A twin to Howard Stark, Elizabeth has always strived to be the first. The first to walk, talk, or become the first female Major in US history. She was the first Avenger and the first to fall in love. But first, the three of them have to make it through the war. Starts in Captain America: TFA, continuing until Avengers 4. Will crossover with Marvel's Agent of SHIELD. 

Steve/OC/Bucky

Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! Here is the newest story. Named after the Linkin Park song, What I've Done. We pick up in June 1943, where a pre-serum Steve Rogers is set to meet our lovely OC, Elizabeth Stark, even as Bucky already met her ;) As a twin to Howard, she’s been through it all. But don't take my word for it, take hers. Elizabeth took me for a ride as I began to write this story, and I'm excited to see how things change, alter and some just don't happen. But I won't spoil anything for you. You'll have to read to discover where her path leads us.

Elizabeth Stark is portrayed by Marie Avgeropoulos.
Enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney or the Avengers.
Chapter One

*Hell always seemed like a vague concept to me. A place of suffering, where circumstances never changed, and you couldn't escape. I didn't need to die to know Hell. I was living it.*

My brother would say that while he was born first, I lived first. I was the first to walk, the first to talk, the first to discover everything. Howard was the one allowed to go to school, to create a company by designing weapons, and I was expected to settle down, have a couple kids and keep a home. I basically said, "Fuck that," because I worked right alongside my brother, keeping him from killing himself or blowing up another lab.

The world wasn't my speed. The antiquated laws and rules weren't changing fast enough for me. So I didn't give two shits about what was expected of me when the war broke out. Most women signed up to be nurses, or aids to the brass, and the ones left at home took up the men's jobs in the factories. I didn't want any of that. I wanted to fight, to do something worthwhile in the war. I got to help him when he was asked to join the Manhattan Project after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour. While Howard was demonstrating a new weapon, I was lecturing the troops who would be using it about not being jackasses with said weapon. I took the weapon right out of Howard's hands, yelled, "Fire in the hole!" and proceeded to obliterate the target board.

Colonel Phillips gave me a smirk and said, "How would you like a promotion?"

And just like that I was a Major in the SSR. Well, a bit of basic training, and a shrug of Howard's shoulders, I was in the Army. Phillips liked the way I talked to the men, and pushed them, so he promoted me from my starting rank of 2nd Lieutenant to Major within the first year. It was a huge honor to be trusted with something so important, and given more responsibility along with my rank. And I was brought into the SSR right away, just as Johan Schmidt started making his way into our intelligence briefings more and more.

Howard hired a new assistant that I trained to watch him like a hawk. I met Edwin Jarvis when I was in London once, and I wrote Howard asking for help with getting Ana out of the Third Reich after his failed attempt at forging travel papers for her. I had no pull over this particular General that was court martialing him, but Howard was able to twist his arm. Ana sobbed in my arms after she was reunited with Jarvis, thanking me profusely, and I gained a friend.

I was working with Phillips in Camp Leigh, training recruits, and simultaneously developing tech with Howard. My days were long and the amount of bullshit I dealt with from stupid men wasn't enough to make me quit. I loved what I was doing, and I would prove to everyone that I deserved to be there. I earned their respect.

And then, I met Peggy Carter. She was a force of nature; blowing through the SSR and instantly making me love her. She took no shit from anyone, especially Colonel Phillips. Howard called us both bearcats and I promptly smacked him upside the head.

Peggy came back from a mission in the Bavarian Alps with a German scientist named Abe, who was brought into the SSR in exchange for his project, to create a super soldier army, to aid the Allies in winning the war. Abraham Erskine was a tough nut to crack, but once I did, he brought me in to the lab and explained some of what he was doing with the serum. Most of it wasn't written down, so it was interesting to watch him pull everything out of thin air. But the serum wasn't quite perfect.

After a drunken evening, I was usually regretting my behavior. But this was past regret. I was in deep shit and I had no way out.
"We should have tested it on an animal first. I cannot believe you talked me into this," Abe said, monitoring me as I went through a bout of wicked cold sweats.

"Anyone can be talked into just about anything when they're that drunk. You're not infallible Abe," I grimaced as my muscles constricted painfully. "I'm also to blame for this."

"I really need another set of eyes on you," He sighed, "And a medical doctor in case you turn for the worst."

"Hey, what did we say? No one must know. Howard will kill me, and Phillips will flip his lid. It's one thing for him to have taken a chance on a woman, by taking me into the army, but to take away the first subject spot from one of his recruits? I would like to live a little longer," I said, taking a sip of water and gasping in pain, "I'd rather die this way instead in front of a firing squad. I'll write a note so they go easy on you if I die."

