absolutely necessary.

But at the same time Steve knew Bucky wanted to confront Tony and apologize.

*He* still needed to properly apologize.

All three of them needed to stop pushing this away and face each other.

Too much was at stake right now to just let things stew for a while.

But first things first...They had all gotten off topic...And he wanted a real answer too.

“But you do have the power to control Tony's mind?” Steve inquired, wanting clarification.

After all, if they had been wrong about the 'wolf voice’ than maybe this wasn't entirely what Scott was making it out to be either.

Steve and Bucky watched as Scott slightly tensed, his eyes carrying a slight angry glint in them.

“All Alphas have the ability to use their Alpha Roar to assert their power and dominance over their betas through the Pack Bond, take control of their beta's mind and force them to do whatever task it is they commanded” Scott gritted out, angrily, bitterly as he recalled when Peter had down such a thing to him.

“Soldat?”

“Ya gotov otvetchat”

Bucky scowled angrily, his knuckles cracking as his hands tightened into fists.

“And how can we trust that you won't use Tony as your personal puppet?” Bucky demanded, not wanting Tony to be used in the same way he had been.

“Because my Alpha did it to *me*” Scott snapped back angrily.

The raw emotion in his words shocking both Steve and Bucky, their eyes widening in disbelief.

“But I thought your were-” Steve began, confused and concerned.

“I wasn't always an Alpha” Scott reminded them sharply, cutting Steve off, “I was a beta first”

“And your Alpha?” Steve inquired tightly, angry on Scott’s behalf for the mistreatment he had suffered.

“A serial killing psychopath hell bent on revenge” Stiles filled in blandly, “Took control of Scott and ordered him to kill me and three of our other friends so that he wouldn't have his 'human' Pack anymore to distract him”

“You’re my mission!”

“Then finish it”

Bucky grit his teeth painfully.
The parallels cutting too close to home.

“And I almost did…” Scott trailed off, his line of sight drifting off as the guilt weighing him down.

“The Alpha doesn’t want to kill us” Stiles muttered in disbelief as he came to the same conclusion as Scott.

“It wants me to do it…And that’s not even the worst part” Scott stated miserably, turning away from Stiles, unable to face him in his own guilt.

“How in h-holy hell is that not the worst part Scott?” Stiles demanded, stammering in his fear.

“Because when he **made** me shift…I wanted to do it…I wanted to kill you…All of you” Scott revealed painfully, guiltily.

Seeing the identical visage of pain in Scott’s eyes Bucky vowed that if Scott’s former Alpha wasn’t already dead, he **would** be.

“It wasn’t your fault” Steve declared firmly, trying to relieve Scott of his guilt.

He didn’t like what he was learning about werewolves...Their hierarchy seemed to possess a lot of potential for abuse of leadership.

“You aren’t responsible for what someone else forces you to do” Steve continued assuredly, “That’d be like saying Bucky killed all those people while he was brainwashed under Hydra”

Sure he and Scott had a lot of parallels, but there were things he couldn’t connect with him about. This being one of them. Though maybe he, Kira, and Bucky could work out their past guilt together.

“He did kill all those people” Stiles retorted bluntly, an edge of irritation in his voice.

Steve immediately felt his hackles rise as his eyes snapped sharply to Stiles.

“How is he at fault when he was brainwashed?” Steve demanded challengingly, incensed by Stiles’ remark.

“There is a difference between fault and responsibility Rogers. What Sergeant Barnes did wasn’t his fault, but he still did it” Stiles pointed out irately.

He was getting sick and tired of Roger’s ignorance!

“Telling him that it wasn’t him isn’t going to make him feel any better!...It isn’t going to help the guilt. Because it **was** him...It was by his hands that all those people died” Stiles declared, projecting his own pain in his rant.

“Allison’s dead...And I guess the only good thing is that I’m dying too”

“Knowing that you weren’t in control of your actions doesn’t make what you did when you were under someone else's control any easier to deal with” Stiles continued furiously, staring Rogers down, daring him to challenge him.

“You mean if he dies do I die?...I don’t care. So long as no one else dies because of me”

“And you know what that feels like?” Steve challenged skeptically right back, narrowing his eyes at Stiles.
“I do” Stiles declared firmly, not an ounce of hesitance in his voice, his eyes raw as tears started to well.

Steve’s affronted expression fell as if he had been slapped.

“......What happened?” Bucky hesitantly asked, unsure if Stiles was able to speak of the incident causing his whole body to shake.

Stiles, turned his grief-stricken gaze to Barnes.

“You lost your arm. I lost the body I was born with” he declared, his voice cracking.

“Okay, so I’m real...But am I really me?”

Stiles watched as Bucky shuttered at his response, unconsciously flexing his titanium arm.

“You are the new Fist of Hydra”

“Small price to pay to stop the son-of-a-bitch who hijacked my body and mind” Stiles declared firmly, and a look of understanding passed over Bucky’s face.

He would’ve given up all his limbs if it meant he was free of Hydra’s control.

“And I remember everything he did while using me as his meat-puppet...Using my memories against my friends and family...Toying with them” Stiles listed painfully, his voice cracking more and more with each point.

“I remember everything I did Scott”

“Thirty-three” Stiles said, looking down at his fingers twisting together in front of him.

“I remember pushing that sword into you”

“Thirty-three people were killed” Stiles revealed, getting lost in a haze of memories filled with spraying blood and curdling screams, “Because of me”

“I remember twisting it”

“One of them was Lydia's boyfriend...And another was one of our closest friends”

“It wasn’t you” Scott said sadly, trying to sound reassuring.

“Yeah but I remember it” Stiles exclaimed softly, his breaths coming out in gasps from the sharp pain of the memories.

“...Do you remember what you did when you were brainwashed?” Stiles asked, breaking free of his own grief momentarily to look Bucky in the eyes.

“Yes” Bucky declared, his eyes just as guilt ridden and scarred.

“What do you remember?” Stiles prodded on.

“...All of them” Bucky admitted, his voice heavy.

His marks were the first thing he remembered.

Every death.
Every innocent.

Every life cut short because of him.

“Good” Stiles declared, causing Bucky a slight emotional whiplash.

“Good? Good?! How the hell is being haunted every waking minute by the faces of the people I’ve murdered a good thing?!” Bucky roared indignantly.

“Because it means you’re not a monster!” Stiles shouted back, “It means that you’re not the killer they forced you to be!”

“You are the new Fist of Hydra” Zola decreed joyously.

“Your name is James Buchanan Barnes” Steve declared resolutely.

“The fact that you care means your empathy is still intact. And that you will eventually be able to recover” Stiles continued, jabbing a harsh finger in Bucky’s direction.

“I won’t lie...It’ll take a long time...What happened to you will leave a scar over your heart...A kind of darkness” Stiles admitted, huffing out angry, sorrowful breaths.

“I have it. Scott has it...And the way we fight that...The way we keep from getting lost in that darkness, is by looking for our friends, our family...By living for the sake of those we’ve lost...Knowing they’d kick our asses if we wasted our lives letting the darkness consume us...They’d want us to be happy. To live our lives” Stiles implored, willing both Bucky and Steve to understand.

There was no ‘fix’ button.

Even if the triggers are removed, the guilt will always remain.

It’s how you deal with that guilt and grief that matters.

“And you can...And the way you can honor that is to not forget the sacrifices and the people before you” Scott advised softly.

“Nous protégeons ceux qui ne peuvent pas se protéger eux-mêmes”

“You can’t bring them back...But you can do more with your life...And that helps with the guilt” Stiles assured.

It was time all the Avengers learned that.

(Third POV)

“A man showed up at the border who claims to have killed Klaue” Okoye declared impatiently through the hologram at the Princess’ nonchalance.

“What?” Shuri exclaimed in disbelief.

How was that even possible?

Killing Klaue was one thing, knowing how to enter their borders was another.
Had one of their War Dogs killed him?

“W’Kabi is transporting him as we speak to the Palace. We need to find your brother” Okoye implored, hoping the Princess finally understood the critical situation they were in.

Whatever this man hoped to gain by bringing Klaue’s body to Wakanda, Okoye had a bad feeling that her husband would be supporting him.

“An outsider?” Shuri proclaimed, confused by the visage of the man her Beads had drawn up.

She did not recognize him at all.

“No. A Wakandan” Okoye corrected, shocked that the Princess would think the man was a foreigner when he knew of their Land.

“He’s not Wakandan” Agent Ross declared softly, recognizing the man, causing Shuri to turn to him in surprise.

“He’s one of ours” Ross exclaimed, looking almost smug that he knew something they didn't, though his eyes told a different story.

“Whatsoever Stevens is here for it can't be good” Ross thought grimly.

(Third POV)

“Well. We’re off to Neverland” Tony declared in sarcastic cheer as he and Scott stepped onto the quinjet’s ramp.

“And here I thought Neverland made you young forever. Not older” Rhodey teased.

“I’m forever a child at heart Honey-Bear” Tony retorted with a smile, placing his hand over his chest.

“I think you mean mentally. Cause I know you haven’t matured since I met your scrawny ass at sixteen” Rhodey countered back, grinning as well.

“I beg your pardon, I’ll have you know my ass is still very much plump and firm” Tony declared, raising an eyebrow and pretending to be offended.

“He’s not wrong” Bucky noted appreciatively (and silently), remaining out of sight from his spot at the far end of the tarmac.

He had hoped to talk to Tony before he left, but no dice. He’d just have to talk with him when he came back.

“There are indeed many sources commenting on your rear...In fact I find media’s fascination in the posterior assets of celebrities to be both confusing and mildly concerning” Vision joined in, “Kim Kardashian-West’s assets are disturbingly well documented”

Tony couldn’t help the gut-busting laughter that ensued.

“Viz, man, someone needs to teach you about proper pop culture” Rhodey stated between laughs.

“I was not aware there was a such thing” Vision noted curiously.
“And as much as I hate to cut this off, we do really need to go” Scott declared ruefully, he himself still smiling.

“Alright alright. Keep your fur on kid” Tony grumbled slightly walking further up the ramp.

“Try not to cause trouble” Scott near ordered, turning his gaze to Theo.

“I have no idea what you could possibly mean” Theo replied in his typical smooth tone, looking like the cat before it pounced on the canary.

“I mean it. You're here to help” Scott reminded him, a sharp undercurrent to his voice, though somehow still maintaining its softness.

Bucky was silently jealous that Scott could make himself sound so much like an exasperated parent and still be authoritative...Actually that was just being a parent.

“And I will” Theo replied assuredly, though his smile didn’t seem that reassuring.

“He looks eager” Bucky noted critically.

“I hope so” Scott muttered, turning to make his way into the quinjet as the ramp began to close.

As soon as the quinjet lifted up into the air Theo’s smile twisted into a grin Loki would be jealous of, his eyes sparkling with mischief and mayhem.

(Scott’s POV)

I plopped myself down in one of the co-pilot chairs.

I didn’t actually need to worry about piloting the craft at all. Everything was automatic, and if anything should happen Tony knew how to handle the controls.

I huffed out a stressed breath through my nose.

The fact I had received an additional letter yesterday informing me that ‘my new beta’s presence was also requested’ at the Supernatural Council Meeting today, couldn't mean anything good.

The fact that the Ancient One even knew about Tony was concerning in itself.

But for his presence to specifically be requested (read: demanded)...

I couldn’t help but worry that all this had to do with the fact that we had to out the Supernatural to the Avengers.

Yesterday, after we had gotten Secretary Ross to take a hike, the rest of the Pack and I were forced to finally explain to the Avengers (and Bucky) just what we were.

*Flashback*

“You really expect us to believe that ghosts and the Boogeyman are real?” Sam demanded skeptically.

“Whether you believe it or not, yes both are in fact real” Stiles retorted, sounding done with the world.
“Aliens mistaken for Gods I can believe. But **everything** being real? That, that's...” Sam said trailing off, an edge of fear in his tone.

“Scary?” Lydia finished, a sad understanding in her eyes, “How do you think we felt?”

A grim silence fell over the Avengers.

“We were untrained high school kids who just learned that a lot of the supposed home fires and animal attacks in our town weren't just accidents...That there was a lot more to everything than anyone knew” I detailed, a heavy sorrow in my voice.

“A whole other world stationed in the shadows…” Natasha stated softly, finally understanding the group’s true purpose (and name origin).

“And somebody had to be the one standing guard” Steve finished, a firm respect echoing in his words.

*End Flashback*

Tony, Steve, Wanda, Vision, and Rhodey had already known even before we had officially revealed ourselves, so they had been relatively calm during the whole reveal.

Clint, while somewhat dubious, accepted things fairly quickly and even started adding to Vision and Tony's Mythbusters list.

Natasha on the other hand was very skeptical (no surprise there), but she seemed to take our explanations in stride and accepted them well enough.

Though I expected a thorough interrogation in our future.

Barnes however didn't seem too phased by the revelation at all past the initial surprise...

In fact, Rogers hadn't been overly surprised either...He actually seemed to accept things fairly quickly...Too quickly...That's something worth looking into a bit later...

But first...

I glanced over at Tony from the corner of my eye.

I had no idea how to get the man to trust me.

How to get him to accept that he was Pack now.

“**Bond with him on his own turf**” Lydia’s advice echoed through my mind.

“Tony” I called out, immediately getting his attention.

“What’d you need Teen Wolf?” Tony replied in his usual sarcastic drall.

“I was wondering, when we get back I mean. If you'd be interested in figuring out what species of were-canine you are? We can sequence out your DNA to determine which species of canis you are-”

Tony held up his hand.

“I’m gonna stop you right there” Tony declared seriously.
“Did I say something wrong?” I thought worriedly, “Did I offend him?”

I resisted the urge to drum my fingers nervously as Tony leaned forward in his chair.

“You had me science kid. Elaborate” he declared, his expression still just as serious as it had been a moment ago, though the mirth and fascination in his eyes was unmistakable now.

My face broke out into a relieved grin.

“Thank you Lydia” I thought victoriously.

(Third POV)

Everyone was in the Avengers’ Lounge waiting for Wanda, Clint, and Kira to arrive so that Theo could properly introduce himself.

Though Steve and Natasha had waited all of six seconds before starting to subtly interrogate the young man themselves (a new record really).

“So you’re Theo Raeken?” Steve questioned, giving the young man a thorough once over.

He didn’t look like much...But appearances could be deceiving.

“That’s what it says on my underwear” Theo retorted, giving Rogers a sarcastic grin.

“And you’re an Enhanced...Not a Supernatural?” Natasha questioned.

“Just a cheap knockoff” Theo replied, a slight note of bitterness making its way into his voice, his expression twisting ever so slightly from his smug, confident demeanor, though his smooth drall remained, though not as unphased as before.

“That’s interesting” Natasha observed, narrowing her eyes slightest as the emotional shift, “Inferiority complex?”

“Knockoff?” Bucky contemplated, comparing the kid’s wording to his own situation, how his serum was a ‘knockoff’ to Erskine’s.

“So what can you do?” Sam inquired curiously, sizing the kid up.

Would he be like Derek, or Lydia, or Stiles? Or something else new entirely?

“What’s the fun in showing your cards before the game even starts?” Theo commented coolly, grinning at them like they were his source of entertainment for the night, causing everyone’s hackles to rise at his baiting.

“Shut up” Stiles declared bluntly, sounding beyond fed up all ready.

“You know I just got here right?” Theo noted, sounding amused.

“And yet it’s weird...I can’t wait for you to leave” Stiles retorted sarcastically, giving Theo an irate glare.

Theo just blew him a mocking kiss.

“Wanda you need to calm down” Clint implored firmly, his voice echoing throughout the room.
He was trying not to get too frustrated at Wanda’s lack of listening.

“Why should I?” Wanda demanded like a petulant teenager, “This isn’t fair!”

“Life hardly ever is. But getting angry and throwing a tantrum over it isn’t going to solve your problems” Clint reminded her sternly, scolding her like she would one of his children.

“I’m not a child!” Wanda adamantly declared, “And I’m not throwing a tantrum! I’m pissed off that the world is treating me like I’m some kind of megalomaniac when I’m a hero!”

A sharp laughter cut through the room, causing everyone to freeze and immediately turn toward the source, arguments forgotten.

Wanda’s wrathful eyes locked onto the form of the dirty blonde haired young man, currently doubled over as if he’d just heard the funniest joke in the world.

A joke no one else was laughing at.

“What’s so funny?” Wanda demanded loudly, stalking over to the unknown young man.

“You’re joke” Theo replied between laughs, his smile as sharp and mocking as his laugh, “You a hero? That's the funniest thing I've heard in a while”

Wanda clenched her fists, her white knuckles in stark contrast to the blood red now outlining them.

“Theo” Stiles warned, taking a step forward in case he needed to intervene.

“God dammit. Not even thirty seconds!” Stiles thought bitterly.

“No. I've been waiting for my chance to put this bitch in her place...You all tried playing good cop. Advising her...Now it's my turn” Theo declared viciously, grinning like a shark.

Wanda narrowed her eyes challengingly back at him in kind.

“She's been making progress” Kira noted, trying (and failing) to defuse some of the tension.

“But none of this has given her the punch of reality she needs for the gravity of everything she has done to finally sink in” Theo retorted sharply, his eyes never once moving from Maximoff’s challenging gaze, “A few half-hearted apologies mean nothing...She’s only in this to protect herself”

“And what would you know about me?” Wanda challenged, loathing the man for judging her without truly knowing her.

“Oh honey I know because I was you a few years ago” Theo mocked, his voice sickly sweet, his comment throwing them all for a loop.

“Shit” Lydia thought, “So that’s how he’s going to play this”

She turned her eyes frantically to Stiles.

Their eyes locked in silent understanding.

Be ready.

Because this could get very ugly.
“What’d you mean?” Steve demanded coldly, not liking where this conversation was heading... Or what Theo was alluding to.

“I killed Scott” Theo declared bluntly, as if he was talking about the weather.

Silence.

“Eviscerated him actually” Theo corrected when nobody said anything, pretending to seem thoughtful.

Steve and Natasha stood up from their positions on the couch. Tense and ready to strike at the threat in their home.

“Made Lydia catatonic” Theo continued as if he wasn’t in any potential danger, “Signalled the Dread Doctors’ of Kira’s location so they could experiment on her and make her animal spirit go outa control”

The sound of metal knuckles flexing echoed through the the stifling silence of the room.

“But I’m getting ahead of myself” Theo stated mockingly, as if he was forgetting something important.