"If this kills you, I will bring you back, just to kill you again," He sighed, taking my pulse for the second time in fifteen minutes.

I lived. Only, not the way I would have liked. I had a boost of endurance and strength that helped in training, but when I was injured, the injury would heal much faster than it should ever heal. Howard found out one time, after seeing me get a cut in the morning in the lab, and then seeing the healed forearm later that night at dinner. He demanded to know what I did. So I took him to Abe and had him explain.

"She isn't perfect."

"She's my sister, you don't think I don't know that?" Howard joked, making my punch his arm. He grabbed it immediately and said, "Fuck, how much are you training?"

"That's a side effect Mr. Stark. She has been given one of the first test samples of the Serum."

"Holy shit, the Serum?"

"We were drunk, and thought it would be funny. Cold sweats, every muscle in my body screaming, and now I can't get drunk. Kind of the universe's joke on me for a drunk decision," I said, sighing. What I wouldn't give for a drink for this conversation.

"Her metabolism burns off the alcohol before it can effect her. But Mr. Stark, had she been saturated with the proper radiation afterwards, she would have been perfect!"

"So what you are saying is that-"

"Yes Howard, I'm a super soldier," I deadpanned. He was silent a moment before saying, "Phillips doesn't know?"

"Do you think I would still be in the army if he did? I would be in Alamogordo so fast, your head would spin!"

"Please, Major Stark, Mr. Stark. This cannot get out," Abe said, seriously.

"I know," I sighed, rubbing my forehead and closing my eyes.

So, we kept the secret. We kept it close to our chests, and I was going to be the 'template' that the actual first subject would be measured against.
Peggy and I worked flawlessly together, not letting our ranks get in the way of our friendship. We trained recruits, put them through their paces, and made them absolutely perfect for shipping out. We expected perfection, and if you weren't, you stayed until you were. The men liked to make jokes at the beginning, that they'd take the torture to be around the pretty women a little longer, but eventually they realized they would rather fight a war than go through my training course one more time.

I had a small furlough, enough to go see Howard in New York for a week. I was supposed to be heading back tomorrow, but I was allowed one more night of fun, according to Ana and Jarvis. Ana had made me a stunning dress for my last night, because Howard was supposed to take me out dancing. Of course that wouldn't happen until after he announced his latest brainchild, a flying car. Whoopy-do. I wouldn't be taken dancing until Howard had finished, and even then a girl or two might distract him.

It was Flag Day, and the festivities were in full swing at the World of Tomorrow Expo. Howard liked to call it his expo, but I would tell him he was a glitterati, and the attention was making his head disportionate.

"Take it in Lizzie," Howard said, smirking at a group of his 'show girls'. One of them gave him a little wave and I internally rolled my eyes.

"How about you keep it in your pants brother?" I suggested, flicking his ear for calling me Lizzie. He knew I hated that nickname.

"Ouch. Why don't you go find some poor guy to abuse? You need a fella."

"Oh god. I have plenty of men in my life, I don't need another," I said rolling my eyes.

"Phillips, myself and your maggots, as you so fondly call them, are not the kind of guys I was talking about."

"Well, I was going to go find Abe after your show. He wanted me to test something," I said, backing up from where I looked out over the crowd from backstage.

"Go, on. I know I bore you," He sighed.

"Love you big brother," I said, hugging him tightly. He hugged me back just as fierce and said, "I love you too Lilabit."

After wiping a quick tear away, I gave him a winning smile and said, "See you in a week... Howie."

"Tell Erskine to pick the right guy, will ya? We need a good one to do his predecessor proud," He teased, tugging on a stray curl, before he got his queue to get ready. I walked out the door of the stage to the crowd, mind wandering over who could be worthy of the Serum. I certainly wasn't. I was drunk and thought it would be funny. I didn't do it for my country or for honor.

"Major Stark," I heard as I weaved my way from the crowd. My heart fluttered, seeing one of my favorite recruits, standing at attention. He hadn't openly flirted with me like some of the other recruits, but the kiss he gave me on the last day still made my knees weak thinking about it.

"At ease, Sergeant Barnes," I said, noting the women on either side of him, feeling my heart sink a little bit. His friend was hovering behind the trio, giving me a respecting nod.

"Here to see your brother, ma'am?" He asked, as the girls tried to sidle up closer to him, threatened by how he was treating me. I gave a smirk, noticing how his eyes were soft on me. Maybe he wasn't lying when he said he'd wait for me. But I couldn't think like that, as he was still an enlisted soldier.
"Yes, but my furlough is up tonight. Enjoy the show, Sergeant," I smiled, before looking back at his friend. He was cute too. Not in a, "I want to put him in my pocket." kind of way though. He was cute in a "Doesn't have self-confidence, even though he certainly is handsome," kind of way. Most girls would have looked right past him due to his height, but I was only about an inch taller than him and it didn't bother me.

"Buck up soldier, you'll get your shot yet," I said to his friend as I passed him. I had seen that look on many guys that wished to enlist, but were rejected. He looked up at me and with bright eyes, he said, "Thank you Ma'am."

"Don't thank me yet. War is a bloody affair, and I hope you have a strong stomach," I smirked, "What's your name?"

"Steven Rogers, ma'am."

"From your attitude, I'd say you have the heart, not just in it for glory. Just remember, we need good men in this war. Anyone who willingly enlists is good in my books," I said, before giving him a small smile.

"If I get in, I'll do you proud," He said, before adding quickly, "Ma'am."

"Well Rogers, I'll be seeing you," I smiled softly. I looked back at Barnes and his dates. They were watching the show, but Barnes was watching Rogers and I, practically green as he observed us.

He stood at attention as I nodded to him in goodbye.

"Rogers," I said, before turning to walk back to the enlistment office in the Expo. I got nods from the MP's and a nurse told me that Dr. Erskine had just finished up with his last patient. Abe was just gathering his things as I walked into his office, and smiled at me in greeting.

"I'm here, what's this test?" I asked, before scrunching my face up in pain, "What's that noise?"

"That is the test. Your hearing, as you mentioned, is another effect of the Serum," He said, flicking a switch and making the noise stop, "That was a small device your brother made for me. The noise attracted dogs, who hear much higher frequencies than humans."

"I have dog hearing? And I thought I was going crazy, hearing voices. That's it, I'm a freak of nature," I sighed.

"Our next subject will be able to as well. So, no, you are not a freak," He smiled, "Come, let us grab dinner."

We started walking out, when I noticed certain conversations around us were louder than usual. I started focusing on certain people, hoping to fine-tune this better, when I heard two men arguing. Men I had just been talking to.

"As who, Steve from Ohio? They'll catch you, what's worse, they'll actually take you," Barnes said to his friend, sounding angry.

"Look, I know you don't think I can do this-"

"This isn't a back alley Steve, this is a war," Barnes said as Erskine and I rounded the corner to the front hall.

"I know it's a war-"
"Why are you so keen to fight? There are so many important jobs," Barnes said, and I watched him as Erskine slowed to eavesdrop. I pretended to face him to give the pretense of us having a conversation, to cover up the fact we were eavesdropping.

"What? Collect scrap metal in my little red wagon?" Steve bit back.

"Yes, why not?"

"I'm not gonna sit in a factory Bucky. Bucky, there are men laying down their lives. I've got no right to do any less than them. That's what you don't understand. This isn't about me," Rogers said.

"Right, cause you've got nothing to prove," Barnes said, and I saw Abe quickly look back at me. Bucky also took a quick glance around before stepping closer to Steve.

"Steve, I love you," Bucky said softly, but loud enough that I could hear it plain as day from where I stood. My eyes widened, and I risked a quick glance up as Bucky continued. Abe asked what I had heard, but I shook my head to wait, as Barnes said, "I wish I could kiss you right now, to say goodbye like I want."

"I know Buck, I love you too. I wish we had one last night together," Rogers said, and I covered my mouth in shock. Barnes had seemed like such a ladies man, that I never suspected… Was all his flirting a lie? But that kiss had seemed so real, no hesitation…

"You know why we can't. We said we needed to stop, to find girls and not give anyone a chance to think we… I can be kicked out of the army for it."

"Bucky, you don't think I saw you checking out the Major?"

I blushed hard, hearing Barnes's response of, "You're clobbered by her too."

"She's beautiful. She seemed to like you," Rogers said, sounding a little bitter.

"You too Punk. I wasn't sure if I was jealous 'cause she was talking to you, or you were talking to her. She's a bombshell, and a bit of a bearcat. She took no shit from anyone back in training. You know I love you, but I was falling for her as well," Barnes said, as Abe asked, "What are they saying?"

"Something personal," I whispered back. Barnes was falling for me? So the kiss was real and the flirting was genuine.

"Hey Sarge, are we going dancing?" I heard one of Barnes' dates call out to him.

"Yes we are," He said, as I turned to see him look back at his dates. He looked back at Steve and said, "Don't do anything stupid until I get back."

"How can I? You're taking all the stupid with you."

"You're a punk."

"Jerk," Steve said as they gave a hug.

"Ask her out," Barnes said lowly to Steve, "If I can't have either of you, I would hope you had her, and she had you."

"I will try, but I'm telling you, she wants you."
"We’ll see about that," Barnes said, before backing away.

"Be careful," Rogers said, "Don't win the war till I get there."