“Let me start at the very beginning” Theo emphasized, returning his gaze to bore into Maximoff’s eyes.

This little show-and-tell was for her after all.

And he was going to lay all her sins out bare for everyone to see.

But you know what they say, if you want someone to talk you have to first.

“I was nine. Severely bullied alongside Scott, Stiles, and a few others in our grade” Theo began as if he were a teacher reading to his students, gesturing a hand over to Stiles.

Steve’s eyes momentarily fell between Stiles and Theo, his jaw tightening.

“It don’t want to kill anyone. I don’t like bullies. I don’t care where they’re from”

It didn’t help that Stiles wasn’t looking anyone in the eyes either.

“Then one day these scientists showed up offering to give me the one thing I never had” Theo declared slowly, his words causing a pit of dread to form in Wanda’s stomach.

“Power” Theo emphasized, his eyes boring into Wanda’s, as if they were flaying her open and exposing her for all to see.

“The chance to put my tormentors in their place” Theo declared sharply, his mocking smile gone.

“Is that why you’ve come? To end the Avengers?”

“But first I had to meet the requirements of their enhancement surgery” Theo stated, his words causing everyone’s hair to stand on end, “All I had to do was kill my sister”

What?!

“This kid is insane” Clint thought, his hands edging slowly to where he stashed his concealed
“Of course my nine year old brain didn’t see a problem with it when these men told me that my sister was more than happy to sacrifice her life in order to make mine better” Theo stated, trying to be blase about it, but they all caught the faint shine of tears in his eyes.

“So you know what I did?” he inquired to them softly.

No one dared to answer.

“I pushed her right off a bridge and watched as she froze to death in minutes” Theo continued, “The Doctors then cut out her heart and gave it to me, allowing me to meet their requirements for their enhancement surgery”

“This is so beyond fucked up” Sam thought disgusted.

“And it worked” Theo emphasized in disbelieving amazement.

“I was the first to survive” he declared, eyeing Wanda pointedly.

A miracle Strucker had called us...A horrifying, magnificent miracle.

“I attributed it to my strong desire for payback” Theo stated coolly.

“Stark. The Avengers...They will pay for the pain they have caused us...That is why we survived when the others didn’t” Wanda declared reassuringly to Pietro.

“That I was fated to get my revenge” he continued, looking at her as if he could see into her soul.

As if he knew.

“Of course things happened and a group of Hunters found them out, and tried to stop them by cutting off their power source, forcing them to leave”

“Herr Strucker it’s the Avengers”

“They had promised me power...That if I did whatever they asked they could fix me so that I wasn't just a supernatural knockoff...That they would make others like me so that I wouldn't be alone” Theo detailed painfully, sharply.

“The two of you are the first in a new age of humans. Superior to that of the Avengers” Strucker regaled.

“My parents had already fled town without me, so I left with the psychotic scientists...Figured they'd still be of use to me. S’not like I had anything left anyway” Theo detailed tightly, regretfully.

“They’re not SHIELD. They’re Hydra!” Pietro whispered furiously.

“It doesn’t matter. They gave us what we wanted...We can still use them...It’s not like we have anything left to lose anyway” Wanda proclaimed, just as stubbornly.

“Is this story sounding familiar to you?” Theo inquired mockingly, taking a step forward in Wanda’s direction, breaking her out of her own memories.

“You weren’t kidnapped or coerced. They came to you with all sorts of promises, offering you power” Theo regaled, his voice and accusations like knives cutting into her.
“And you said yes”

But what cut deeper was the fact that it was all true.

“You chose to go with them...And even after you found out they weren't who you thought they were you still stayed”

She didn’t care that SHIELD had actually been Hydra. She had always thought SHIELD had been a den of snakes. But she had thought she could use them to get what she wanted...Regardless of her loyalties or beliefs, she chose them. And she had chosen to stay.

“And you did whatever they asked you to do in order to get what you wanted...Because so long as you got your revenge...So long as you had power it didn’t matter how many people you had to kill, or torture, or manipulate right?” Theo declared knowingly.

“Who is he?” Wanda asked, eyeing the man strapped pitifully to their chair, sticking of fear.

“We need to see just what you are capable of. Just what your powers can do” Strucker replied, nonchalantly brushing off her inquisition.

“All that mattered was that you were no longer small and helpless ever again!”

When their rescuers finally found them she vowed never to be helpless like that again.

“And you would make sure that everyone else knew it too” Theo said darkly, narrowing his eyes at her knowingly

For the first time she heard the sounds of what a person felt as their mind was torn apart by their own fears.

Her smile sharp and vicious.

It was their turn to be afraid.

“You would crush them all and watch them burn because you could”

“It’s time for some mind games” Ultron's sentry declared.

“They would suffer like you did”

“We waited for two days for Tony Stark to kill us”

“Because this time they were weak ones”

“Everybody’s afraid of something”

“And when your so called plans were gonna burn you too, you jumped ship to save yourself” Theo mocked.

“You said that we would destroy the Avengers. That we would make a better world”

“Not because you felt bad for your hand in Ultron...But because you knew you would die anyway, so why not side with the group trying to stop him and have a chance to live?”

“When everyone is dead?”
“It had nothing to do with morals” Theo spat, “Just self-preservation”

“Please. Don’t do this” Ultron pleaded.

“What choice do we have?” Wanda declared darkly.

“I know...Because I did the literal exact same thing” Theo declared, the burning self-loathing in his eyes evident to all.

“The difference between you and me? I didn’t lie about my reasons for helping. And my past sins weren’t automatically ‘forgiven’ for it” Theo spat furiously.

“She wanted a do-over Buck. Her brother was killed when they were helping us fight off Ultron. She deserved a fresh start” Steve implored.

“Her brother’s death is her own fault. You reap what you sow” Bucky declared coldly.

“And they shouldn’t have been. You shouldn’t have been” Theo emphasized darkly, his words reminding Wanda of her talk with Clint a while back.

“You never had to deal with the consequences of your actions. You never had to prove to anyone that you wanted to change. That you wanted to make amends. To wipe out the red in your ledger”

“You never had to deal with the mistrust or figure out how to win it back. Or even apologize”

“You should have been made to face the people you hurt...Helen, Tony, Bruce...Johannesburg shouldn’t have been covered up, and you should have gone on TV to apologize for Lagos earlier”

“They jailed me in Bardo for what I did” Theo declared furiously, choking up on the horrifying memories of the prison he'd been trapped in.

He won’t lie and say he didn’t still have PTSD from his experiences there.

He'd rather deal with a hundred Hulks than go back.

“Do you know what Bardo is?” Theo questioned Wanda, his tone making her feel like a ten year old child again.

“It’s a separate dimensional plane...The space between life and death” he explained, causing a shiver to crawl up her spine.

“And do you know what it does to a person?” he continued, not really expecting an answer, the raw pain in his voice evident.

“It traps you in an endless loop of illusions where you're visited by either peaceful or wrathful deities. Forcing you to face your own actions, fears, and choices, pinned against you over and over and over, again and again...Forcing you to face the darkest parts of yourself. Torturing you with the lessons you are supposed to learn until you either gain insight or madness” Theo detailed, his voice just shy of hysterical.

Wanda swallowed hard.

“I was there for months. Months! In literal Hell!” Theo roared, his body shaking in anger and fear.

All her actions, fears, and choices pinned against her...She would have gone mad well before then.
A sentiment, unknowingly to her, that she shared with Natasha and Bucky.

“And even after I was freed I was treated like a traitor, murderer, and an untrustworthy criminal by everyone, even as I was helping them take down the enemy” Theo pushed onward.

Wanda recalled what Clint had said about Natasha.

“She wasn’t just accepted into SHIELD”

“Because I hadn’t earned their forgiveness. And I sure as hell didn’t deserve it” Theo continued pointedly.

“How hard is it for you to just say that you’re sorry? Because I don’t think you ever actually have...For anything. In your entire life” Stiles challenged maliciously, jabbing a finger at the air in Wanda’s direction.

“Because I was just helping out of self-preservation”

“You call yourself a hero but all you care about is yourself....How you can keep yourself safe” Helen unmercifully accused.

“Even when we were being discriminately hunted down, they only reluctantly included me, but they knew I would help because I wanted to live too” Theo grit out bitterly.

“All you’ve done your whole life is use people in order to get what you want. And when they’re no longer of use to you you toss them aside” Helen accused, “You used Hydra. Then Ultron...And now you’re using the Avengers”

“Only towards the end did they start believing that I actually wanted a second chance. That I wanted redemption”

“I...I am not going to run away this time” Wanda declared.

“Because wanting redemption and getting it are two very different things” Theo declared pointedly.

“We’ll see” Helen declared skeptically.

“And getting it takes time...A long time” Theo emphasized, almost miserably, “People aren’t going to trust you right away”

“You may be sorry for fucking up, but the world doesn't know that! Nobody went and explained what the situation had been. Nobody!” Stiles near shouted, “And because of that, as far as the world is concerned you're not a hero. You're a threat!”

“You have to show them that you can be trusted”

“You may be sorry for your actions but the world doesn't see that. You just hid away!” Stiles exclaimed irately.

“Even if that means putting on those handcuffs, staying out of the spotlight, publicly admitting your failings, and putting up with their slander and hate-filled jabs” Theo emphasized, his voice almost shouting.

“She put up with the jeers...The glares...The mistrust...All because she wanted to wipe out the red in her ledger” Clint detailed heavily.
“Because it shows that you’re being cooperative. That you’re listening to them. That you’re learning.”

“Never once did any of you come forward to explain the devastation. To tell us why those tragedies happened. To tell us why they were necessary...That you were sorry for our losses” Miriam knifed, cutting deeper and deeper into the wound.

“Because by putting up with all of that shows that you’re willing to work to gain back their trust. That you want to change”

“You run you’re telling the world that you are a threat that needs to be taken care of” Clint advised, giving her a firm resolute look, “Prove them wrong. Stay”

“And eventually they will see that”

“It took a long time before the other agents stopped treating her like she was an enemy in their midst...But she proved herself” Clint said proudly.

“And I’m telling you right now, nobody sees that...Nobody that matters...They’ll all out there” Theo declared, gesturing his palm out to the windows.

“And all you’re doing is proving that you can’t be trusted...You want to be trusted? You have to earn it. And that means playing by their rules. By showing them they are safe around you. Hell if your own team doesn’t feel entirely safe around you how the hell do you expect non-trained people to feel?” Theo demanded bitingly, causing Wanda to flinch.

“Remember how you felt when you were powerless against something more powerful than you? That’s how they feel” Theo emphasized.

With a shuddering breath Wanda finally understood.

The shell had caused her to feel weak, powerless, and afraid…

She was that shell now.

“Show them different and you’ll get that trust. But not a moment before” Theo declared, smelling the shift in her emotions.

“And if you can’t do that, then you don’t want redemption...And you sure as hell aren’t a hero” Theo concluded with a flourish, letting the silence reign as everyone took in his speech.

Theo watched as the decisions and conflicts warred within Maximoff’s eyes.

It was up to her now to decide the path that she was going to take.

“Captain Rogers” Friday called out, sounding uncomfortable as she cut through the silence, “Secretary Ross is requesting to land...He says that he has the warrant”

(Third POV)

“Here’s your warrant Agent Stilinski” Secretary Ross mockingly jabbed, flicking his hand holding the envelope out to Stiles, “Feel free to check it yourself and have your little computer friends confirm its validity. I can assure you it’s legit”
“Oh I'm sure it is” Stiles snarked back, near ripping the envelope out of Ross’ hand as he scanned the document over.

“So where is she then? And don't say the bathroom” Ross questioned, trying to save himself a sarcastic quip.

“The lounge actually...It's Monster Movie Monday. The live action sucks” Stiles sneered, retorting with a sarcastic quip anyway as he turned to retrace his steps back down the hall.

Ross hadn't waited for them to meet him at the tarmac. Which in itself wasn't all that surprising.

Stiles just prayed that Wanda hadn't tried to make an escape when he was busy confronting Thunderthighs.

“Has she tried to run?” Ross inquired seriously.

“Nope. So far she's been a good little girl. Waiting in timeout for you to come back and send her to her room” Stiles replied mockingly, the doors to the lounge now in sight.

“The Scarlet Witch is hardly a petulant child Agent Stilinski. She's committed numerous crimes against humanity” Ross nonchalantly pointed out.

“Funny because you're still an old man telling people to get off his lawn” Stiles retorted.

Ross has made it well known that while he appreciates the Avengers, he didn't like how they just did whatever they pleased on American soil (and elsewhere).

“I like to make sure everything is kept in order. I have a very big lawn to take care of after all” Ross countered, deciding to continue the metaphor.

“And yet under reasonable enough circumstances you can be removed from your so called Home and placed in a facility” Stiles retorted.

He really hoped that Tony can get Ross fired from office at some point soon.

“Is that a threat Agent Stilinski?” Ross inquired warningly, pausing before they entered the room.

Stiles turned to face him, his eyes locked into Ross’.

“Just a reminder that you're not as ethical and law abiding as you pretend to be Mr. Secretary” Stiles replied softly, mockingly, narrowing his eyes at Ross, giving him a gentle warning of his own.

Ross just gave Stiles and contemplating stare.

Stilinski had always been rebellious, but he'd always been a loyal soldier.

“Figures the Avengers would start to sink their claws into him” Ross thought bitterly.

Stiles pushed open the doors, cutting off their little staring contest.

“Please be in here. Please be in here. Please be in here” Stiles chanted to himself, pleading to every deity on the face of the planet that Maximoff hadn't made a break for it.

Stiles ignored the footsteps behind him in favor of scanning the room.
He breathed a sigh of relief when he spotted Maximoff standing by the windows, her back to the door.

“Ms. Maximoff you are under arrest for your alleged involvement in the destruction of Johannesburg, Novi Grad, and the Aid and Relief Center in Lagos. Allying with Ultron as well as having a hand in its creation, and your involvement with Hydra” Ross declared, motioning his hand in a silent command for the agents to surround and apprehend Maximoff, “If you resist arrest we will have no choice but to use lethal force”

Wanda remained like a statue even as the armed men surrounded her, seeing their reflections through the window.

Wanda shifted her vision to gaze at the dismal visage of herself reflected back at her.

Eerily reminding of her of her training session with the Guard.

“Stiles might have been egging you on, but he was there to make you try and find an alternative way to locate him from the reflections. To try and help you realize that if you continue fighting yourself and letting your powers and emotions control you, you will only continue to hurt yourself and by extension others” Kira explained.

“But I defeated them…” Wanda pointed out weakly, uncertainly.

“You destroyed yourself” Stiles corrected.

“Everything I do just gets reflected back at me” Wanda thought grimly.

“Find an alternative way”, Kira's voice echoed in her mind.

......It wasn't up to the Avengers to give her a second chance Wanda realized.

Nobody moved.

Everyone waited fraught with tension as Wanda made her decision.

The soldiers too afraid to get closer...And the Avengers didn't want to make things worse.

Then Derek and Theo smelled it.

Her resolve.

Her conviction.

Maximoff had made her decision.

Turning around slowly, Wanda faced the agents covered in SWAT gear, the first row holding shields while the second had machine guns trained on her form.

“I surrender”

(Tony's POV)

“So you joined a super secret mystical cult?” I inquired skeptically, staring down Dr. Steven Strange as if he'd grown six heads.
“Frankly that would've been better than him forsaking science. The blasphemy” I thought.

From what I remembered of the man he always made sure to look his best when he wasn't wearing scrubs, so seeing him in monk attires had completely thrown me for a loop.

Though I suppose taking a sabbatical of sorts wasn't entirely off base considering the fact Strange had lost his ability to practice his (true) craft.

Though this took reinventing yourself to an entirely new level even where I was concerned.

“I merely branched out into a different type of science” Strange countered, sounding unamused and defensive.

Interestingly enough Stiles and Thor have both commented similarly on the subject.

Magic as a *science*?

It made me almost want to loudly declare “preposterous” in a British accent while methodically stroking my beard.

But seeing Strange has admittedly brought back my curiosity on the subject, so this whole magic deal warranted another look see I supposed.

“I believe it is time we left for the Conference Hall. Strange and Mordo will remain here to assist Drumm in our absence” the Oh so Ancient One declared calmly, turning from her conversation with Scott and Argent.

Something about her made my hackles rise.

She felt….different from everyone else...Though I couldn't put a finger on exactly why. It was something like a buzz in the back of my mind. Something instinctual warning me of something. Though for the life of me I had no idea of what.

Though it did make me feel slightly uneasy.

Ever since we entered the New York Sanctum, (I swear all 'supernaturals’ had a flare for flashy names...And that's coming from me), she's been gazing at me with an expression I couldn't identify.

Her expression was...not entirely neutral...But slightly uneasy? Unsure?

I didn't like that she was looking at me like that.

Scott had said that she knew I wasn't human anymore. But did that really warrant giving me the polite stink eye?

“We’re ready” Scott replied, giving her a confirming nod.

Before I could ask which direction the Conference Hall was in this place the Ancient One held out her hand, making circular motions in the air.

Fiery sparks of orange/yellow crackled through the air as they mimicked the shape of her hand motions.

Within the fiery ring was gorgeous white marble floors and pillars that looked to be straight from Ancient Greece.
Two different locations separated by a gateway.

A portal.

Soaring through the New York skies one moment. Weightless in the depths of space the next.

The Suit shutting down. Deep space not one of its functional environments.

My sight fading to black at the oxygen deprivation as the plumes from the nuke decimated the Mothership. Decimated an army far too much for us to handle.

“Tony” a distant voice called out.

I needed to keep breathing.

I could do this.

It was just-just...

“You...could’ve...saved...us”

Surrounded by devastation on the wasteland of some foreign planet. Everyone dead.

“Why didn’t...you do more?”

The Earth helplessly invaded as we laid defeated.

“Tony” Scott said gently, looking extremely concerned as he stepped into my line of vision, cutting my gaze away from the por-

“Wha- I’m fine” I said, as if I hadn't just been staring unresponsively for God knows how long.

I mental cursed myself ten ways to Sunday.

I thought I had this shit under control!

……At least I did until that Hydra base in Sokovia.

“You sure? You looked like you were about to have a panic attack” Scott replied worriedly, not looking like he'd believed me for a second.

“Yup yup. Just fundamentally against magic is all” I tried to brush off, trying to sound more haughty than defensive.

Though considering the fact everyone in the damn room was still giving me identical looks of pity, I'm going to go out on a limb and say my deflection didn't work.