I watched Barnes give him a salute, and I gave him a small smile, when he caught my eye turning. Bucky walked back to his dates, saying, "Come on girls, they are playing our song."

Rogers turned and walked past Abe and myself, not seeing us as he went to enlist, for what sounded like not the second time. Abe gave me a look and said, "It's him, isn't it?"

"Maybe. I think he deserves a shot."

"A chance," Abe smiled, "I shall only be a moment."

"Go get him," I smiled, nodding towards the hallway Steve just turned down.

It was the next afternoon that I saw Rogers again, my mind was still reeling from the conversation he and Barnes had at the Expo. It was immoral; in fact, most of the US thought it was illegal. The Nazi's were arresting them and putting them into concentration camps. But as I walked towards our newest batch of greenhorns, I watched Steve catch sight of me and stand at attention before Peggy could yell, "Recruits, attention."

"Gentlemen, I'm Agent Carter, and this is Major Stark. We supervise all operations for this division. Major Stark has designed this training program to test your endurance, agility and ensure you are the best equipped for wherever you are stationed in the theatre."

"What's with the accent Queen Victoria? I thought I was signing up for the US Army," One man said, before looking over at me, "And what's a women know about being a soldier?"

"What's your name soldier?" Peggy asked, ignoring his comments.

"Filmore Hodge, your Majesty," He said sarcastically.

"Step forward Hodge. Put your right foot forward," She said, and he did as he was told, sharing looks with a few of his fellow recruits.

"Are we gonna wrestle? Cause I got a few moves I know you'll like," He said, giving a small wink to Peggy. I rolled my eyes and waited for the inevitable. She pulled back and gave him the right hook he deserved, before I walked over to pick him up by his shirt collar. He was dangling just off the ground, so no one got suspicious of how a woman my size could be so strong.

"The next time I hear you or anyone else disrespecting Agent Carter, I am going to make you eat your teeth. I will make your life so miserable here, you'll be begging Hitler to take you as a POW. Do I make myself clear?" I said, starting out softly and raising my voice to a yell, addressing the recruits with the question.

"Yes Major!" Steve barked out first, making me smile internally as the rest of the recruits answered in the same manner.

"Agent Carter, Major Stark," A voice said behind us as a Jeep pulled up.

"Colonel Phillips," We responded as I dumped Hodge back in the dirt, and turned to face him.

"I see you're breaking in the candidates. That's good," I heard Chester say, the amusement in his
voice obvious as he strode towards where Hodge was still laying down in the dirt at our feet.

"Get your ass up out of that dirt and stand in that line at attention, until somebody comes and tells you what to do."

"Yes sir," He said, sniffing back the blood that threatened to fall from his nose. Peggy and I backed up to give the Colonel some room to inspect the recruits.

"General Patton has said, that wars are fought with weapons, but they are won by men. We are going to win this war, because we have the best… men," Phillips said, eyeing Steve, and glancing at me. I smiled and nodded that he was my pick, and he shook his head slightly.

"And because they are going to get better, much better. The Strategic Scientific Reserve, is an Allied effort, made up of the best minds of the Free World. Our goal is to create the best army in history. But every army starts with one man. At the end of this week, we will choose that man. He will be the first, in a new breed of super soldiers," Phillips said, and I locked eyes with Abe, who's flashed at me.

"And they, will personally escort Adolph Hitler, to the gates of hell," Chester said, before nodding to me.

"Alright, ladies," I said, "Get ready to puke your guts out, because this course isn't going to be easy. You will run it, everyday, until you are perfect. I like to call this course, the Absentee Father. He's tough, brutal even. His presence in your life is brief but it will scar you and instill a toughness in you, that will carry you through birthdays, Christmases and the rest of this war when you are pinned down by the enemy just waiting to die from dehydration or starvation," I shouted. The men seemed to realize that I wasn't joking, because they looked a little scared.

"Out here, you have no one but your fellow soldiers. Those that work together will succeed. Those who don't play by my rules, will be running it again and again, until your muscles are crying out in fatigue and your feet bleed. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes Major!" They yelled.

"Good. Now ladies, follow Drill Sergeant Foy here, to get fitted for packs and rifles. Once you have, report back and we'll begin the torture. I mean, testing," I smiled sarcastically, as Foy nodded at me. I caught Rogers' eye as they handed back their clipboards and sent him a little wink when no one was looking. He blushed red, before I turned to speak with Chester.

"Who is that?" He asked me lowly.

"Steven Rogers, our future super soldier," I smiled knowingly at him.

"He won't last the first twenty minutes."

"Sir, if you like to make that a wager, I'd be happy to put in 20 dollars that says your wrong," I said, making Peggy smirk.

"You've got a gambling problem Major, if you think that boy will survive your program. The big one, that Agent Carter knocked into the dirt maybe, but not the twig," He said, seriously.

"People can surprise you," Abe said, "He was very adamant about enlisting."

"Doctor, I think you may have just killed him by allowing him in here. His dead body is on both of our hands," Chester said to us, as I internally rolled my eyes at his dramatics. He walked away and I
said, "He won't die. I won't let him."

"Don't be too hard on him."

"Hey, just because I like the guy doesn't mean I can give him special treatment. You heard him yesterday. He wants the same chance as anybody else. And I'm gonna give it to him."

Slang translation:

bearcat (1920's term): a kickass woman, who takes no shit (I may be paraphrasing lol)

brainchild: Someone's creative idea

glitterati: rich famous people who love bright lights and cameras

bombshell: attractive female
Chapter Two

Chapter Notes

Hello faithful readers! This work is also available to read on my Fanfiction profile of the same username.

It was a grueling week for the recruits. Steve was always falling behind in the course, with no one stopping to help him, but he continued to try. In the evenings, the recruits were either in their barracks on in the mess hall. I would seek Steve out in the Mess Hall, because he sat by himself. I would check up on him, make sure he was eating enough, and asking if he had any injuries he didn't disclose to his Drill Sergeant. He was always polite; never giving more than was respectable, to my position. Even if he cheeks did pink up when I approached him most nights.

And the day of the hike was always my favorite. But watching Steve struggle to breathe was killing me. Having known what asthma felt like, I knew exactly what he was going through. The Serum would wipe out all of his pre-existing conditions, as it did with mine. I had bad ankles from years of my mother forcing me into heels instead of flats. After the serum, gone.

"Squad, halt!" He said, as the recruits stopped at their Drill Sergeant's command. I had been sitting in the back of the Jeep, waiting for the troops as I went over their test results of the last couple days. Peggy was needed for debrief of information they had received from Europe, and I would be filled in later. Colonel Phillips kept leaving me notes about Hodge this, Hodge that. It was sickening.

"That flag means we are only at the halfway point. First man that brings me that flag, get's a ride back with Major Stark!" Foy yelled, encouraging the men to climb the pole. When he felt no one would get it, I commanded the squad to fall back in.

"Rogers, I said fall in!" Foy yelled, as I turned to see Steve undoing the lynch pin and letting the pole fall to the ground. I had to hide my smile, as he walked over to grab the flag, bundling it up and handing it to Foy with a mumbled, "Thank you sir."

He hopped in the back with me, nodding at me respectively, as the driver started the Jeep. When I was sure we were out of sigh of the rest of the men, I pulled out a canteen from under the seat and said, "You need to stay hydrated."

"That's awfully kind of you Major, but I can't take your water," He said, still wheezing.

"Shall I make it an order, Private?" I smiled, forcing it into his hand. He nodded, grateful as he gulped it down.

"Do you have a nebulizer?" I asked after he stopped drinking. He gasped, "Had to leave it in my bunk."

"We'll drop you off there when we get back to camp. Don't need you have more of an asthma attack walking there," I teased. He pinked up again, and it definitely wasn't from the running.

"I know you wouldn't be giving me special treatment ma'am," He said, looking up and wondering if he had crossed a line.
"Not to a soldier under my purview. But to someone who I have really grown to admire," I said, making sure the driver wasn't listening, before smiling at Steve. He seemed to be not breathing, until I gently touched his arm, "Private?"

"Sorry. It's just… no one has ever said that I'm admirable. Except Bucky," He said, as I nodded, "He sounds like a wonderful friend. I'd like to hear more about him. I only knew him as my recruit. I'd actually like to know more about you too."

"I'm no one special," He said as the driver stopped in front of the barracks.

"I disagree. I'll get you to see it one day," I said, gesturing for him to get out.

"Stranger things have happened," He conceded, "I don't think there has been a time you've not gotten what you went after."

"Not because of money, or influence, but because I believed in myself. You believed in yourself enough to enlist, so why not that you could be something more?"

He didn't have a response to that, so I motioned to the driver to move. When I looked back at Steve, he was giving me a salute, and a boyish smile that nearly stopped my heart.

I thought my bad thoughts about Barnes…Bucky, would drive me crazy, but the thoughts I had about Rogers…Steve, started to mingle in with the ones about Bucky. I wondered what they were like…together. It was well known to the world that Howard and I weren't religious. Our parents had died when we were teenagers, and we didn't really care for church. So I wasn't concerned with the sodomy of Bucky and Steve being together. It fascinated me though, and distracted me.