“Are we going to this shindig or not? I mean I'm all for being fashionably late-” I began, trying to cut through the uncomfortable tension.

“Stark's right...We need to get going” Argent cut in.

I forced myself not to narrow my eyes at him.

I didn't trust him.

His family were the first Werewolf Hunters.
Their traditions had paved the way for racist genocidal maniacs like Monroe.

Maybe that was a little unfair. But really they should have expected something like that to happen when they created a subculture little better than the Red Room based off the 'code’, We Hunt Those Who Hunt Us.

Then again, calculating the hundreds of different future possibilities based off of past and current actions was just something my mind did instinctively.

“If you're not comfortable with portalling-” Scott began.

“What, we'll fly to wherever it is the Conference Hall is? If that were really an option we would have done that instead of coming here” I cut him off, raising an eyebrow at him challengingly.

Scott breathed out an exasperated huff, but he didn't deny my claim.

“Besides I was just trying to work out the logistics of how the glowy circle appeared without a reactor” I smoothly lied.

Scott still looked fairly dubious, but gave me a reluctant nod none-the-less.

“Then let's go” I said stepping towards the por-fiery gateway.

With every step it felt like a noose was tightening more and more around my neck, cutting off my airway.

I barely resisted the full-body tremble fighting to extend from my hands.

I can do this.

I can do this.

I'll never admit that Scott's sudden firm grip on my shoulder grounded me as I forced myself to step through the ring of flames.

(Wanda's POV)

I didn't know what I was expecting.

But this wasn't it.

From the moment I had been arrested until now I had been straightjacketed.

That in a way I had expected.

I had expected to lose all bodily autonomy.

That I would be forced to rely on others acting as my hands.

That I would be completely helpless again.

And it was suffocating.

Having my arms bound caused me to endlessly flashback to when Pietro and I had been trapped underneath the rubble of our home as we waited to die.
It made me want to scream.

Maybe I did.

What I didn't expect was for Secretary Ross to have one of his agents collar me with a device that somehow prevented me from accessing my powers.

Like a dog with a shock collar.

Like I was some kind of animal.

For the first time since I had them, my powers were lost to me.

And that feeling only made me further lose myself in the endless loop of terrors in my mind.

“Maximoff” the guard called out, sounding none to pleased to be talking to me.

I opened my eyes to the reality of the world around me.

The dismal gray surrounding me remained.

“Your lawyer's here” he explained impassionately, scowling slightly, as if he didn't believe I deserved one.

He probably didn't.

As I was escorted into the visitor's room I silently wondered who had been ballsy enough to take my case.

When the door buzzed open I caught sight of the man who would have my fate resting in his grasp.

Light brown hair.

Completely at ease, and looking remarkably comfortable in his expensive and impeccably pressed suit.

The guards sat me in the chair, taking up positions behind me in case I made a move to either hurt myself or the civilian visitor.

There was a sharp smugness in the man's eyes.

Arrogance and amusement.

Confidence.

The man leaned forward in his seat, folding his hands in front of him, his mouth quirking up in a charming smile that made my spine tingle uncomfortably.

“Hello Ms. Maximoff. My name is Peter Hale”

Chapter End Notes

The start of Wanda's redemption? (Hopefully)
What's Peter up to now?

I'm not sure when I'll be posting again next but it won't be too long. I promise!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!!!
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Hi all!

Sorry it's been a while! With everything with my thesis plus work etc it's been hard to devote time to my stories.

But as promised I have chapter 20 out this week!

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Wanda’s POV)

"Hello Ms. Maximoff. My name is Peter Hale" the man dralled, appearing thoroughly amused by my skepticism and curiosity.

"Hale...Like Derek Hale?" I inquired, very near raising an eyebrow at the coincidence of it.

Hale wasn’t that common of a last name was it?

“We're related” Mr. Hale expressed minimally, the amusement in his eyes letting me know that he and Derek were likely more than the distant cousins he was implying.

“And you're defending me?” I questioned him skeptically.

Had Derek contacted him, asking him for some kind of favor?

As far as I knew Stark had yet to find anybody to take my case.

And that in itself was still a kick to the face.

The very person I had wanted to destroy had given me a new home, and was now (still) helping to defend me.

“I felt it would be a good kickoff to my return to the world of sharks and politics” Mr. Hale replied casually, leaning back in his chair.

His phrasing grated on my nerves.

“You'll lose” I stated blandly, unimpressed with his reasoning.

If he wanted some kind of glorious comeback case I didn't understand why he would choose to help me of all people. Unless he himself was getting something out of it.

“Oh nothing is as simple as winning and losing...Though I will say I'm not particularly fond of losing” Mr. Hale emphasized coolly, a sharp gleam appearing in his eyes though his expression remained relaxed.
I can’t really say whether or not that was a comfort.

Everything about him made me feel like he was a predator, and I was just the tiny rabbit he had chosen to toy around with until he came across some bigger game.

“Your case is definitely going to be tricky though” he stated, looking no less unruffled.

I scoffed at his words.

“More like a lost cause” I thought bitterly.

“You’ll have to understand Ms. Maximoff. Most cases are never even brought to trial. Ninety percent of all cases usually end in some kind of a plea bargain. However, since you’ll be what we affectionately call a ‘celebrated’ case, you’ll be subjected to the full criminal justice process straight down to your sentencing” he stated, leaning forward in his seat again, his expression and tone more serious and business-like now.

“With all the charges pinned against you, a plea deal is almost guaranteed to fail, lest you wish to be put on death’s row, since they most likely will not be willing to negotiate more on our terms” he explained neutrally.

“And if they don’t?” I inquired tightly, curiously.

“Taking your case to trial means that we have a chance to reduce the charges pinned against you” he replied simply, giving me a consideratory gaze.

“To what? Eighty years in a maximum security prison?” I scoffed bitingly.

Mr. Hale just gave me an unimpressed eyebrow (must be a hereditary trait), and leaned back in his seat once again.

“The criminal justice system ultimately boils down to two things: Intent. And evidence” he replied, still serious, but appearing more relaxed than he had a moment ago.

“The prosecution has to prove beyond reasonable doubt that you willingly, knowingly, of sound mind committed these crimes” he listed off, “My job is to place doubt. Poke holes in their allegations, and counter their claims”

“And how exactly do you plan on doing that?” I asked, extremely skeptical.

As far as I could see the ‘allegations’ against me were pretty cut and dry, with evidence upon evidence piled up against me.

“These. You Ms. Maximoff are a product of your environment. A traumatized young woman, from of a war-torn country. You lost your parents when you were ten to a fake Stark Industries shell that you had thought was real. You grew up seeing and hearing constant slander against the Avengers who for all intents and purposes might have well have been person no grata in Sokovia...And that was before Ultron” Mr. Hale started off with a flourish, “The riots you joined for patriotic intentions were, unknowingly to you, orchestrated by Hydra in order to cover up their experimentations. And the false SHIELD scientists played on your desire for peace and hatred of the Avengers in order to entice you into signing up for their human experimentation trials”

Playing the sympathy card.

Yeah. That’ll go over well (*sarcasm*cough*sarcasm*).
“And almost right after my brother and I survived they were outed as Hydra and yet we still stayed. How do you plan on countering that?” I challenged, narrowing my eyeing at him

“That your allegiance wasn't with them. That they were just a means to an end. If you wanted to get justice against the Avengers sticking with Hydra was your best bet. Not to mention right after the Avengers overtook the Base in Sokovia you dropped them old hat, and continued about your normal lives until Ultron contacted you” he countered swiftly, entirely unphased.

“I still did whatever Hydra asked me to do” I reminded him sharply.

“True. But that mainly accumulates to unorthodox training methods” he countered in kind, sounding amused by our banter.

“You mean torture” I corrected blandly, unhappy with how he was downplaying my hand in driving those poor men insane.

“I don't think there is a correct way to teach the limits and can do's of mental manipulation” he casually brushed off with a sharp smirk.

So that was how he was going to try spinning it.

“Accidents can happen when you're first learning after all” he replied simply, sounding just as callous as he did calm.

He could definitely spin stories...The question is whether or not that's actually a good thing?...Or rather a good thing for whom?

“Not to mention your mental state just coming out of your exposure to the so called Scepter was questionable at best” Mr. Hale stated matter-of-factly, my attention immediately snapping back to him.

“And just how do you know any of this?” I demanded sharply, my eyes narrowing at him mistrustfully once again.

“Nous protégeons ceux qui ne peuvent pas se protéger eux-mêmes” he stated with a flourish, giving me an amused smirk.

“So he is a member of the Guard” I realized stunned.

“Recovered videographic evidence mainly. However since I am not in fact a shrink, an actual psychologist would definitely be beneficial in assessing your past and current mental states” he casually continued, as if he hadn’t just dropped a metaphorical bomb on me.

Though his word choice definitely caught my attention.

But not in a good way.

At least not what he was implying.

“I'm not crazy” I declared sharply, insulted that he would even insinuated as much.

“Darling” Mr. Hale dralled, “We're all crazy here. It's not a competition”

“I'm not taking an insanity plea” I grit out, annoyed by his flippancy.

“Whoever said anything about a plea of insanity?” he inquired, sounding thoroughly entertained,
“I’m talking about mitigating circumstances”

He folded his hands in front of him on the table, and rest his chin atop them.

“And I know just the psychologist to call” he declared.

(Danny’s POV)

“The only good thing is that the mutant community hasn’t taken any backlash so far with Maximoff being arrested” I stated, taking note of a near imperceptible twitch from Lehnsherr at the name.

“So what do you suggest that we do?” Professor asked, wheeling himself around his desk.

“Preferably to stay out of sight. If you're seen helping us Monroe and her new friends will start openly targeting you as well” I advised, hoping to still warn them off helping us, though I knew it was a lost cause.

The Professor's face contorted in a slight frown, bringing his hands up atop his desk and folding them together consideringly.

“The X-Men were created to combat prejudice such as this” Professor reminded me calmly, “Can you honestly picture us just sitting by and watching the devastation unfold around us from our television screen?”

No.

No I couldn’t.

The Professor had already sent a telepathic message to all the retired X-Men, calling them back to the Mansion.

And any hope I had of Bobby staying out of the line of fire was immediately dashed when he, Kitty, and Jubilee roped Colossus into training them (along with Rogue and John) rather than attend the meeting.

I had no doubt the five of them had it in their minds that they would be the newest generation of X-Men defending the world from it’s latest genocidal maniac.

But the thought of Bobby being subjected to the constant danger and paranoia that was my life caused thorns of regret to wrap around my heart.

I should've known better than to try dating someone outside the Supernatural sphere.

But since when has anyone ever held power over the heart?

(Aphrodite notwithstanding).

“We are joining this stand against Monroe” Lehnsherr declared, his voice unwavering, unmoving, “With or without you”

His eyes glinting like polished steel. And just as cold.

“The world does not need another Hitler, Trask, or Hydra” Lehnsherr near growled, raw pain and fury sparking off of the steel, igniting a flame within his eyes, though his face remained just as stoic, and his posture just as rigid.
While the Brotherhood has been officially inactive for decades I had no doubt that he would more than willingly start it back up again in order to move in and just eliminate every member of the Monroe Republic in one fell swoop.

After all the blood, sweat, and tears he and Xavier have shed from fighting both each other's influence as much as the prejudice against them I couldn't blame him for wanting to maintain the peace they had struggled to achieve no matter the cost.

“Fine” I caved, letting out an exasperated sigh, “But if this is going to work we're going to have to play this carefully”

They can help, but for right now they should probably stick to cloak and dagger tasks, support on the sides through advocacy.

“Agreed” Professor declared, more than likely having read my mind, “Though I must ask that if we are going to be working more closely together that we learn more about your kind and Monroe's system as a whole”

I gave him a reluctant nod.

I knew this was coming eventually.

“Danger Room it is” I near grumbled in dissatisfaction.

(Third POV)

With a satisfied sigh Theo plopped himself down into the lounge chair, making a show of kicking his feet up onto the ottoman, and folding his hands behind his head.

“Well don't you look proud of yourself” Stiles noted dryly, glaring down at Theo.

“No need to thank me” Theo replied smugly.

“Don't worry. I won't” Stiles retorted blandly.

“Come on. The Witch saw reason. The Compound is still intact. Nobody was injured. Even you have to give me a pat on the back for job well done” Theo remarked pridefully.

“So humble” Lydia noted sarcastically.

“I try” Theo retorted back, shifting his gaze then to acknowledge the mistrustful glares he was receiving from the Avengers who had remained in the Lounge after Maximoff's arrest.

“Why so serious?” Theo inquired mockingly.

“You really expect us to trust you after everything you revealed?” Steve retorted, his patented disapproval glare dialed up to eleven.

“You let the Witch on the Team. I figured I'd be right up your alley” Theo countered snidely.

“I get that you were a kid who made bad choices, and that you've already made up for your mistakes. But that doesn't mean you've proven yourself to us. Helping Wanda not withstanding” Steve declared pointedly.

He felt for the kid, he truly did.
He had been nine years old. *Nine.*

He can understand wanting to make bullies stop.

He had trusted Erskine to help him be able to fight for his country.

Unlike him, Wanda and Theo had festered in their hatred of their apparent weakness and trusted the wrong scientists in order to get the power they needed to face their ‘bullies’.

And both of them regret their actions later on.

He had failed Wanda spectacularly.

He just hoped that Theo was right that eventually the world would see that they were wrong about her.

But even so, he couldn't just trust him.

Not yet anyway.

Though that might have more to do with their clashing personalities than anything else.

“Oh please. Get off your high horse Rogers. It's not like you're any different from me” Theo scoffed, rolling his eyes at the older man.

Steve bristled at Theo's accusation.

Vaguely reminding Theo of cat.

“Sure Steve's been the poster-boy for fuckups lately, but he's not what I would call a recovering psychopath” Clint noted, narrowing his eyes at the younger male.

“Psychopathy isn't curable through any current known means’” Lydia corrected.

While she may have agreed with the diagnosis at one point, the fact that Theo was able to use the pain siphon was continued proof that he did in-fact possess empathy.

“He volunteered to be a scientist's guinea pig for the sake of attaining power” Theo noted flippantly, mockingly, “Hide behind your excuse that you're standing up for the little guy all you want. All you really are is a suped up guy with a napoleon complex”

Steve's eyes darkened furiously at Theo's words, his arms tightening as they laid folded across his chest.

“And now you're officially not helping” Stiles cut in, clapping his hands together, hoping Theo got the hint and shut up.

No dice.

“Am I wrong?” Theo challenged with a smirk, enjoying the conflict and reactions.

“You're not too far off base” Bucky allowed, cutting in before a fight broke out.

“Buck?” Steve questioned, disbelief and hurt noticeably present in his voice.

“Your scrappy five foot four asthmatic self picked a fight with anything that breathed. You were
the definition of a napoleon complex” Bucky explained with a hint wry humor, smirking slightly so that Steve knew he wasn't outright insulting him.

Steve relaxed slightly, though he was definitely still incensed by Theo's accusation.

“The difference now is that you're not five-four and a hundred pounds soaking wet. You have been pushing around those who don't agree with you and just doing as you please with no regard to anything else” Bucky declared a little more seriously, “Need I remind you of Bucharest?”

Steve winced at that.

Bucky definitely wasn’t wrong. He saw that now.

Clint scoffed at Roger’s reaction to the impressive tongue-lashing.

Leave it to Barnes to get Rogers to see any kind of reason.

“I think I should just start charging people by the minute for my services. I think I'll call it Theo's Kick-in-the-Ass therapy” Theo stated semi-sarcastically.

“Only if it means that I can literally kick you in the ass. Cause if that's the case I'll happily pay you by the minute to beat on you. It'll be good catharsis” Stiles retorted dryly.

“From what it sounds like Steve would be more than happy to join in” Natasha added in thoughtfully as she sauntered back into the room.

“Any news?” Clint immediately asked, wanting to know how Wanda was handling being held prisoner.

“No incidents so far” she replied simply, understanding what he meant, “As far as I can tell they’re playing things by the books”

“All the guards check out?” Steve asked expressionlessly.

“So far. I’ve already gone through their files and scanned their faces through facial recognition. So far everyone matches up” she replied.

“Making sure the same mistake doesn’t happen twice” Bucky noted thoughtfully, reminded of how Zemo had gotten past the JCTC.

“Rhodes and Vision are on their way to the prison to act as sentries...Or deterrents in case Wanda somehow gets the collar off and decides she’s had enough” Sam reported, walking through the doorway and over to the group, having returned from seeing Rhodes off.

Steve grit his teeth at the mention of the power-dampening collar.

He had an idea of what to expect due to how Tony was unjustly treated during his trial (And he had not been happy about what he had found researching more into that), but he hadn’t expected that they’d have something like the collar to use against Wanda.

Hell none of them had even known something like that had even existed!

As far as he knew Nat was still looking into where it had originated from.

“Well there is one good thing” Natasha stated casually, cutting up the tense atmosphere.
“And that’d be?” Clint inquired curiously.

If Nat thought something was in their favor he wanted to know what it was.

“Wanda’s got a lawyer” she replied blandly, giving Stilinski and Martin an expectant look.

“Who?” Sam asked curiously, wondering who the hell Stark managed to convince to take Wanda’s case.

“His name’s Peter Hale” Natasha replied, not taking her eyes off the two members of the Guard.

“...”

“You’ve got to be kidding me” Stiles commented dryly.

When Natasha didn’t refute the claim (only raising an eyebrow at him), Stiles let out an annoyed growl, yanking his phone from his back pocket.

“What the hell does he think he's doing?” Stiles muttered furiously to himself as he put his phone up to his ear.

“Saving Maximoff’s ass. Something you goody-two-shoes can’t seem to accomplish” Theo commented coolly.

“Meaning he’s up to his usual bag of tricks” Lydia corrected exasperatedly.

“To survive a den of snakes you need a snake” Theo remarked, giving her a shrug.

This was getting more amusing by the minute.

(Danny’s POV)

“I'm telling you the suit's not necessary” I grumbled, pulling at the collar with my fingers.

Professor had insisted that if I was going into the Danger Room that I should wear one of the spare unmarked X-Men uniforms.

“Perhaps. But I would feel better knowing that you had on some measure of protection” he stated, his words the perfect mix of sincere and firm that made you feel guilty if you went against his suggestion.

“Let's just get this over with” I muttered unhappily, walking up to the giant sliding doors.