I had fallen for Bucky's charm when he was in basic here. He would steal away for a minute or two to find me, bring me a flower, or simply ask how I was doing that day. It was flattering, and not unwanted, but as his superior officer, I couldn't be seen with him in a romantic setting. I was already a woman, ranking higher than most of the men here, I didn't want to give them any ammunition that I was sensitive or easily swayed by the right amount of flirting to turn into a giggling schoolgirl or a khaki wacky dame.

Bucky understood, and said he would work hard to outrank me, or at least make officer, so he could take me out. He was still flirting with me, but he was a little more inconspicuous about how he did it. He had kissed me in secret, behind the Officer's quarters their last day, and I had told him to make sure he lived through this war.

Coming out of my musings, I watched the recruits pensively. It was the last day, and we were announcing our pick later, but Phillips was still not convinced.

"He is the clear choice," Abe said, as they came up to stand beside me. I was leaning against the back of the truck.

"When you brought a ninety pound asthmatic onto my Army base, I let it slide. I thought what the hell? He could be useful to you, like a gerbil," Chester said, as Foy and Peggy watched the men.

"Up!" Peggy commanded, "Jumping jacks."

"Put a needle in that kids arm, its gonna go right through him."

"Don't be so pessimistic," I said, "He's perfect for the program."
"Look at that," Chester said, nodding his head towards Steve, "He's making me cry."

"I am looking for qualities beyond the physical," Abe said, almost annoyed.

"Do you know how long it took to set up this project? All the groveling I had to do with Senator what's his name's committees?"

"I know, I am well aware of your efforts," Abe said as I watched Steve pant.

"Then throw me a bone here. Hodge past every test we gave him. He's big, he's fast, he obeys orders, he's a soldier!" Chester said, to which Abe replied, "He's a bully."

"You don't win war with niceness Doctor," He said, glancing around at me and moved to grab a dummy grenade from the crate behind my head.

"You win it with guts," He said pulling the pin and tossing it at the recruits' feet.

"Grenade!" They all scrambled for cover, while Steve dove on top of it, using his body to shield them from the blast. Only the blast didn't come as I approached him slowly. He yelled for me to get back, only to realize it still hadn't gone off.

He sat up, looking at me and Peggy and asked, "Is this a test?"

"He's still skinny," I heard Chester say and I smiled at Steve.

"Yes. And you passed with flying colors," I said offering him a hand up. He took it, as I said, "Quick on your feet there Rogers. You could be a pretty good dancer if you tried."

"Most girls don't want to dance with a guy they might step on," He said, looking down at his feet.

"I'm not most girls," I said softly, watching him raise his head, wondering if he heard me right. I gave him a quick wink, before I said, "Recruits, dismissed."

The men left, as did Steve, giving a slight blush to the one or two guys that gave him a congratulatory pat on the back for his bravery.

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Abe went to visit Steve that night, bringing a bottle of wine from his hometown in Germany. It amused me that he forgot Steve couldn't have any fluids before the procedure tomorrow, as I watched him drink both glasses of the wine from the window. I met him at the door and he gave me a smile, as if knowing why I was here. As he left Steve alone, he gave the signal that he would stand lookout for me. Abe had seen the looks I gave him and confronted me about it. He was more of a father figure than my own ever was, wanting me to be happy, even if he didn't know it.

"Steve," I said softly, seeing his back to the door. He turned, and gave me a small smile, "Major."

"Please, when we are alone, call me Elizabeth."

"So that's your first name," He said, gesturing for me to take a seat on the other bed. I chose to sit next to him, causing him to sit up straighter.

"Elizabeth Hermione Stark."

"Hermione? Like Shakespeare?"

"Like, my father didn't want to completely dismiss my Greek heritage when they immigrated here."

They named me Elizabeth to fit in though," I blushed.

"My parents were Irish, so I can understand the struggle," He nodded.

"I go by many names though. Howard calls me Lilabit, because he is older and likes to remind me. My best friend growing up called me Lizzie, but I wasn't a fan of that nickname. It was too childish sounding. Peggy calls me Eliza, and I like that one," I said, feeling more comfortable.

"You said I could call you Elizabeth. What about Elle?"

"I… like that one. Okay, only Steve gets to call me Elle," I blushed again. His smile was bright enough to light the room, as he said, "Elle."

"Are you nervous?" I asked, remembering the pain of my own Serum.

"No. I thought I was, but I think knowing I'm not the only one is helping."

"What?" I asked, my blood running cold.

"Dr. Erskine told me about you," He said, giving me a compassionate smile. I shook my head, knowing Abe trusted Steve enough with the serum, so the secret of my own experience was nothing.

"The serum wasn't ready, and we were really drunk. In part, I blame Howard. He always says that he was born first, but I lived first. I had to be the first to do everything. I do some pretty stupid stuff because of that logic," I said, rubbing my hands together nervously.

"I know what that's like. Bucky was always picking me out of back alleys, picking fights with bullies twice my size," He said, before I saw his hand reach out and pull back abruptly.

"Tomorrow you won't be under my command," I said, reaching out to take his hand. He seemed to understand my intentions, tentatively reaching to meet me halfway. When our lips met, it was soft and warm. He must have gotten pretty good at kissing Bucky, because I was not disappointed with his skills.

And all at once it stopped after a sharp knock on the door. Abe's signal that someone was coming.

"I'll see you tomorrow soldier," I said, giving him one last peck on his cheek and hightailing it out of there, my curls flying behind me as Abe opened and closed the door for me, and walking us back like I hadn't just been the barracks.

"So?" He asked, as I blushed.

"Ah, so he likes you too," He smiled. I huffed, "Don't be like that Abe. It was one little kiss."

"Well, that is something. Two of my creations, getting together over a mutual understanding. He told
"No, he didn't," I said, deflating.

"He told me. You should stand with your brother. I want you there in case something goes wrong," He said.

"You plan on something going wrong?" I said, giving him a look.

"No, but things can, even when we least expect them too. I will ask you what I asked Steven tonight. Whatever happens tomorrow, you will stay who you are. Not a good soldier, but a good woman."

"You asked him to be a good woman?" I teased, unable to help the laugh that escaped at the thought. Abe laughed as well, "You know what I meant."

"I did. And I promise. I'll make you proud, whatever happens," I said softly.

Slang translation:

khaki wacky: boy crazy
dame: woman
Abe and I were off first thing for Brooklyn, me to ensure Howard was sober, and Abe to check over the Serum for the last time.

"HOWARD!" I yelled into his lab. A groan and a thunk sounded from further inside and I rolled my eyes.

"Jarvis has hot coffee and a full breakfast waiting for you in the dining room. Get up before I pour cold water over your head," I said, stepping over half done inventions and blueprints strewn on the floor.

"Hurry, hurry, hurry. Steve is waiting. I mean-"

But it was too late, because instead of the 'hung-over' Howard I would expect, it sobered him right up as he smiled at me, "Well, well, well. The soldier is Steve to you, huh?"

"Private Rogers is waiting," I said tersely as I dragged him up by his arm and towards the door.

"I don't like being manhandled," He complained as I got him into the dining room. I forced him down in his chair and said, "I don't care. You will be at least courteous to remember that if you mess up, it costs him his life. So you need to be sober and attentive today. How's the machine?"

"Purring like a kitten," He said, waving me off as Jarvis poured Howard a cup of coffee.

"Will you be having breakfast Ms. Stark?" Jarvis asked, smiling at me.

"I would love some, thank you Jarvis. But I might not eat all of it. I'm a little too nervous to eat," I said, as Howard took a bite of his toast.

"Well, now I'm nervous," He said, looking up at me sarcastically, "Thanks Sis."

"Oh hush up and sober up," I said, shoving his toast back in his mouth.

Howard was sober enough for my liking by the time we got to the facility in Brooklyn. He tripled checked the machine the night before, and I put my trust in him. Unlike his failed concept of a flying car. He would perfect it, but this was a little more important to the future.

The doors opened at the platform above the lab stage, and everyone stopped as they took in Steve. He was nervous, until he spotted me. I gave him a smile and he seemed to relax as he and Peggy walked down the stairs to us. I stood behind Abe as he greeted Steve with a handshake and a gentle, "Good morning."

"Please, not now," He said as a camera flash went off. He looked to Steve and asked, "Are you ready?"

Steve nodded, looking at the machine and then me.

"Good, take off your shirt, your tie and your hat," He said, as I held my arms to take them from Steve. He blushed slightly as Peggy and I locked eyes, hers dancing with amusement.

"Shouldn't you go find a seat?" I said to Peggy when Steve turned his back slightly, giving her a look. She pressed her lips together to stop her smile and said, "Thank you Major. Private, good luck."
“Thank you Agent Carter,” Steve said, nodding to her. As Steve got up to lay on the table of the machine, I said, ”Steve, I won't lie to you. This is going to hurt.”

“I know.”

“You are brave for doing this. I was a coward who did it while intoxicated. I would never have had the guts to do this sober.”

“I don't believe that,” He said, eyes soft as I looked up at him.

“Neither do I,” Abe said as he approached us.

“Comfortable?” He asked Steve.

“It's a little big,” He joked, before looking at Abe, ”Did you save me any of that Schnapps?”

“Not as much as I should have. Sorry, next time,” He said apologetically.

“I'll have a whole case flown in to celebrate,” I smiled at Steve to ease his mind.

“Mr. Stark, what are your levels?” Abe asked, and I saw the confusion on Steve's face as my brother came forward.