“If you are so uncomfortable with combat there are other ways to demonstrate your abilities” Professor reminded me yet again, giving me another out if I wished to take it.

He wasn't wrong.

I disliked conflict. Danger. Being in the direct line of fire.

But I couldn't back out now.

The X-Men were everything I wasn't.

I spent most of my life burying my head in the sand.
Helping without getting directly involved.

That all changed after Monroe.

Sure for the most part I still wasn't a direct combatant, but I wasn't pretending to be ignorant anymore either.

But now it was my time to truly take a stand.

“I'm ready” I declared firmly, stepping forward so that the door's sensors registered my presence, my stride confident and assured as I entered the Room.

(Tony’s POV)

“So where are we?” I asked, still admiring the marbleized grecian architecture as we traversed the open air pavilion.

The white pillars sparkling in the sunlight.

We were in some kind of temple. That much I could make out.

But as far as I knew there were no grecian temples in the world this nice.

Refurbished or otherwise.

“Which means it's likely newer built...And not anywhere tourists or locals can get to it” I thoughtfully deduced.

“Mount Lykaion” Scott replied, sounding unusually tense, not even facing me as he answered my question.

That was interesting.

If anyone here should be uncomfortable it should be me, not him.

“And that would be...?” I asked, hoping I could prompt more of an answer out of well, anybody.

“Arcadia, Greece” Argent replied, turning to me briefly before facing ahead again.

“Anything particularly special about this place besides apparently good housekeepers?” I questioned further, digging for more information.

“It is neutral ground. Something of which is sorely needed for a meeting of so many egos” the Ancient One declared simply, though how she managed not to sound patronizing was beyond me.

“Brazen as always” a heavy accented Romanian voice declared, sounding amused.

My eyes snapped forward, taking in the... eclectic group of individuals seated at an artfully crafted white marble table supported by brass legs that had been shaped to mimic lightning bolts.

“I prefer honest” the Ancient One corrected, taking a seat next to a...man with pointed ears, white hair (longer than freakin Rapunzel) in a ponytail, and blood red eyes that almost seemed to glow, though they were not nearly as bright nor as vivid as Scott's alpha eyes.

“You just better not be wasting my time. I have far more important matters to attend to then the
latest scandal of you surface dwellers” another declared haughtily, his long black hair slicked back, revealing his own set of pointed ears.

But what really caught my attention was his choice of attire.

They say that clothes make the man, and it really made me wonder where this futuristic Little Mermaid wannabe came from.

His cropped top looked to be of black shells, extending down his arms like armor.

But what really caught my attention was the golden trident in his hand, and the tiny wings on his ankles.

“If that truly was the case you would not have bothered coming at all” the only other woman at the table casually rebuked.

She looked to be of Japanese descent, her attires distinctly reminding me of the Shinto priestesses.

“They're not waste any more of our time. I'm assuming the cause behind the disturbance is the newly turned before us?” the...creature...man assumed, staring pointedly at me with his glowing yellow eyes, causing my hacks to rise at his accusation.

Of everyone he (it?) was the most...distinctive (read: fugly).

Purple skin, a massive clump of black feathers adorning his back, a helmet doing an unusually good job of masking everything but his creepy ass eyes, and to top the whole look off he was rocking, or trying to at least, a freaking loin cloth.

I clenched my teeth in an attempt to hide my annoyance and nerves as each of the occupants scanned my person with varying degrees of interest (or lack thereof) and skepticism.

“You mean to tell me that I came all the way from my kingdom to discuss a mere lung-breather?” Little Mermaid demanded, sounding outraged.

“Patience is a virtue Namor. What we are here to discuss is far more than just a new beta's life” the Ancient One chastised lightly.

“Then by all means, enlighten me” Namor challenged, leaning back in his ornate brass chair.

Just then I felt a small tug on my arm.

I looked over to see Scott motion his head to the left, silently instructing me to follow him and Argent over to the two remaining empty seats at the table.

Even before the two of them sat down I had already gathered that I would be left standing behind Scott's chair like a guard.

“The course of our universe has shifted slightly. Something of which I'm sure some of you here have already felt” the Ancient One began, eyeing the Priestess and purple ogre, both of whom nodded at her in confirmation.

“I'm assuming it's not a good shift” Argent dralled, looking grim.

“I am not certain yet. There are an infinite number of possibilities, determining a particular course gets more difficult when the individual in question has a particularly flexible personality accompanied by high intelligence and imagination” the Ancient One admitted.
Somehow I got the feeling I was both being complimented and insulted at the same time.

Well at least her...dislike of me makes more sense now.

I'm guessing she doesn't like uncertainties very much.

“So this is a waste of time” Namor emphasized pointedly.

“Not at all” the Ancient One lightly rebuked, “The nature of the shift involves the fate of all supernaturals”

The tension in the room became stifling.

Any lightness in the conversation was replaced with dark anger and unease.

“So I was correct” the Romanian breathed, giving a bloodthirsty smirk that showed off a pair of (I kid you not) fangs, “Our time to take back control of the world has come”

“Humanicide is not the answer” Scott declared sharply, his eyes boring into Dracula's with hardened ferocity.

“You are acting as if Monroe has not already begun her final moves to wipe out those she does not see as human” Dracula countered smugly, unconcerned with Scott’s silent threatening.

“If that is the case then measures need to be taken now” Namor declared coldly, his eyes glinting sharp as steel.

I immediately tensed, not liking what the Fish was implying.

“Killing everyone is never the answer” Scott cut in, turning his sharp gaze to Namor.

“If death is not acceptable then what is it that you suggest that we do?” the purple ogre questioned, not sounding like he particularly cared about the death of all humanity, but he did seem rather curious if Scott actually had an alternative in mind.

“......We start revealing our existence in factions” Scott declared reluctantly, not sounding like he very much agreed with what he was suggesting.

And I could understand why.

“Yes because revealing the existence of monsters and fairytale to a world that fears us and are likely nuke us is a brilliant idea” Namor scoffed bitingly.

“Well he isn't wrong” I admitted to myself bitterly.

With all the damage in the last several years pinned on enhanced, and extremist groups like the Watchdogs targeting anyone not a baseline human he was right to be worried.

The world would not likely handle knowing about Supernaturals very well.

“What other options do we truly have anymore?” Argent questioned, playing devil’s advocate.

“To end them before they try to end us” Namor declared unrepentantly.

And that I would not stand behind.
Clenching my teeth I glared furiously at Namor. If they were going to continue threatening the people of the world then I wasn't going to hesitate to end them.

“We are not alone. We have allies” Scott cut in sharply, sounding frustrated.

“Whom are these allies that you speak of?” the Priestess asked curiously, sounding hopeful.

“The X-Men, Blackagar Boltagon” Scott quickly named off.

Huh. That was interesting.

Xavier I could understand, but I was curious how they knew Boltagon.

“Wakanda” Argent continued, following Scott's lead.

“I'd like to know the story behind that one” Namor questioned, sounding as intrigued as I felt.

Sure T'Challa had seemed unusually friendly and grateful to Scott for whatever reason back at the JCTC, but for Argent to declare them as allies?

“So the mutant community, the Inhumans, the Shadow Guard, and the most technologically advanced country in the world” the Priestess reiterated, sounding slightly more assured with Scott's reasoning.

“And the the Avengers” I declared, cutting into the conversation, making everyone's heads turn to me. Frankly I didn’t care whether or not I was supposed to remain quiet. Nobody had said I that needed to. And even if they had I wouldn’t have listened anyway.

“Are you sure?” Scott asked, his eyes wide with surprise.

I don't know if I should be relieved that he hadn't just expected us to aid them because I was apparently his beta, or offended that he actually thought we wouldn't.

“If you think any of us are just going to let Monroe, the Watchdogs, and the Humans First Movement do as they please you've got another thing coming. Besides, we're involved in this already if you haven't already noticed” I retorted, raising an eyebrow at him.

“Fair enough” Scott conceded, the corner of his mouth quirking up in a small smile (the first one since we arrived here).

“I believe now I see as to why your Turning has affected our universe’s course” Dracula wondered aloud, “How curious” I didn’t like how he was staring at me. Like I was some prized piece of meat. From the gleam in his eyes I could tell that he was plotting something. And that something sure as hell would not likely be a good thing.

“Even still, we do not have a plan” the Priestess reminded them, “You suggested revealing
ourselves in stages. Whom would go first?"

“We would” the Ancient One declared, cutting off Dracula before he even could open his scheming fangs.

“You sure about this?” Scott questioned warily.

“The public has always been fascinated by the wonders of magic. Compared to other Supernaturals I'd say that we'd be the most logical decision” she reasoned.

...Well...She wasn't wrong.

As much as it grated on me to even admit that in my head (And it did deeply kill a part of my soul).

“Agreeable” the purple ogre stated, “Though how you would go about announcing such a thing I am curious”

“The world is curious about how Stilinski stopped Ms. Maximoff's abilities are they not?” the Ancient One questioned, shifting her gaze to Scott.

“...They are” Scott acknowledged reluctantly, sounding like he knew where she was going with her idea, and unsure if he liked it not.

“Then I suggest an interview with him introducing myself and Dr. Strange to the world” she suggested, though it really didn't sound like a suggestion.

“Strange?” I inquired, raising an eyebrow at her curiously.

“He was an acclaimed neurosurgeon was he not?” she countered back smoothly.

“Touche” I conceded.

On second thought, Strange's inclusion might not be so bad of an idea.

Strange was a well known face across the globe. A man of accolades and science.

I could almost see the headlines now: From Scalpel to Wand. Surgeon to Sorcerer. Dr. Strange’s Mystifying Return!

“I would have to ask Stiles first” Scott reminded her tightly.

“You are his Alpha are you not? Order him” Dracula scoffed flippantly, flicking his hand in Scott’s direction.

I tensed at his words.

“That's not how I do things” Scott declared icily, glaring at Dracula with an angry annoyance I've never seen in him, causing my tension to lessen slightly out of relief.

“Yes yes we are all aware of your weakness” Namor declared in disgust.

“Commanding without tyranny is not a weakness” the Priestess declared sharply, her voice hardening for the first time in the discussion.

“To each ruler their own” Namor shrugged back unphased.
“So we are all in agreement then?” the Ancient One questioned, looking to each of them for clarification.

Each of them nodded.

“And I trust that both you and Vlad will keep to yourselves and not make any rash moves?” she questioned (read: demanded), eyeing Namor and Dracula pointedly.

“For now” Vlad agreed, leaning back in his chair and steepling his fingers, looking very much like her words had no deterrent on his plotting, a fact he did not even bother trying to hide.

“Staying away from the surface will be of no particular hardship” Namor scowled.

“Very good. Then until we are ready to move forward consider the meeting adorned” the Ancient One declared simply.

_Danny’s POV_

Walking into the domed room I noticed out of the corner of my eye that the Professor and Lehnsherr had followed me inside as well.

“What happened to the simulation?” John demanded irately, picking his disheveled self off the ground, “We were kicking ass!”

“I think you mean our ass was getting kicked” Kitty noted dryly, her hand raised to brush some non-existent dirt off herself before she thought better of it.

“Danny?” Bobby inquired curiously, noticing my presence, “What're you doing here?”

While I couldn't say the X-Men uniforms suited me, it damn well suited him.

Hugging his lean muscular frame and sculpting his butt deliciously.

“More importantly what the hell are you wearing?” John noted, giving me a critical once over, no doubt curious and (likely) slightly offended that a non-mutant was wearing an X-Men uniform, even if it was unlabeled.

“If the X-Men are going to be involved then you have to know exactly what you're up against” I explained in a serious tone, “I made up a simulation based on the confrontations and missions the Shadow Guard have had against the Monroe Republic”

Honestly I felt like an asshole for what I was about to do.

But if they were going to be involved they needed to know.

And sugarcoating things would do no-one any favors.

“And you're here becaauussee?” John inquired skeptically, raising a judgemental eyebrow in my direction.

I fought the urge to roll my eyes at him and his superiority complex.

“Quit being a jerk” Rogue declared with a small scowl, giving John a light punch to the arm.
“What?” John demanded, having the nerve to be offended, “Can he even fight?”

“You do remember that even if I wasn't a Supernatural that I’m still a member of an elite FBI taskforce that not only deals with genocidal maniacs, but arresting powered individuals right?” I gibed, raising my eyebrow at him mockingly.

John just grit his teeth at being outwitted, flicking his lighter in annoyance.

Kitty snickered at John's expense with Bobby smiling at me with something akin to pride sparkling in his eyes.

“But you are a Supernatural” Jubilee stated, looking me firmly in the eye with a boundless curiosity, “The real question is what kind of Supernatural”

“It'll be easier to explain after the demonstration” I replied cryptically.

It wasn't a lie.

I didn't have one set of easily definable skills like fire manipulation. In my experience it's a bit easier to explain after people see what I'm talking about.

John just narrowed his eyes at me.

He had always tolerated me, told me that I was “pretty cool” for a human.

But now I supposedly had powers and wasn't technically human.

Mistrustful didn't even begin to cover how he felt about me now.

“And the setting of the simulation?” Colossus asked, diverting the conversation to a less volatile topic.

I turned my attention to him, hoping my expression wasn't as grim and guilty as I felt.

“...A covert rescue op” I replied minimally, “We scope out the building, take out security, and rescue the captees. Arrest as many of the enemy as possible. We don't kill if we can help it”

Everyone shook their heads in understanding.

They really didn't.

I turned to face Lehnsherr.

“Maybe you shouldn't be here” I told him imploringly, hoping, praying, that my eyes gave away as to why.

Lehnsherr's stoic expression grew sharp.

“I stay” he declared firmly, immovably.

I sucked in a shaky breath.

“Then let's begin” I declared.

Immediately the room pixelated as the simulation was built around us.

Suddenly I found myself surrounded by sidewalks, storefronts, and cars. Realistic people walking
by as if they were going about their everyday lives.

The sounds of the car engines as they drove down the street. The smell of bread from the bakery, and authentic Mexican from the restaurant further down. The solidness of the concrete beneath my feet.

It was beyond incredible how realistic the simulation was.

Which only made me feel worse about what was going to happen.

"Storefronts?" Kitty inquired, sounding confused, "I was expecting something more...hidden. Evil lair-like"

"Most of the places we raid are regular stores, homes, and warehouses. They maintain a better cover than a giant base in the middle of nowhere, though those do exist" I explained.

I had picked this setting intentionally for that reason, to clear up that misconception.

"Seeing as you're the one with the most experience, you're in charge” Colossus delegated, turning the leadership over to me.

“Great” I thought bitterly.

“Our target is the electrical supply store. Surround the building. Search for anything suspicious. Scope for any security cameras or devices and note anyone coming and going from the facility. Stay out of sight” I ordered, “Kitty and Jubilee will take the back with me. John and Rogue the alley. Colossus and Bobby the front entrance and parking lot”

“Move out”

(Ancient One's POV)

Stepping back onto the floorboard of the New York Sanctum I let some of the unease I had been harboring roll away.

The Meeting had gone as I had hoped.

Preparations were beginning for the inevitable.

None of the Council would yet make their own plans of attack just yet.

Vlad and Namor will want to see where Scott and I's plan leads before they take any action of their own.

Not to say Vlad wasn’t already plotting his next moves. He certainly was. But even he is not foolish enough to instigate war (right now).

Oberon and Hoshi are removed enough that they were more likely to gather their kind and retreat back into their own dimension and let humanity destroy itself should the worst occur.

Most importantly Dr. Stark now sees the true reality of the state of the world.

Glancing over to the man I could see that he was discussing plans with Scott and Argent before they parted ways.
Even though his future was still uncertain, I was sure that our paths would cross again soon enough.

At the moment I really needed to discuss matters with Strange.

But before I went on my way...

“Dr. Stark” I stated, my voice grabbing his attention.

He turned to me curiously, in an expression not unlike the many I receive from Strange.

“Just remember one thing Dr. Stark” I advised him sagely, his expressive eyes taking in my every detail.

“Keep your mind open to the possibilities”

(Danny's POV)

“Well?” I asked Kitty quietly as she made her way back to where Jubilee and I remained hidden behind the trees in the back of the store.

“It was like a murder scene in there. Chains. Blood. It was like something out of a serial killer movie” she relayed looking very disturbed but was managing to hold herself together well enough.

I had her phase into some of the delivery vans in order to see if there was anything suspicious.

I knew there would be, but still...

“Pyro?” I whispered through the comm.

“...”

“Pyro?” I whispered again, this time more firmly, demanding an answer.

“...We inspected the dumpster after one of the sketchy employees threw out a huge bag” Rogue replied, sounding nauseous.

“And?” I prompted, knowing full well what was in that dumpster.

“Body parts...Diced body parts” John replied, gagging slightly.

I definitely didn't envy how realistic that smell probably was.

I ignored the gags coming from Kitty and Jubilee.

“Iceman?” I inquired, pushing forward with the mission.

“A sketchy group of guys in camo. Buying a bunch of electrical cords and batteries. Talking about their next hunting trip” he relayed.

“You used your powers to create an ice mirror and read their lips as you hid behind a car didn't you?” I asked, smirking a bit.

“...Colossus used his metal arm” Bobby muttered embarrassed.

“Next time one of you be lookout in case other customers walk by you” I advised, “The point is not
“Got it” Colossus replied affirmatively.

“Okay. So now comes the infiltration” I began through the comm, “Colossus and Iceman immobilize the Hunters then stealthily make your way inside and into the back. Take out any cameras and enemy on your way. Pyro and Rogue take out the camera and carefully go through the side door. Get to the back”

“Copy that” the group sounded.

“And us?” Kitty asked, looking ready and eager.

“Jubilee, use your powers to short-circuit the cameras” I commanded.

Nodding affirmative she lifted up her hands, multi-colored sparks dancing from her fingertips like fireworks.

With a surprisingly accurate toss she send a blast into the camera above the delivery deck.

With a fizzle the red blinking light faded out.

“Kitty phase in and open up the bay doors” I ordered.

Nodding, Kitty raced forward, bolting straight through the giant garage door-looking back entrance.

Using my two fingers I signalled Jubilee to move forward.

Just as we reached the doors a loud clang of metal chains echoed as the doors raised open, Kitty standing on the other side.

Reaching out with my senses I felt three people making their way towards the bay.

“We need to hurry” I told them, stepping past Kitty, “I’m sensing three coming at us fast”

Fortunately neither of them questioned how I could sense the incoming enemy as they followed me to the back of the bay.

I flattened my self up against the wall next to the backdoor, waiting for it to open, Jubilee to my right, and Kitty on the other side of the door.

As soon as the door opened I focused my energy into my hand, surrounding it with an orb of magenta, and blasted the energy at the surprised assailant, knocking him out from the force of the impact.

Immediately the second enemy loaded his shotgun, aiming it straight at me.

But before he could pull the trigger Jubilee released a shower of sparks, zapping him like an insect on the Fourth of July.

As the second assailant fell to the ground the final remaining enemy arched a machete at my neck.

I bent backwards to dodge the blow, readying myself to kick at his knees.

But before he could bring the machete back around a hand reaching through the door and grabbed
the man’s arm, yanking him harshly and causing him to smack his head hard against the metal frame and drop the blade.

Taking advantage of his momentary daze I gave him a swift uppercut to the chin, knocking him unconscious.

Not sensing anyone else I gestured forward, slowly making our way to where I knew the lower staircase was hidden.

“Pyro. Iceman. Status” I commanded, through the comm.

Sure I could sense them but lacking communication could be fatal.

“In the back room” John declared quietly, ensuring that his cover would not be blown.

“Making our way to the back now” Bobby relayed, whispering as well.

Making our way through the hall I paused when we reached the back room, spotting John and Rogue.

Not long after Bobby and Colossus made their entrance, though not nearly as quietly as I’d have liked.

“Quit trampling around like elephants! We’re supposed to be on a covert mission!” Kitty lightly chastised, whispering irately.

“Sorry” Bobby replied sheepishly, “Got a little overexcited. Adrenaline rush”

“Lucky you. We only ran into one person” John grumpily complained.

“The mission?” I reminded them in a light chastising tone as I moved forward to the shelf on the far wall covered in heavy appliances.

“Colossus. If you will” I requested, gesturing to the shelf.

“My pleasure” he replied, his body shifting into its metal form, the ceiling lights glinting off the metal coating.

Striding over to me Colossus wasted no time in shoving the shelf to the side, the metal structure scraping at the ground with an ear piercing screech.

Whelp. There goes our cover.

With the shelf no longer in the way the doorway to the basement was now visible.

“Colossus will go down first. Keep your form active. Kitty will go down after, then me, then Jubilee, then Pyro, and Rogue with Iceman guarding our backs” I ordered, gripping the door-handle.

It was time.

Opening the door Colossus made his way down the eerily dark stairway, barren of all light.

Slowing making our way down in formation I reached out my senses, knowing what I would find.

“Ambush” I declared right as a shower of bullets began raining down upon us from the still unseen
bottom of the staircase.

The shells bounced ineffectively against Colossus’s body, the only indication he was actually getting hit was the loud clanging of metal on metal and the small sparks from the friction of the bullets scraping against his metallic skin.

Focusing my energy into my right hand I created a magenta force-field in front of myself and the rest of the team.

“Jubilee light’m up” I ordered.

“No problem” she declared gleefully, multi-colored fireworks shooting out from her hands and lighting up the area momentarily with an array of blues, greens, and yellows.

Pained shouts echoed from below as well as the telltale sound of guns clattered to the floor.

Silence.

“From what I can sense they’re unconscious, but just to be sure I want you to phase down there and scope it out” I said, dropping the shield as I glanced over my shoulder at Kitty, “Turn on a light if you can”

She nodded once before literally running straight through me and down the stairs.

Shuddering at the oddness of her essence passing through mine I waited with baited breath for her signal.

Suddenly a blinding light flashed, causing me to shield my eyes at the jolt of brightness.

“Ahhhhh!!!!” Kitty screeched in terror.

“Kitty!” the group shouted in tandem, concerned for their friend.

Taking my arm away from my eyes, we moved together with the unspoken order to tend to our teammate (though I already knew what had caused such fear).

Colossus having been at the front of the line reached Kitty first, wrapping his arms around her shoulders as she remained sickeningly pale and hunched over, both her hands covering her mouth as her eyes screamed for everything to just be a nightmare.

If only it was.

Just as they everyone made their way over to Kitty, they each froze in disbelieving horror.

Strung up from the ceiling by electrical cords were corpses upon corpses of were-creatures.

Their skins gray. Black blood adorning them from head to toe with the stench of rotting flesh filling the air.

And if only that were the worst of it.

No.

Limbs of the corpses were missing. Some were no more than a head.

Instruments of torture laid upon metallic gurneys.

“I shouldn’t have eaten that burrito” Bobby gurgled, sounding like he was fighting back bile.

Suddenly, an emergency siren sounded, red lights flashing throughout the floor, and likely the rest of the building.

Spinning around I saw that one of the Hunters wasn’t as unconscious as we had thought.

Having managed to crawl over to the far wall he had tripped the building’s emergency alarm.

“Burn in hell you monsters” he cursed out at us with so much vitrole you would think we were the murderers.

Fed up, Bobby reached out, spraying the man with ice, freezing him solid.

Sprinklers descended from the ceiling, showering us in a foul-smelling liquid.

“Gasoline” John muttered in recognition as he took a whiff of his suit.

“Shit! They’re gonna send this place up in flames!” John realized in horror.

“Everybody out!” I ordered frantically.

I had no desire to find out just how realistic this simulation really was when it came to tactile sensations.

Just as we had all bounded up the stairs the gasoline sprinklers stopped, flamethrowers appearing out of hidden compartments in the wall.

“Rogue give me a hand!” John ordered, panic laced heavily in his voice, throwing both of his arms out, and bracing himself for the explosion of flames.

Removing her glove Rogue placed her bare hand on the back of John’s neck.

FWWOOOSSSHHH

Flames erupted around us, engulfing everything in scalding heat.

Everything but us.

“We can hold it back” John declared confidently as he stood, jaw clenched, near glaring at the flames as he commanded them to do his bidding.

“We got it” Rogue echoed, her left hand poised similarly to both of John’s, “Let’s move”

“You heard’em” I stated, “Forward”

As we exited the building through the bay doors I heard the distinct rumble of the building’s structural integrity coming undone.

Finally pausing a good hundred feet from the store I looked up grimly into the billowing flames.

“Mission failure” I declared, ending the simulation.

Watching the harrowing scene just fade away, the choking smoke along with it, was jarring.
“They aren’t ready” I thought, though that wasn’t necessarily a bad thing.

Hopefully this scared them off a bit.

Turning to exit the Danger Room an irate voice stopped me in my tracks.

“What the hell was that?!?” John demanded furiously, following right after me.

“Reality” I replied simply, coldly, remembering just how many we have failed to save.

“Don’t you think that may have been a little much for a first practice?” Professor inquired, not sounding overly judgemental, but not very approving either.

Lehnsherr on the other hand looked like he was just recovering from a severe flashback, his trademark stoic expression containing cracks, revealing fragments of his pain to the world.

“No” I declared firmly, “This was tame”

“Tame?! Tame?!! How the hell was mutilated bodies tame!” John roared, his body trembling from the trauma he had witnessed.

And he wasn’t the only one.

Kitty, Jubilee, and Rogue were clinging to each other, Bobby looked seconds away from shutting down, and while he looked calm and collected on the outside, Colossus’ eyes were filled with grief.

I wanted apologize.

Give them false assurances.

I wanted to squeeze Bobby tight and never let him go.

…….But I couldn’t.

“Because this is what Monroe and her cult of followers do!” I countered back harshly, tears welling in my eyes, “We are nothing but monsters to them! Animals! There are camps of Supernaturals being killed and tortured right now for the sole reason that they exist!”

Lehnsherr sucked in a shuddering breath, no doubt remembering his own horrifying experiences during the Holocaust.

“This isn’t a game!” I declared, my grief making my voice crack.

“If you’re going to help you have to be prepared to deal with horrifying shit worse than any nightmare your mind can conjure up...You have to be ready to deal with regular people taking ridiculously drastic measures to kill you, even at the expense of innocent people” I ranted, just shy of hysterics.

Closing my eyes I took a deep breath to calm myself, before I opened them once more.

“This isn’t about playing hero...This is about saving the world and everybody in it” I reminded them sternly.

“The question is can you stand up and do it?”
(Monroe's POV)

Everything was progressing as planned.

Albeit slower than I'd prefer, but unhindered none-the-less.

The first seeds of doubt have been planted in ground fertile from the Avengers' own past mistakes.

Step one: Show the world the truth behind their so called 'heroes’.

The public trusted the enhanced marauding around, calling themselves the defenders of the people.

Once that trust is broken it'll be even easier to begin openly targeting the Inhumans and the enhanced that were a threat to humanity.

Eliminating said threats will be Step two.

And once all the known non-humans were taken care of and no longer a threat, then I will initiate the final, hardest step.

Revealing the existence of the Supernatural.

The world will still be ready in arms from handling the enhanced and Inhumans.

Playing on that fear and hype we will hunt down every last supernatural and eliminate them like the animals they are.

“Soon” I muttered to myself, leaning back in my chair, the anticipation causing me to smile, “Very soon”


“You called me Ma'am?” Rollins inquired, hands behind his back as he addressed my inquiry.

“I did” I responded, folding my hands together atop my desk.

“I need you to contact Haigh. It's time I formally met our gracious ally”

Chapter End Notes

Damn this was a harsh chapter! Amoral/gray characters abound with harsh lessons thrown in!

I promise the next chapter will be lighter in the feels!
Chapter 21: Fireworks part 1

Chapter Notes

Hi all!

Sorry its been so long since my last update!!

I hope you all enjoy part 1 of this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Third POV)


Without bothering to lift his head off of his pillow Steve clicked the Off button on his alarm clock.

Suddenly the sound of fizzes and sparks cut through the silence.

“Bomb?!” Steve thought frantically.

Steve immediately shot up, body tense and alert, scanning behind him for the source of the sound.

To his surprise sparklers spelling out ‘Happy Birthday’ had somehow come out of a compartment of his alarm clock.

Then all of a sudden mini fireworks emerged from the back of the clock, bright bursts of red, white, and blue lighting up his face.

Then as suddenly as the display appeared it vanished back into the confines of the apparatus, as if the entire spectacle had never happened.

And while Steve’s brain was still blue-screening in touched amazement a ‘ding’ sounded, and two tickets popped out of the clock like toast in a toaster.

Steve grabbed ahold of the tickets, scanning them for clues as to just what they were.

“Dodgers tickets” Steve thought in awe.

“But where did all this come from?” Steve wondered, his brows scrunching in confusion.

“Friday?” Steve called out, hoping that the AI would be willing to answer his questions.

“Yes Captain Rogers?” she replied, sounding incredibly unenthusiastic.

“Who…did all this?” Steve asked, trying hard not to keep his voice from cracking.

He had a sinking feeling he knew exactly who had done this.

There was only one person with access to the Compound who had the technical capabilities to pull something like this off.
“...Boss made the adjustments to your alarm clock back at the start of May. Prior to discovering your betrayal” Friday relayed, not even bothering to hide her disdain.

Steve sucked in a shaky breath, rubbing the one side of his head harshly as he stared at the tickets he held near death-gripped in his hand.

Tony.

God just thinking about the genius brought down a raining cacophony of stabbing pain to his chest.

Even though they really hadn't been talking Tony had still prepared a birthday gift for him. (Tony had always found it endlessly amusing that he had been born on the Fourth of July).

He hadn't even given Tony a birthday present, and yet he still had one prepared for him.

But their relationship had always been one-sided like that...

Behind all the false masks Tony wore (much like his own armor) was the heart of the most selfless person Steve has ever known.

Tony had always been the only giving. Reaching out.

Even to the people who had hurt him.

And they'd (he'd) always taken advantage of that. Consciously and unconsciously.

Taken Tony for granted in the worst ways.

And even though Tony was still bending over backwards to protect all of them from Steve's own fuck ups, he could see it in Tony's eyes whenever he was forced to occupy the same space as him.

Tony was done.

With him.

And that hurt more than anything.

And he had no idea how to even start fixing things with him.

“Sometimes in order to rebuild you need to destroy the old foundation” Morrell's voice echoed, “Once all the rubble and mess from the demolition has been cleared away you will have room to rebuild again...This time on a stronger, sturdier foundation”

His and Tony's relationship had started out as crap.

Too many issues between the two of them that they had inadvertently taken out on each other.

Maybe fixing wasn't the answer….Maybe they just needed to start over...Like he and Bucky we're trying to do….

Determined resolve burned within Steve's eyes.

He would talk to Tony today.

(Third POV)
“And don't forget. This week you have a meeting with Rand Enterprises, and an appearance at MIT for the September Foundation” Pepper reminded, still not happy that Tony wasn't taking the time he needed to fully process everything that had happened to him in the last several days. But really what else was new?

“Pep you haven't been my PA for years. I'm fully aware of all my commitments for the week” Tony stated, straightening his tie as he made his way down the SI meeting hall, “You don't need to worry. I'm not going to have a feral episode”

“You can't know that for sure Tony” Pepper lightly chastised.

“I'm not just going to hide myself away like some diseased monster Pep. I've got things to do and places to be” Tony casually retorted.

“What if your claws come out or something?” Pepper questioned unhappily.

“I never liked being handed things anyway” Tony flippantly countered right back.

Pepper gave him an exasperated sigh.

“Everything will be fine” Tony assured her, stopping at the door he was meant to go through. She and him hadn't talked about them yet. Whether or not they were officially done their break.

But Pepper was like a breath of fresh air for him. His Zen. Wave music. Incense. Anchor or whatever Scott called it.


But she didn't need to know that.

Didn't need that pressure.

Especially when she was reluctant to officially put a label back on them just yet.

“Just don't cause another lawsuit” Pepper poorly teased, giving Tony a sad smile, kissing his cheek goodbye as she made her way further down the hall.

As soon as she was out of sight Tony made his way into the meeting room.

“Ms. van Dyne” Tony greeted as he entered the room.

Hope turned in her chair to address the man, “Dr. Stark”

“Let's get down to business then shall we?” Tony stated, plopping himself down in the seat across from Hope's, “We're both very busy people”

“And exactly what business is it that we will be discussing?” Hope inquired curiously.

Dr. Stark hadn't been very forthcoming with why he had wanted the meeting with her in the first place, but it had peaked her curiosity, and with Pym Tech's standing right now it couldn't hurt to
hear him out.

“A joint project between Pym Tech, Stark Industries, Rand Enterprises, and U-GIN” Tony replied, hoping his vagueness would entice her interest some more.

It did.

“A joint venture between four Companies? Nothing to do with the Avengers?” Hope inquired, curiously skeptical.

The Avengers had been her top thought for the reasoning behind the meeting.

“I try to keep SI as separate from the Avengers Initiative as possible these days. Keeps backlash against the Company to a minimum. A meeting with SI is a meeting with SI. If you wish to speak about the Avengers Initiative we can schedule a separate meeting for another time?” Tony inquired, his tone professionally neutral, casual.

Hope shook her head.

“This is a meeting between Pym Tech and Stark Industries. Not Iron Man and the Wasp” Hope agreed.

“Good to know that we’re both on the same page. It is my understanding that Pym Tech has stagnated in its development of new innovative technology. I would like to know if you, as the newest CEO, would be willing to collaborate with SI on a revolutionary new prospect that I’ve thought up?” Tony inquired, intentionally baiting her.

“We are not our parents Tony. And I could frankly care less what my father has to say on the matter. I’m the one in charge of the Company. So if your cards are as good as you are implying I’m willing to place my bets” Hope assured him, knowing that he was just testing her commitment.

“Well then” Tony said, leaning forward in his seat, steepling his fingers together as he gave Hope a sly grin.

“How would you like to help cure cancer?”

(Danny’s POV)

I took in another deep breath.

Eyes closed. In and out. In and out. In and out.

Focusing on the flow of the energy around me.

The abundance of life.

The rustle of the leaves above me. The coolness of the tree’s shade.

Sensing the life-force of each ant marching through the swaying grass blades, the nurturing presence of the robin nestled atop three warm lights.

Bobby hesitantly shuffling his way towards me.

I resisted the urge to sigh.
Not yet.

I wasn’t ready to face him yet.

In fact I’d been avoiding everyone since yesterday’s disaster of a simulation.

“I don’t regret it” I stated aloud, keeping my eyes closed as I sensed his presence approach me from behind.

*I can’t.*

“I understand” I heard Bobby say, his voice sounding sad, but not accusatory or angry like I had expected.

“Do you?” I asked him.

I felt him sit beside me under the tree.

“I can’t imagine having to make a decision like that” Bobby said, his voice sounding heavy.


“You had to decide between telling us a truth that you knew would hurt us, and leaving us wholly unprepared which would have resulted in the same. Sure maybe you could’ve started off a little less gory, and preferably given us a heads up, but you’re just scared right?...Scared for us?” Bobby inquired, his voice gentle and knowing.

Breathing a deep (shaky) breath I slowly opened my eyes.

“You were trying to dissuade us from fighting weren’t you?” Bobby stated softly. It wasn’t a question.

“That was part of it” I admitted, staring at the sunny shimmering off of the lake like diamonds, unable to meet his eyes.

“I use to stay out of it. The fighting. The danger” I began, "I pretended to be ignorant. To not see that my friends were all fighting for their lives"

I clenched my hands stop my knees, glaring at the grass swaying peacefully in the wind.

A peacefulness my hometown never truly knew.

"They all chose to risk their lives to protect our home and I couldn't bring myself to do the same" I admitted loathingly, "Each time they asked for my help, lying about what it was for I let them think that I believed them...And I was happy with that. Helping from the sidelines. Away from all the danger...Until Ethan came along"

I couldn't help but chuckle a bit when Bobby tensed, sensing the jealousy swirling through him.

"Don't worry, one of these days I'm expecting my best friend to finally pop the question to him" I assured him, relieving some of the worry in his shoulders.

"But because of Ethan I got a little bolder in helping...And it nearly cost me my life" I stated shuddering at the memory.

Mistletoe poisoning.
Even after all these years I still had damn near panic attacks at even the sight of the damn things over the doorway during Christmas.

"I tried...But I couldn't do it...I couldn't be with someone who's life was constantly on the line...The fear of it...So we broke up, and I got the hell out of dodge while I was still breathing" I said deprecatingly, "I was a coward"

"You were afraid" Bobby corrected, "It takes a lot to be able to fight the instinctive fear to run away"

"And that's all I ever did...Until I couldn't anymore" I mumbled.

"Do you know what made me stop running?" I asked him, not expecting an answer.

Bobby said nothing, patiently waiting for me to continue.

"Monroe and Gerard had sent Hunters to MIT, posing as maintenance workers... They'd cut the power to my apartment" I revealed, my breathing becoming uneven, my hands starting to shake. Suddenly I felt Bobby's hand slide into mine, gripping them firmly as if to say 'I've got you'.

I took in a steadier breath, squeezing his hands gratefully.

"If it wasn't for a friend I met at college I'd be dead right now...The story in the papers would've been that I'd electrocuted myself to death trying to fix the short-out instead of waiting for someone else to come and fix it...The maintenance workers would have been the ones to 'find' my body" I revealed, a strong shudder rippling through my body.

Bobby enveloped me in a hug, his arms supporting me, protecting me.

I felt nothing but love as the nightmares were chased away.

“I truly don’t deserve him” I thought as I desperately gripped held onto him like a lifeline.

After Bobby was sure that I wouldn’t fall to pieces he finally pulled away, just far enough to look into my eyes.

“Life’s ironic. I couldn’t be with Ethan because his life was constantly in danger...And now I don’t want to risk you because now my life is constantly in danger” I stated wryly, a bitter smile reaching my lips.

“Shouldn’t that be my decision?” Bobby retorted softly, a gentle reprimand sparkling in his eyes, mixed with exasperated love and affection.

I didn’t move away when he leaned forward to press his lips against mine.

(Third POV)

“Cancer” Hope reiterated in disbelief.

That definitely hadn’t been the direction she’d thought this meeting would be going.

Tony nodded affirmatively, relaxing back in his seat now that he knew he had Hope’s undivided attention.
“I have a stabilized method that uses nanotechnology to rewrite a person’s very DNA. The idea is to program the biotech to rewrite the damaged or cancerous cells” Tony explained.

“If you already have a cure made up then I’m failing to see how a partnership with Pym Tech would be of any use to you” Hope noted.

“I am a lot of things. A medical doctor is not one of them. Hence why Dr. Helen Cho is working with me on the project. To make sure that it will be safe to use on real people with as little to no side effects, or unplanned surprises, as possible. The last thing I need is to turn people into pterodactyls” Tony elaborated.

Extremis’ original flaw blew people up. He may have fixed that, but he still couldn’t risk something else unintentionally happening, even with the formula stripped down to its bare basics.

“And Pym Tech?” Hope inquired.

“Has been working with nanotechnology far longer than I have” Tony conceded.

“A second pair of eyes” Hope realized.

Tony nodded, “The more eyes the better to catch any possible flaws”.

“And if this works…” Hope trailed off, her mind reeling with all kinds of possibilities.

“If this works we will have the satisfaction of having saved millions of lives, and millions of future lives” Tony declared.

“But that’s not all is it?” Hope stated, narrowing her eyes at him in suspicious accusation, “If this works not only will we be saving lives, but it will increase company profits, and it will substantially improve the corporate standing for all the companies involved. Possibly even getting the UN to back off Pym Tech”

“Side bonuses. Typical reward and consequences of running a business and creating products for consumer use. Lives are saved. The public spews less vitriol. Everyone wins” Tony shrugged, trying to seem flippant.

“And it just happens to be a coincidence that three of the four companies are affiliated with known heroes?” Hope inquired knowingly.

“Smart woman” Tony stated, giving her a sly grin.

“So I guess the real question I should have asked was, Why now? Though I suppose I already answered that for myself” she noted.

“I won’t lie and say that I haven’t been sitting on this idea for a good few years. But with the Accords and all the destruction in the past left in the Avengers wake, changing the public’s perception of us is tantamount to ensuring that another genocide doesn’t happen” Tony detailed gravely.

They needed to show the world that Enhanced, Mutants, Inhumans, and what-have-you’s weren’t a threat that needed to be eliminated.

With all the bad and destruction, the world needed to see all the good they did too. Their empathy. If they humanized themselves more than people like Monroe and the Watchdogs wouldn’t have
the ammo and support they were trying to gather against them.

And of course Monroe was a whole other issue altogether. But you know what they say: Rome wasn’t built in a day.

“If you had a potential cure years ago then why pursue things now?” Hope asked curiously.

“I had minorly assisted on the original design before it was later weaponized a few years back into a variant of a super soldier serum” Tony reluctantly (shamefully) admitted.

“Ah” Hope stated, nodding her head slightly in complete understanding.

“As you can imagine if people found out that such a thing existed far more than a few less than honorable people would try and use it for their own ends. As such I’d like to keep the inner workings of the technology as secretive as possible” Tony pointedly emphasized.

“No arguments here. The last thing we need is for some nut-job to get their hands on the formula. God only knows what they could do with something that can rewrite a person’s DNA” Hope whole-heartedly agreed.

“Create an army of super-powered individuals and take over the world?” Tony suggested darkly, ignoring the faint buzzing in the back of his mind.

Ever since he’d come out of his latest near death experience the buzzing had been getting worse (though it also really depended on his location too).

It was almost like static feedback or something.

He really needed to lock himself in his lab and run a full diagnostics on himself.

And fortunately he and Scott would be doing just that today once this meeting was finished.

“Wouldn’t be the strangest thing that’s happened” Hope retorted with a grin.

“And isn’t that just sad?” Tony sarcastically replied, getting to his feet.

“So what do you say Ms. van Dyne? You in? Yes, no, maybe so?” Tony asked, eyeing Hope expectantly.

“I’m in” she replied simply, now standing herself.

“Allright. Then I’ll have Bambi send you the contract and paperwork. Feel free to have your lawyers take a look at it if you so wish. Make sure the nefarious Stark Industries isn’t plotting to screw the pooch on you” Tony sarcastically jested.

“I’ll keep an eye out for the papers” Hope replied, moving to walk alongside Tony out the door.

“And while I’m at it I’ll have her schedule a lunch date for you and Pepper” Tony exclaimed as he held the door open for her, ignoring Hope’s ‘Say-What-Now?’ glare, “Two powerful corporate CEOs talking business and about the foolish men in their lives...Actually I take that back. I don’t want to be indirectly responsible for when the two of you decide to take over the world” Hope just gave him a shark-like grin, “Actually. A meeting between CEOs sounds perfect”.

(Danny’s POV)
I squeezed Bobby’s hand as we entered Xavier’s office.

I’d be lying if I didn’t say that I was dreading facing everyone.

Xavier was kind enough to have kept everyone away from my self-imposed exile, but I had promised myself that I wouldn’t be a coward anymore, so it was high-time I faced the music.

To say that I was surprised that John hadn’t chucked a fireball at me the second I walked into the room would be an understatement.

Actually, the level of emotional pity and kinship I felt contained within the room’s walls was the last thing I’d expected.

I raised an eyebrow at their silent pity.

The problem I had here? John was looking at me like I was one of them. Jubilee and Colossus couldn’t even look me in the eye, and Xavier himself even looked a tad bit guilty.

“You telepathically listened in when Bobby and I were talking didn’t you?” I speculated knowingly.

“Sorry” Kitty blurted, “We just wanted an explanation”

“Who was it?” I asked curiously, “Cause no offense Professor but unless you telepathically sensed that I was going to attack the school you wouldn’t breach my privacy like that...Though I do suppose the saying is: curiosity killed the cat”

Xavier nodded solemnly, “Jean wanted to be sure that you weren’t a threat. She was very...put out when she heard of what occurred during the simulation. And you are correct in that I could have stopped her if I wished too. I apologize for that”

I waved him off.

“I spend most of my time around people who can detect my every emotion and lie. I actually have a Bond with twenty-four other people. A lack of privacy is not wholly unusual. Though it’s not like we’re all constantly monitoring each other either, but still” I explained, not offended by Jean’s actions at all.

Now if she had delved into my memories and searched through my mind like a filing cabinet, then I would’ve had a few choice words regarding the sanctity of the body and mind, but it was pointless to bring it up now and make mountains out of molehills.

“A Bond with twenty-four other individuals?” Xavier exclaimed in awe, his eyebrows skyrocketing, “I’ve never sensed such a thing on you before”

“I keep it shielded. So does Stiles and Lydia” I explained to him, silently patting myself on the back.

The three of us had put a lot of time into making sure our minds were shielded from telepaths. It was gratifying to know that we were able to fool the greatest telepathic mind in the world.

“They’re a part of the Bond as well?” Xavier inquired curiously.

“Yup. Two of the first members actually” I revealed. I didn’t think that they would mind me saying as much.
“So you can create Bonds?” Bobby inquired curiously.

I shook my head no, “The Bond comes from Scott, and whomever he chooses to let into the Pack”.

“So all werewolves can create Bonds?” Kitty inquired curiously.

“Yes and no. Yes all Alpha werewolves can create Pack Bonds, but normal Alphas can only include other were-canines, humans, and Druids. Scott’s a little different in that because he’s a True Alpha, in that his Alpha power was created and stems from the power of his will and character, he’s able to include, well...anyone into the Pack Bond. Mutant. Enhanced. Were-anything. Supernatural anything. Even if their species aren’t Pack reliant by nature. Part alien. Doesn’t matter” I explained. Things were always slightly harder when Scott was involved.

“That’s cool!” Jubilee exclaimed, an excited gleam in her eyes.

At least she was able to look at me again.

“And what category do you fall into exactly?” John inquired, arms folded across his chest.

Well, I guess I got away with keeping things a secret for long enough.

“Hawaiian shaman” I stated simply, though pride coursed through my tone.

“So a magic user?” John retorted, sounding wholly unimpressed and slightly let-down.

I shook my head no, “Anyone can use magic. Shamans are born. Descended from a line of priests blessed by creatures from a dimension parallel to ours which contains the beings my ancestors called their Gods”

John at least had the decency to look sheepish for his unintentional insult.

“And while shaman is a common term across the world, abilities differ depending on their origins,” I continued, my internal excitement growing as I explained my heritage, “For example, I manipulate life-force which my people call mana”

“No offense, but if you’re a shaman why does Monroe go after you? It’s not like you’re the boogeyman or whatever” John stated, his statement a bit harsher than he probably meant, but he was just probing for answers.

“In the past Hunters typically left people like Stiles and I alone. Tolerated us because we kept the balance between the Supernatural and the not” I explained grimly.

“Why the sudden change?” Colossus asked, sounding disappointed in the actions of people.

“It wasn’t so much a change as much as it became a line drawn in the sand. There were always the Hunters who didn’t go after us and the ones that did. Monroe’s stance just made that line more apparent” I corrected.

“So not all Hunters are on her side then?” Xavier inquired curiously.

“No. Some families like the Calaveras who treat the Code like law are deeply offended by Monroe and everything she represents. They’ve even tried to off her themselves more than a few times” I replied.

Frankly it was a miracle Araya was still living with how against Monroe she was.
“So even racist murders have standards” Erik snidely mocked.

“Surprises even them sometimes” I joked darkly.

These days Monroe was starting to lose more and more support from even the more radical Hunting families that had been the first to join her in the beginning. Even the Adler Family who’d hunted the Packs in Beacon Hills down during the Deadpool were starting to turn away from her now.

“Then I say we need all the practice we can get” John exclaimed, stepping forward confidently, not an ounce of hesitation in his voice.

“Though maybe a little less blood this time?” Jubilee said, miming a ‘little’ with her thumb and pointer finger.

I gave them a ruefully smile, “You sure about this?”

“You can’t scare us away that easily” Kitty declared confidently, “We’re the X-men!”

(Third POV)

“The interview is scheduled to be three days from now” Sharon informed, swiping quickly across the Starkpad, “The interview will be conducted on Good Morning America by George Stephanopoulos. The plan is to start off with Agent Stilinski answering his questions regarding the Lagos interview, and then have him introduce the Sorcerer Supreme and Dr. Stephen Strange to the stage. Do you think that you will need cue cards or someone in your ear assisting you in answering Mr. Stephanopoulos’ questions?”

“I don’t think that’ll be necessary” Stiles stated, not looking to happy about the prospect of talking on live TV.

“PR isn’t a walk in the park. Especially when you’re put on the spot. He could ask you anything, not just about your powers or Wanda” Sharon reminded him firmly.

“I’m an improv kind of guy” Stiles retorted back. Something about her just bothered him.

“A comm in the ear would be great” Lydia stated, going over Stiles’ head.

Stiles just gave her a ‘seriously’ glare.

“We’re agents and students, not public speakers. We’ll need a backup plan in case Monroe hijacks this interview too” Lydia reasoned, firmly not backing down.

“God fine” Stiles reluctantly caved.

Sharon nodded, making a note on the Starkpad for Maria, Agent Argent, and Agent McCall.

“And Dr. Strange agreed to do the interview?” Scott inquired.

Sharon nodded, “We’ve been in correspondence with Dr. Strange on the matter. So far there haven’t been any issues”.

“And what am I supposed to say if they ask about Maximoff’s trial?” Stiles asked curiously, cause he had no doubt that it would at least come up.
“It was decided that you are to avoid speaking of Ms. Maximoff’s past. Stick only to what you know of her from your time here and your evaluation of her abilities” Sharon relayed, going off of the notes Maximoff’s lawyer had sent to the Avengers PR team.

“And how much should he say about the hijacking?” Liam inquired, folding his arms across his chest.

“The Humans First Movement is not a secretive group. There is concrete evidence that they were involved in the hijacking” Sharon replied.

“But what about Monroe and the Watchdogs?” Kira inquired.

“Unnecessary information” Stiles cut in, looking at Sharon sharply (accusingly), “Right?”

Sharon nodded, “While the Humans First Movement are known supporters of the Watchdogs we don’t have any evidence that they have any kind of alliance going on-”.

“But we do have evidence that the Monroe Republic assisted in the hijacking of the Lagos interview” Derek declared, cutting her off.

“Yes but-”

“No buts. If I’m doing this interview then Monroe is getting her ass thrown under the metaphorical bus” Stiles firmly declared, “She’s making moves to discredit anyone not human and anyone getting in her damn way of world domination. The Monroe Republic is already on file as an extremist neo-nazi terrorist group. So if they’re going to start going after Enhanced then we need to start going after them...We don’t really have the option of burying our heads in the sand anymore”

“Fighting fire with fire” Theo stated, resolve burning in his eyes.

“Monroe’s getting ready for another war” Lydia stated grimly, her mind flashing back to all the death and pain Monroe and Gerard had caused years ago, the echoes of the dead still haunting her.

“So are we” Scott proclaimed.

Chapter End Notes

Feelings of reconciliation and plots to combat Monroe abound!

Will it be enough?

Tune in for the next chapter to find out!

*As an extra tid-bit, the Adler Family is actually a name I gave to the Hunting family that went nameless in Teen Wolf season 4 (the Family that used an Eagle symbol on their arrows).
Chapter 21: Fireworks part 2

Chapter Notes

Hi All!

Sorry it's been such a long time!

Hope the wait was worth it!

*Warning for possible/likely medical inaccuracies*

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Third POV)

"The blood samples are good to go" Helen said, shaking the vials slightly.

"Not even a scratch" Tony muttered to himself, eyeing his arm in fascination.

It was as if a needle hadn't been jammed into his arm at all.

"Now for the PCR" Scott said, taking the strip of eight PCR tubes from Dr. Cho and placing them into the thermal cycler to be sequenced.

"And sequencing out Tony's DNA will allow you to see the...animal DNA he now has?" Helen inquired curiously, looking over Scott's shoulder.

Scott gave the scientist an amused indulgent smile.

"No. As of right now his genes will only show that his physicality has been enhanced. There's an...extra step required if you want the genes to demonstrate their...animal side" Scott explained.

"And what's that?" Tony asked his eyes sparkling with fascinated interest.

"Wolfsbane" Nolan stated, coming up next to them, pulling a small vial out of his pocket, "Nordic Blue Monkshood to be specific"

"Why this species?" Helen asked curiously, taking the small vial from the boy's fingers to get a closer look.

"When turned into a vapor it forces our kind to transform" Scott explained, a tightness to his voice as he tried not to choke up on the painful memories elicited by the sight of the seemingly innocuous plant.

The uncomfortable pain in Scott's tone wasn't lost on anyone.

And though Tony was still adamant that Scott wasn't his Alpha, he couldn't help the protective anger in him surge at the implication that someone had tried to poison Scott through such a method.
"Your DNA changes" Helen realized in amazement.

Scott nodded, "Because of our nature as shapeshifters our DNA is malleable and subjected to change depending on certain conditions. Nolan was actually the one to theorize that we could use wolfsbane to induce a shift in the samples".

"It took a lot of trial and error to figure out the best method and species that wouldn't taint the samples we were sequencing, but we eventually figured it out" Nolan continued, a slight embarrassed blush on his cheeks at Scott's praise.

Tony was impressed.

"Not bad kid. You like genetics?" Tony inquired.

What is it with this Pack and science professions?

Well at the very least he didn't feel out of place-


Nolan nodded, "I'm studying to be a geneticist. Human evolution. DNA changing. I just want to know...more".

Tony nodded in understanding. He knew that curiosity well.

Maybe he could reference the kid over to Xavier? He got the feeling that the old man would appreciate Nolan's quest for knowledge that seemed to parallel his own once upon a time.

"Wait. If wolfsbane is poisonous to your kind then wouldn't you and Tony be harmed when the wolfsbane is vaporized and released into the air?" Helen exclaimed in concern, eyeing the vaporizer warily.

"Stiles constructed an attachment to the vaporizer that keeps the vapor contained within a dome, so I promise it's safe" Scott explained, giving Helen a grateful smile as Nolan pulled out the plastic attachment and connected the end with the tube to the export.


"Sounds like the brownies are done" Tony exclaimed, not even trying to hide the eagerness in his voice.

He'd been waiting all day for this!

Fortunately the thermal cycler he'd constructed years ago for SI included a sequencer in it's system, making it far more efficient and time-saving than the standard DNA barcoding method where the cycler and sequencer were typically separate.

Scott placed the vaporizer atop the vials in the cycler, and pressed the small machine's On button.

As the machine whirred Tony watched with bated breath as the vapor was expelled into the dome, reminding him vaguely of a smoke machine, or even one of those crystal balls you found at those fake fortune-tellers.

Seeing that Tony was distracted Helen turned the sequencer On, watching as the screen lit up as it re-analyzed Tony's DNA.
The group watched the screen in utter fascination as the shape of Tony's genes *shifted. Changed* to an entirely new shape.


"..."

Despite the machine's indication that the process was complete, nobody dared to move.

Tony wasn't sure he could bring himself to see the evidence of his lack of humanity first hand, and Scott felt that it was only appropriate that Tony be the first to view the test's result.

"If you'll have the honors?" Scott gently prompted, smelling Tony's uneasiness.

When Tony still didn't move Scott placed a comforting hand on his shoulder, fully understanding the man's hesitance.

"If I'm not a monster than neither are you. This part of you saved your life. You may not understand why now, but someday you will...Trust me" Scott softly exclaimed, unknowingly echoing Tony's own words to Bruce back when they first met on the helicarrier.

Tony's eyes widened in shock at Scott's words, his heart giving an extra beat as happiness and nostalgia filled him.

Mentally shaking himself out of his stupor Tony stepped forward toward the cycler, confidence restored as he gazed upon the results displayed on the screen.

"...Well" Nolan hesitantly asked, not able to handle to anticipation any longer, "What does it say?"

"...Jackal. Golden jackal" Tony exclaimed in hushed awe, not expecting that result at all.

Scott quickly snapped out of his shock, immediately making a mental note to call Deaton to see if he knew anything at all about were-jackals.

Of course before he could congratulate Tony a smell caught his attention...One that had intentionally stayed downwind.

The scent of metal, gunsmoke, and...plums?

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Stiles demanded as Peter Hale sauntered his way into the lounge room, escorted personally by the Black Widow herself.

Stiles had demanded that Peter high-tail his ass to the Compound as soon as he was able to after they learned he had taken on Maximoff as his client.

While Peter acting as Wanda's lawyer did solve several of their concerns as of late it also raised just as many.

The main concern however was, what the hell Peter was scheming *now*?

“I was actually considering asking Jackson to be my para. It would be a good experience for him” Peter dralled, unimpressed by the Widow's little display, and Stiles being wholly done with him wasn't unusual either.

“This isn't Legally Blonde! This isn't a game or movie!” Stiles declared in annoyed exasperation,
“...Though I will be changing Jackson's ID in my phone to Elle Woods now”

"You're Peter Hale? Derek's Uncle and Wanda's new mysterious lawyer?" Sam questioned, raising an unimpressed eyebrow.

The man's haughty body language practically screamed 'I'm-better-than-thou'.

"I see my nephew and his friends have mentioned me. All good things I hope" Peter dralled.

"They called you a psychotic murderer" Clint deadpanned, scrutinizing Peter from head to toe with a critical, mistrustful glare.

"Ex-psychotic" Peter corrected defensively, irritated, but really not surprised.

"Not ex-murderer?" Sam questioned, his eyebrows hitting his hairline.

"Depends on the day" Peter replied, his tone a mix of mocking and sincere, causing the three Avengers present to be unsure whether or not he was joking or not.

Though Natasha and Clint didn't think he was.

"Shut up" Stiles and Derek simultaneously demanded.

"I do believe that would be counterproductive seeing as you specifically asked, no demanded, that I come here so you could interrogate my intentions" Peter retorted unphased.

"Are you actually surprised?" Lydia calmly stated.

"I am honestly offended by such skepticism" Peter mockingly declared, placing a hand dramatically over his heart as if wounded, "I am merely aiding a traumatized young woman who has been unjustly arrested out of the goodness of my heart. Is that so hard to believe?"

"Yes" Derek deadpanned.

"What goodness?" Stiles mocked straight-faced.

"You have a heart?" Lydia sarcastically teased, expression neutral.

Peter just gave each of them an annoyed glare.

The Avengers weren't totally sure what to make of the newcomer.

Obviously he was one whose motives and actions you needed to keep an eye on.

At the same time it was incredibly amusing to see the banter between him and the members of the Shadow Guard.

"You all should be thanking me for standing up to represent her" Peter snobbishly pointed out, "Not like anyone else competent was going to"

"So humble and altruistic of you" Clint deadpanned.

"Two words that have never been used to describe Peter" Derek stated, giving his Uncle a sarcastic smile that he returned in kind.

"So then why are you representing Wanda?" Natasha inquired (read: demanded), narrowing her
eyes at the aloof man, "What do you get out of this?"

Peter turned to give Natasha a shark-like grin, "What any good lawyer wants. Justice".

"For people like Wanda" Natasha lead.

"Exactly" Peter stated, giving her an indulgent smile.

"So self preservation then" Natasha concluded, her posture suddenly more rigid than before despite her relaxed frame, a technique she was taught to help prevent the telegraphing of movements.

"She pegged you quick" Stiles laughed, impressed by how quick Romanoff had interrogated Peter for his underlying motives.

"Wait what?" Sam demanded, feeling out of the loop.

"You're a werewolf too. Like Derek" Clint speculated, having followed Natasha's line of reasoning more easily.

"Indeed I am" Peter proudly confirmed, his eyes momentarily glowing blue.

'The eyes of a murderer' Natasha thought, 'And somehow I doubt his were mercy kills'

"So you're representing Wanda in the hopes that what? You can set back Monroe's plan to demonize those with powers?" Clint questioned.

"Maximoff and the Avengers are Monroe's first step on her quest of global domination and genocid" Peter clarified, his tone making him sounding like he was berating Clint for being small-minded (which he was), "First she discredits the Avengers. Next it's the other enhanced and powered individuals in her way. If she's ambitious, which she is, she may even take further steps against the Inhumans at the same time"

"And last the Supernatural" Sam finished, his tone hard.

"Exactly" Peter proclaimed, "But only if we stay in the shadows"

"Except we need publicity to keep ourselves safe and to improve our standing" Derek pointed out.

"But if we try Monroe reveals our existence ahead of schedule" Stiles followed grimly.

"It's a game of chess" Lydia concluded.

"We have to protect ourselves in a way that corners her" Peter confirmed, "If she's going to throw dirt, than it's going to rain mud"

"Enough hiding" Scott exclaimed, a firm but not unfriendly barb to his voice as he turned to face the direction of their hidden guest.

Startled, the group turned to face the direction Scott was facing.

Slowly, Bucky made his way around the corner of the lab he was hiding behind, his body language sheepish and awkward at having been caught unintentionally spying.

He had come into the lab hoping to talk to Tony, but he hadn't wanted to interrupt such a big moment for the genius.
Tony immediately tensed, fighting a growl that was making its way through his throat at the sight of the super soldier.

Seeing Tony's hostility Bucky shifted his gaze off to the side almost skittishly as the guilt and regret ate at him.

Tony's urge to growl and claw Barnes' throat out slowly died down.

Something about Barnes' posture and...scent calmed him. Told him that Barnes wasn't a threat...Sort of.

Barnes didn't seem like he was poised for a fight anyway.

"To what do we owe the pleasure of your invasion of my inner sanctum Barnes?" Tony inquired, the icy professionalism in his tone causing Bucky to wince.

"I uh...I was hoping that you and I could...talk" Bucky stammered out awkwardly.

Tony narrowed his eyes mistrustfully at the super soldier, noting how tense and uncertain the other man looked, his eyes holding a hopeful sadness.

Tony grit his teeth in annoyance.

Damn Barnes.

Damn Barnes and his sad, regretful puppy eyes.

"I think I can pencil you in" Tony declared, his expression as hard as stone.

Bucky's eyes widened in surprise, a glimmer hope sparking to life.

Tony really wanted to punch him in the face.

"And despite all my kinks I'm not into voyeurism so let's do this outside of the lab. You've got five minutes" Tony said shortly, turning brusquely to the door on the other side of the room.

Bucky followed quickly behind, though he made sure to keep a few feet between them, not wanting to put Tony on the defensive any more than he already was.

The moment the door closed shut behind him Bucky watched as Tony's expression grew even more closed off. Defensive.

His arms were crossed almost protectively across his chest as if unconsciously putting a barrier between them, and guarding the precious organ that had not too long ago ceased its function.

.......Because of him.

Bucky inhaled a deep breath through his nose as Tony's accusing eyes stared him down.

"I'm sorry" Bucky began, the regret and grief in his tone damn near palpable, "I'm sorry that I killed your parents. That I took your Mother from you. Hydra may have brainwashed me but it was still my hands that ended their lives..."

Bucky briefly paused choking on his own words.

The memories.
"That day in the lab with Derek when you were working on my arm...I honestly thought you already knew"

"And it doesn't bother you...having me here?"

Tony's eyes darkened at the reminder.

Looking back on their conversation it was obvious to him now that Barnes had been probing. Seeing just how much he had known.

Of course he hadn't picked up on the subtle wary nuances of Barnes behavior that had implied that Barnes had wronged him. He had thought Barnes was just asking in general whether or not he could trust him after everything Hydra had him do.

"I never meant to seem like I was taking advantage of you...Or that I was lying. I-"

"Would you have told me" Tony demanded, sharply cutting Bucky off.

Bucky blinked in surprise, momentarily stunned that Tony was actually talking to him, "What?"

"That day I was fixing up your arm. Would you have told me the truth had you realized that I didn't know?" Tony demanded, rephrasing his question, his eyes boring into Bucky's, daring him to lie.

"Yes" Bucky replied, not an ounce of hesitation in his tone as he met Tony's scrutinizing gaze head on.

Tony reluctantly nodded once in acceptance before shifting his gaze down to the tiled floor of the hall.

Barnes' eyes never wavered once.

And wasn't that just a kick to the balls?

A man he hadn't even known for a day wouldn't have hesitated to tell him the truth when Steve, someone he had considered his friend, had intentionally lied to his face for years and even had the gall to lecture him on how his secret keeping had almost torn apart the Avengers.

In the end it wasn't his lies that ended up tearing them apart.

Irony was a bitch.

"Do you remember killing them?" Tony found himself asking, his tone more tight than angry, uncertain if he even wanted to know the answer.

Bucky said nothing for a moment as his eyes glazed over with an emotion Tony knew all too well. Self loathing.

"I remember all of them" Bucky replied, his voice cracking with grief and regret.

Tony knew in that moment that despite all his pain, despite all his anger...he could never truly hate or blame Barnes.

In that one sentence Buc-Barnes had showed more emotion, more sorrow for him and his victims than Steve did the entire time he had questioned him after Scott had showed him the video Zemo had found at the bunker.
And if Tony was being honest with himself...He wasn't actually angry at Barnes.

He was angry at himself.

He was angry at his Aunt Peggy for covering up the truth of the accident.

He was downright pissed at Steve (to say the least).

And he was vengeful.

At Hydra.

But looking at the broken man in front of him Tony couldn't control his hate slowly slipping away from him.

Barnes was just the weapon Hydra had used to kill his parents.

The unwilling tool that had no voice. No right to choose what he was used for.

"...Thank you" Tony muttered awkwardly, his voice low but Bucky's enhanced ears picked it up none-the-less.

"You..." Bucky couldn't even finish his sentence, too stunned for words.

He had thought Tony's silence meant that he was just humoring him. Letting him say his piece.

Tony didn't have to forgive him. Hell Bucky didn't expect him to!

But to hear Tony say 'thank you'...Bucky couldn't comprehend what Tony could even be thanking him for!

"Are you...okay?" Bucky couldn't help but ask, still shocked beyond belief.

Tony huffed in amusement, "While my sanity as of late is admittedly questionable I haven't gone off the deep end".

Bucky gave Tony a skeptical look, raised eyebrow and all.

Tony lightly scoffed, his gaze shifting away as he awkwardly scratched the back of his head.

"I... don't blame you...I'm pissed to all hell still at Steve, but it was never really you I was angry at" Tony admitted, both to himself and Barnes.

"That's not to say that this is easy for me" Tony continued, not able to look Barnes in the eyes, "It may not have been your choice but my mind still flashes back to seeing your hands around my Mom's throat"

Bucky flinched at the reminder, a pained grimace adorning his face.

"I don't blame you...But it's gonna take time for me to...deal with that" Tony said tightly, unsure how to explain himself.

Bucky nodded in understanding, "It's like you lost her all over again"

Tony blinked in surprise.

Lost her all over again…
That…

Bar-Bucky was actually right on that…

He was grieving his losses again like he had when he was seventeen.

"I'm starting to see that old man wisdom coming through" Tony jested lightly.

Bucky gave him a fragile looking smile, one that looked like it would shatter at any given moment if he wasn't careful.

"Restart?" Tony cautiously inquired, leaving the option up to Bucky.

Bucky sucked in a stuttering breath, tears welling in his eyes in relief. In happiness.

Tony didn't hate him.

Tony had forgiven him.

For real this time.

"Thank you" Bucky exclaimed, his voice heavy with emotion.

Suddenly it felt as if a weight had lifted itself off Tony's chest.

Huh.

Well what'd ya know? Derek was right. Letting go of resentment was actually kind of cathartic. Who knew?

"Easy there Tasty Freeze, the amount of emotions in this room is starting to give me hives" Tony jested, making light of the situation in order to cover how uncomfortable he was.

Bucky huffed out a laugh, rolling his eyes at Tony's antics.

"What'd you say tomorrow you come by the lab again, and you me and Helen work on BARF some more?" Tony tentatively offered.

"Really?!" Bucky exclaimed, elated at the idea of finally having his triggers removed.

A stab of guilt gnawed at Tony.

After his...death he avoided dealing with Rogers and Barnes in any fashion he could get away with.

Occupying his time with Secretary Asshole, Wanda's impending trial, and planning contingencies in case Monroe revealed the existence of the Supernatural.

All so that he didn't actually have to face the source of his latest betrayals.

Of course that also meant that he had stopped making adjustments to BARF…

And didn't that just make him feel like a heel.

All Barnes wanted was to be free of his triggers so that he would never hurt anyone ever again, and yet the man had never confronted him about the project once since he'd died.

Tony's eyes softened as he gazed into Bucky's hope filled ones.
Maybe. Just maybe he really could trust him.

That Bucky wasn't just going to use him for what he could get and then ditch him the first chance he got.

*Maybe.*

"Sure thing Snowflake. It's a date" Tony teased.

"Speaking of dates. I don't know what your plans are tonight, if you're going to be with Pepper or not. But I was wondering if you wanted to sit and watch the fireworks with me tonight over the Compound?" Bucky asked, trying to keep the hopefulness out of his voice.

He didn't want to push Tony into interacting with him any more than he was comfortable with.

"Fireworks?" Tony repeated, his eyebrows scrunched in confusion.

"Yeah...It's the Fourth of July" Bucky replied, raising an amused eyebrow at Tony's obliviousness.

"..."

"Friday?" Tony inquired.

"*Sergeant Barnes is correct. The date is July 4, 2016* Friday relayed, sounding immensely amused herself.

"Huh. Well what'd you know" Tony muttered mostly to himself.

"Well?" Bucky prompted again, fidgeting slightly as he awaited Tony's answer.

"Well...I do like fireworks" Tony allowed, considering his options.

He knew for certain that Pepper was in meetings all day today...And she hadn't mentioned anything about spending the night together...In any capacity.

Sure he understood that they still weren't...together...romantically speaking anymore.

But it was still a festering wound in his heart.

Pepper was his world.

The first real love of his life.

When they had first taken their break he'd spiralled down a depressive blackhole.

She was his anchor.

Now more than ever.

But she couldn't accept Iron Man.

And he couldn't give it up either.

He could try and plan a romantic gesture under the colorful lights of the firework lit sky...But he'd only be grasping onto something he'd been lying to himself for a long time.

He loved Pepper. With all his heart.
And she loved him.

But they wouldn't be able to compromise where it truly mattered.

They could be happy.

He could retire. Give Pepper that farm.

They could have that textbook happy ending.

...But it wouldn't last forever.

Somehow, some way that illusion would shatter.

As hard as it would be to let Pepper go he knew it was for the best.

They both needed people who could accept all of them.

Pepper was already distancing herself from him while still trying to keep that awkward balance of making sure he was okay. Especially after he died.

But she had already decided that she couldn't be with him romantically anymore.

She moved on and was trying to continue living her life.

And he should too.

"Fireworks on the roof tonight it is" Tony declared, smirking when Bucky's face lit up in joy, "I'm just warning you now though, I expect to be wined and dined. I'm a classy bitch"

Bucky gave Tony a smirk, but before he could open his mouth to retort back at Tony's jest a voice cut in.

"I knew you two would eventually reconcile"

"Good afternoon Ms. Maximoff" Morrell greeted as Wanda was escorted into the meeting room, guards standing directly behind the prisoner as she seated herself in the metal chair.

"If you gentlemen wouldn't mind I'd like to speak with Ms. Maximoff alone" Morrell stated, her tone was calm and polite, but the underlying dismissiveness was very apparent.

"Ms. Maximoff is a highly dangerous-

"Aren't we all?" Morrell smoothly cut in, giving the guards a pointedly bland look.

The guard grit his teeth at her retort but none-the-less said nothing.

"Ms. Maximoff has the right to privacy in our sessions. If there is a problem you will be able to see through the one way glass. I expect the auditory feed is to remain Off. I'd hate to have to charge anyone for a HIPAA violation...Gentleman" Morrell detailed, a clear no nonsense tone as she gesture for them to make their leave.

When the guards exited the room the metal doors closing echoed like thunder.

"You evaluating me isn't a conflict of interest?" Wanda asked, her voice dull and lifeless.
While no one in the prison had dared to mistreat her, the constant confinement and restraints were wearing her down mentally.

The constant flashbacks and nightmares made it hard to tell whether or not she was actually awake at times.

"Not at all. Since I was assigned to be your therapist during your time on suspension, and had already started on your file I was considered a good evaluator. Though the prosecution has hired their own psychologist to evaluate you as well" Morrell calmly explained.


"It is not unusual for the prosecution to have their own specialists evaluate the accused in order to confirm another specialist's prognosis or determinations" Morrell relayed, intentionally keeping the name to herself.

"You expect me to talk to someone from the side of the court trying to get me the death penalty?" Wanda furiously demanded.

"The man selected to evaluate you is one of the best in our field and is very thorough. No matter his opinions of you or who hires him he'll evaluate you as he should" Morrell assured her.

Though deep down Morrell was uncertain.

Dr. Leonard Samson, while a brilliant psychologist, has a traceable connection back to Bruce Banner.

While she couldn't really be sure whether the two men were friends, enemies, or something in-between, it left a variable in Ms. Maximoff's case that she wasn't happy to play with.

She had brought forward the issue as a potential conflict of interest, but her concerns were only noted and for the most part brushed off.

She just hoped that the man was objective enough to do his job. And do it right.

"Not like I really have a choice" Wanda grumbled bitterly.

"Let’s talk about that. Do you feel like you don't have a choice? That you don't have control?" Morrell inquired, clicking her pen.

In retrospect, talking out in the hallway/stairwell of a Compound filled with people wasn’t the brightest idea if one wanted privacy.

Tony’s expression immediately soured upon seeing the sunshiny relief on Roger’s stupidly perfect (lying) face.

“Last I checked Bucky and I’s relationship or lack thereof is none of your business. Though I should have figured you wouldn’t see it that way” Tony scowled, the vitriol in his tone sharp as razors.

Steve grimaced a bit, but doggedly continued onward, “I just meant that I knew if given the chance you two would get along”.

Bucky felt the compelling urge to both smack his own forehead in exasperation, and smack Steve
upside his damn head for his incredible ability to make somehow make a situation worse without meaning to.

Tony’s eyes darkened dangerously, and Bucky could’ve sworn he saw a hint of blue making his way into the irises of his eyes.

“Glad our little heart-to-heart could vindicate your actions for you” Tony sneered, not even bothering to control the growl laced in his words.

Steve’s eyes widened in shock and horror as he realized how his words could have been (and were) interpreted.

“That—that’s not what I meant” Steve stammered, cursing his apparent foot-in-mouth disorder.

“Well you know what Rogers? You can take that self-righteous stick of yours and shove it up your sanctimonious ass! I’m done letting you use and belittle me! You can walk around dressed as a flag and talk about morals all you want. You're nothing but a damn bully” Tony emphasized viciously through his fangs, knowing full when the meaning of the word to Steve.

As if reacting to Tony's anger the stairwell lights flickered. Though Bucky was sure he was the only one of them who'd noticed.

"Just find the cube"

"We didn't. We weren't even close! Were we close to an interface?"

"Well you did something right, and you did it right here!"
“Wait. I know that guy” Tony declared, reaching for the folder in Bruce's hand, taking it from him, “From back in the day. He operates off the African coast. Black market arms”

Steve gave Tony his patented Captain-America-is-disappointed-in-you glare.

“There are conventions. I didn’t sell them anything” Tony defended.

"You don’t know what you’re talking about. Stark's not crazy"

"I'm only going to say this once"

"Oh God Tony, every time I think you’re doing the right thing"

"Gimme a break!"

Steve suddenly felt as though the Hulk had sucker punched him in the stomach.

He was stubborn to a fault.

He learned that clearly.

But in stubbornly uncompromising his beliefs had he really been that demeaning?

Hell, even when he personally went through the helicarrier storage vaults on Tony's suspicions he had been dismissive and brusque with the genius before he left, and acted all high and mighty when confronting Fury and even berated Tony for his past (Scepter's influence or not the underlying emotions were all him).

Even when defending Tony from Wanda's barb he still took her word over just taking a moment to hear Tony out. Hell he never tried to understand more about how Ultron even came to be at all!

Erskine had chosen him because he didn't want a soldier.

He wanted a good man.

But the more he delved into his own actions the more he had to disagree with Erskine's assessment of him.

"Nothing to say?" Tony sneered, Rogers' silence somehow angering him even more, "Not gonna defend yourself from the big bad Tony Stark spouting his usual bullshit?"

Steve's mouth opened.

He wanted to tell Tony that he was sorry. For everything.

But no sound came out.

He didn't know what he could say to make things better.

Or how to say it without making things worse like he always seemed to.

Tony just growled in frustration and anger.

"I'll be in the Hulk Room" Tony growled out, shoulder slamming Steve as he made his way past him, "Tony smash"

Steve's heart sank further and further down into the pit of despair with each resounding this of
Tony's overly aggressive steps up the stairs.

As soon as the door at the top of the stairwell slammed shut with more force than strictly necessary Bucky immediately smacked Steve upside the head.

"Buck!-"

"Go after him you socially incompetent moron!" Bucky proclaimed in annoyance, as if it should have been obvious, "Go after him and just fucking say what you feel!"

"But."

"Don't worry about sounding stupid. Just. Be. Honest" Bucky pointedly declared, fed up with everything.

Sucking in a breath Steve nodded and raced up the stairs four-by-four with a renewed resolved.

'Now hopefully Tony won't claw first and ask questions later' Bucky thought, slightly worried, but he knew that this was something Steve and Tony needed to handle on their own.

"Don't worry" a voice behind him said.

Bucky turned to see that Scott had come through the doorway.

"Tony hasn't learned to filter his end of the Pack Bond yet so I can feel his bloodlust. I won't let anything happen" Scott assured him.

Bucky nodded, slightly less concerned.

'Now it's just up to them' he thought grimly.

Though admittedly he also had something else nagging him at the back of his mind as well.

'For just a moment Tony's eyes seemed to glow a slightly different shade of blue' Bucky thought, mildly concerned.

Making his way towards the Hulk Room Steve finally caught sight of a slightly hunched and fast walking Tony.

Tony's posture reminded Steve of an angered predator, but he was never one to back down before sooo…

"Tony!...Tony!" Steve called out, self-preservation be damned.

Tony spun on his heels, hunching a bit more, claws out and growling threateningly at Steve as if he was ready to pounce.

"I'm sorry!" Steve proclaimed, deciding it would be best to give Tony some space and stopping a good ten feet from the genius, "I'm sorry that I took out many of the issues I had waking up into this century on you. I had felt unnecessary. My friends, the world had moved on without me and I didn't feel like there was a place for me in it anymore. That I just should have died"

Tony's growling slowly died down, though his glowing blue eyes still screamed murder.

"I felt old fashioned and out of date and when SHIELD called me in to handle Loki it was you and your high tech suit that beat him and not me, and I felt like that just confirmed to me I wasn't
"necessary anymore" Steve admitted, all the insecurities he had felt back then, hell even now, coming to the surface.

"And the more we talked the more I fell back on that bullshit assessment SHIELD had on you" Steve scoffed, shaking his own head in frustration at himself, "Everything I said that day on the helicarrier was wrong and I'm sorry I never apologized for that"

He never apologized for a lot of things.

"I dealt with everything during Ultron between us wrong. I'm sorry I didn't just listen to you when you said that it should've been impossible for Ultron to have come online. Hell I should never have raised my shield against you at all! Let alone on the word of someone who had been trying to destroy us. I was projecting my own experiences onto Wanda and Pietro, and I let my own fears of technology and what could possibly happen again take control over my rational judgement" Steve admitted shamefully.

While the technology of the future had been a boon in a lot of areas, he personally believed people were becoming far too reliant on machines to do their work for them and solve all their problems.

First Project Insight. Then Ultron.

He had believed that Fury's plan to use Project Insight to eliminate threats before they happened violated human rights. Innocent until proven guilty.

And Hydra had turned out to not only be behind Project Insight, but had hijacked the helicarriers as well, threatening millions.

So when Ultron happened it was as if the universe had proved his beliefs right once again.

He could understand errors in human judgement when standing up for something you thought was right, which was why he empathized with the Maximoff Twins.

It was what he had thought was Tony's faith in technology over them he couldn't trust.

Wanda was right in that Tony would do whatever he thought he needed to do in order to make things right.

And he thought Tony had been doing that again with the Accords.

And he had let his own lies, his own misunderstandings, and his own mistrust get in the way of seeing that it wasn't that Tony didn't trust them.

Tony (and Natasha) just saw what he hadn't.

That the Avengers needed to adapt. To change with the world.

And he hadn't wanted to change.

"I'm sorry I didn't trust you like I should have during the Accords. I'm sorry I never trusted you like I should have. You're the only person whose loyalties were never in question" Steve confessed, regret and assuredness in his tone.

So wrapped up in the confession pouring out of him like Niagara Falls, Steve failed to notice Tony had shifted back to human form and was staring at Steve with an unreadable dumbfounded expression.
"And I'm sorry I always made you feel like you were beneath me or a villain because of your past or how you think. God Tony you're my other half!" Steve near shouted in a desperate plea to somehow keep from completely losing Tony in his life, "You push me and you aren't afraid to call me out on my crap"

Steve then looked Tony dead in the eyes for the first time since he began his confession, conviction burning bright.

"I'm not half as good at anything as I am when I'm doing it next to you" Steve assuredly proclaimed, "And that's the truth"

Tony said nothing for a moment. His brain trying to process a million logical reasonings and justifications and explanations as well as process a new perspective to Rogers' past actions.

Tony sucked in a frustrated breathed, glaring Rogers down as he finally spoke, "Then why?"

Steve didn't need to ask to know just what Tony was talking about.

"I thought I was protecting the both of you...But you were right...I was only protecting myself" Steve expressed regretfully, "And I don't know what I can say to make up for that...Or even if there is anything I can say"

But even then Steve couldn't let this be the end between them.

"But I want to show you that I'm sorry. That I do trust you" Steve exclaimed pleadingly, though the resolution in his voice was clear, "Even if it takes the rest of my life to do it"

Silence.

Complete silence.

The only real sound was the rhythmic pattern of their breathing echoing through the hall.

Steve clenched his fists in anxiety as his stomach turned in knots the longer Tony remained silent, his eyes a mix of unreadable emotions.

"And people call me a drama queen" Tony huffed.

Steve blinked in surprise at the unexpected statement.

"God do you have Jiminy Cricket's cousin in your head writing speeches for you?" Tony scoffed teasingly, a hint of mild disbelief in his tone.

"Tony" Steve exhaled, trying to bring the genius' focus back on the matter at hand.

"Deal" Tony exclaimed suddenly.

"What?" Steve stated, confused.


Steve's eyes widened at the underlying meaning of Tony's words.

"I-Thank you Tony" Steve exhaled in relief, "So...Do over?"

"Let's just see where the goes Steve...And for the record and sake of introspection and our
newfound apparent pact of honesty...I took my daddy issues with Howard out on you and put you on the defensive from the start" Tony reluctantly admitted, trying to act casual and dismissive, but there was a raw note of honesty and vulnerability to his guarded expression that Steve recognized the words as genuine.

“He treated me like I was never good enough because I wasn't you!”

"And as shocking as this may be to believe, I might just be a tad bit impulsive and do things that I think are best without always maybe consulting the other concerned parties about it too...Sometimes" Tony reluctantly conceded, his face scrunched as if he had sucked on a lemon.

"Howard was wrong" Steve declared, relief bubbling in his chest at Tony's attempt to reach out, grateful that he even was at all.

"Course he was. That goes without saying...But this...whatever this is, doesn't mean everything's now hunky dory between us" Tony pointedly reminded him.

"I know" Steve said.

"I still want to rip your throat out" Tony told him.

"I know"

"With my teeth"

"You're going to need a lot of mouthwash" Steve warned him.

"God I hate you...But for whatever fucked up reason I still don't want you gone" Tony admitted, hating himself for being so weak, not able to completely ignore the little voice that sounded a lot like Obediah in the back of his mind.

"Bucky once said I was like fungus. Hard to get rid of but eventually I grow on you" Steve stated, a slight quirk to his lips.

"And that is why Snowflake is my favorite super soldier" Tony declared.

"That wounds me" Steve said, his expression mockingly serious.

"I can make it deeper" Tony deadpanned, snapping out his claws.

As soon as he did however Tony did a hilarious double-take on his hand.

"Holy shit! I've never done that intentionally before!" Tony exclaimed gripping his right wrist and looking at his hand as if it were the eighth wonder of the world.

Steve couldn't help the chuckle that came out of his mouth.

"Yeah yeah. Laugh it up over there. Just remember I'm enhanced now too. I'm pretty sure I can kick your ass" Tony reminded him, now suddenly very curious how he would fair against the super soldier in a physical fight now.

For science of course...And maybe a little catharsis.

"With or without your mobile assistance technology?" Steve teasingly questioned.

"Mobile assist-Are you actually calling me old? You're almost double my age!" Tony sputtered
offended.

"Nobody ever believed me when I told them he was a little shit" Bucky stated, making his way down the hall to the two of them, "Though he's not so little anymore"

"Now he's just a giant pain in the ass" Tony scoffed.

"Agreed" Bucky unhesitatingly nodded.

"I feel the love" Steve deadpanned, rolling his eyes at the two of them.

"I here it's called constructive criticism these days" Bucky retorted.

"Hilarious" Steve stated blandly.

"Making sure I didn't kill Steve?" Tony inquired.

Steve couldn't help the warmth that spread over him at hearing Tony call him by his first name again.

"Scott actually gave me the green light. Said you didn't feel like mauling Steve beyond recognition anymore" Bucky explained, semi-relieved that something had been resolved, though it would have been well within Tony's rights not to.

"Still wanna punch him in the face though" Tony stated matter-of-factly.

"Take it from me, that urge isn't going away" Bucky advised him.

"You have my deepest respect and sincerest sympathies" Tony declared, half mocking half serious.

"I don't know why I thought you two getting to know each other would be a good thing" Steve exhaled, shaking his head.

"Cause you have a type. Brown hair, stubborn, and no tolerance for your shit" Bucky teasingly scoffed.

Steve couldn't help the blush rising to his cheeks as he glared at Bucky, mildly embarrassed by his friend's teasing.

"Really now?" Tony stated, grinning like a shark, "What else you got on wonderboy here?"

As Bucky shared blackmail worthy stories about him to Tony, Steve couldn't help but smile.

“Sometimes in order to rebuild you need to destroy the old foundation” Morrell proclaimed, “Once all the rubble and mess from the demolition has been cleared away you will have room to rebuild again...This time on a stronger, sturdier foundation”

'Hopefully this is the start of our new foundation' Steve silently prayed.

(Third POV)

**Xavier's School for Gifted Children**

"Hurry! The fireworks are about to start!" Jubilee excitedly proclaimed, pouncing atop the picnic blanket.
"We got the hotdogs!" Rogue shouted, smiling wide as she and John precariously balanced six hotdogs and three drinks each.

"About time" Kitty exclaimed, taking her food from John.

"Well you could've helped" John sneered.

"I did. I found us the perfect vantage point" Kitty retorted.

"Which happened to be conveniently far away from the barbeque" John stated, glaring knowingly at Kitty.

"I have no idea what you're talking about. The lake is the best romantic spot and has the most wide open sky" Kitty defended, taking a bite of her hotdog.

"We really need to talk about your insistence on inserting yourself in Danny and I's relationship" Bobby deadpanned.

"Not my fault the two of you act like an old elderly couple. I'm just trying to spice things up for you" Kitty justified.

"Are you actually equating us to the Professor and Erik?" Danny teased, grinning wide as the group groaned.

"I didn't need that visual" John grumbled.

"Look! They're starting" Jubilee squealed, pointing to the rocket stream in the sky.

As the group silently watched the myriad of colors exploding across the night sky, Danny and Bobby turned to face each other, leaning in close for a slow press of their lips.

Click.

"Definitely gonna be a keeper" Kitty smirked, grinning at the picture on her phone and ignoring Danny and Bobby's 'seriously' glare.

**Ryker's Island Penitentiary**

Boom.

With every explosion Wanda fell further and further into her own mind.


The pain. The fear.

Boom. Bam. Boom.

She was trapped underneath the rubble again.

But this time the shell had gone off.

Over and over again.

The cheerful colors of the explosions mocking her pain.
Outside the prison Vision frowned.

While his feelings towards Wanda were indeed still conflicting he could not in good conscience leave her in such a state.

Through the Mind Stone he could sense her mind breaking apart due to her PTSD.

While the tradition of fireworks on what is supposed to be a celebrated day in American history is meant to be beautiful and joyous, it is only causing Wanda to spiral further.

Hoping he was making the right, no, ethical decision, Vision focused on his connection to the Stone, asking for its help.

With a flicker that Vision could almost equate to a grumble, the Stone's power grew alight, allowing Vision to direct its energy toward his suffering comrade, gently lulling her into a peaceful dreamless sleep.

Avengers' Compound - Fields

Camped out on the fields Clint was Face Timing his family as the fireworks went off, making over-exaggerated exclamations at the louder booms.

Sam and Rhodey were contently sitting next to each other with Natasha observing all parties from the back.

Scott and Kira were making out to her front left.

Lydia had her head resting on Stiles' shoulder, their hands clasped together as they gazed peacefully into the sky.

Derek was off to the side on the phone with someone named Braeden. The genuine smile on his face an incredibly surprising development.

Glancing over her shoulder she could make out the three enhanced dangling their legs over the side of the roof.

A knowing smirk graced Natasha's lips.

An interesting development indeed.

Avengers' Compound - Roof

"I thought you said you wanted to be wined and dined?" Bucky inquired teasingly.

"Anything other than cheeseburgers and root beer on the Fourth of July is un-American you heathen" Tony proclaimed as he stuffed another edge of his burger in his mouth groaning at the flavor.

"Good to know my cooking skills are Tony Stark approved" Bucky stated smugly, his pupils widened slightly.
"I'm actually surprised you made anything at all. You know I was joking right?" Tony asked, mouth still half full.

"I invited you. S'only right I provide the food" Bucky shrugged, still eyeing Tony's mouth and throat as he took a swig of root beer.

"What other skills did you pick up on the run?" Tony inquired, oblivious to the effect his mere eating was causing.

Steve scoffed.

"Buck learned to cook from his Ma in order to...impress...dames...back in the day" Steve corrected, his speech breaking apart as a slow realization dawned on him.

Holy shit.

"What's wrong Punk?" Bucky inquired, looking at Steve in confusion.

"N-nothing" Steve stammered, immediately becoming flustered.

Steve could tell from Bucky's sceptical eyebrow that he didn't believe him, but Bucky knew him better than to press things now, turning his attention back to Tony.

Holy shit.

Steve recognized that look.

That was the same look Bucky had back in the day every time he fell hard for one of the dames he'd pick up.

Only this time that look was directed at Tony.

\textit{JCTC Holding Facility}

Haigh's face morphed into a sadistic grin as he flipped the visor of his helmet down.

He was going to show them some \textit{real} fireworks.

\textbf{Chapter End Notes}

Reconciliation!!

Poor Wanda :( 

Winteriron is finally making some headway <3

Uh oh. What is Haigh gonna do?

And Yayyyyy! We finally learn what Tony is!! A were-jackal! I have links partially explaining my choice (there are other plot reasons I chose this too - secrets secrets) ;)}
Also as I mentioned in my tags, the relationships right now are still tentative. I was going for a Winteriron endgame but after this chapter I'm wondering if this could end up a Stuckony work? What do you guys think?

Please [drop by the archive and comment](https://mydreamsymbolism.com/jackal-spirit-animal-totem-symbolism-and-meaning/) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!