“Levels at 100 percent. We may dim half the lights in Brooklyn, but we are ready. As we will ever be,” Howard added not instilling any confidence into his voice, making me smack him upside the head. Steve was looking panicked and it was probably in relation to Howard's flying car failure.

“Don't listen to him Steve, everything is going to be fine,” I smiled to Steve.

“Ah, so Steve, we meet at last. My sister has told me- OW OW OW!” Howard said as I pinched his arm and directed him away from Steve.

“Abusive,” I heard, making Steve smile.

Abe signaled for me to go stand by Howard, and I quickly leaned down to Steve's ear and said, ”If we weren't in a room full of people that could fire me for it, I would kiss you good luck.”

“Last night's was all the luck I need Elle,” He smiled, before fumbling, ”I mean Major.”

“Remember, I'm your Elle,” I laughed, before straightening up and saying louder, ”Good luck Private Rogers.”

“Thank you Ma'am,” He said, as I gave him a nod and went to go stand with Howard.

“What was that about?” Howard asked, grinning at me.

“Just asking him about his next of kin if this went south,” I said, before asking, ”You ready?”

“Always. I'll get your fella through this,” He teased, making me groan, ”I'm going to kill you.”

“Do you hear me, is this on?” I heard Abe ask after flicking the microphone.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, today we take not another step towards annihilation, but the first step, on the path to peace. We begin with a series of microinjections into the subject’s major muscles groups. The Serum infusion will cause immediate cellular change. And then to stimulate growth, the subject will be saturated with Vita Rays.”
I watched Steve get given a shot of Penicillin and mistake it for the serum, as Abe explained, with an apologetic look on his face.

"Serum infusion in 5…4…3…2…1," Abe counted down, putting a hand on Steve's shoulder in comfort.

I watched Steve as the vials emptied, and remembered the intense pain I went through. His eyes opened suddenly and Abe said, "Now Mr. Stark."

Howard pulled down a lever, only for the machine to raise and enclose in panels over Steve, as a lab worker attached a hose to the back, mainly to keep the reactors cool, but to provide Steve with oxygen.

"Steven, can you hear me?"

"It's probably too late to go to the bathroom, right?" I heard muffled and I gave a smirk. He certainly had sass.

"We will proceed."

Howard turned a dial, handing me a pair of glasses to shield my eyes to which I handed them back. He rolled his eyes and put them on himself, before moving to a large wheel crank. He started the machine, calling out every ten percent increment, until it reached 70% and I heard Steve's blood curdling scream of pain.

"No," I whispered, as Peggy came out screaming to shut it down. Abe told me brother the same, and I was so scared for Steve when we heard, "NO!"

"I can do this!" He yelled, and my heart swelled in pride as Howard started again, turning the wheel and counting up to 100%. The power died before Howard could shut it off, with the back up generator kicking in and bringing power back to the lab. The reactor stopped though, a failsafe Howard implemented, early in the design stage.

"Mr. Stark," Abe said, as Howard hit the lever to open the machine.

As it opened, my eyes widened as I took in the human perfection that emerged. Steve was panting hard, a light sheen of sweat covering his skin, and making his muscles glisten. And holy shit, was there muscles.

"We did it," Abe said, helping Steve down.

"You actually did it," Howard said and I came to stand in front of Steve.

"How do you feel?" I asked, noticing the pure relief on his face. That was his lungs filing for the first time completely. An oxygen high.

"Taller," He quipped and I chuckled, taking the offered shirt from the nurse, and helping him into it. I turned to see Peggy, shaking hands with Abe, who then looked up in suspicion. I started walking over to him, with the intent to ask him what was wrong, when an explosion erupted from the viewing booth. As Abe got up, screaming to stop him, I got in between him and the man stealing the last Serum vial.

The man shot three times, once winging my right arm, and another two missing me entirely. I fell back into Steve's arms, only to turn and see Abe on the floor.
"No!" I screamed, crawling over to him.

He didn't speak as we heard gunfire in the background, with Peggy in pursuit. He simply pointed towards my heart, and then poked Steve's and I knew the message. I wept as he died in my arms, and Steve took off, flying up the stairs in rage.

"Lilabit!" Howard screamed, seeing that I was injured as he pushed his way through the crowd to me. I grabbed him tightly and said, "Give me your jacket and cover it up. No one saw me get hurt."

He jumped up to retrieve the suit jacket, under the guise that I was in shock. He pulled me away from Abe's body, as I cried into his shoulder. He directed me to a small room, where I could take a look at my injury without prying eyes. I removed the bullet, cleaned the wound and bandaged it, making sure that the blood wasn't noticeable on my uniform. I would claim it was Abe's, so no one got any ideas.

By the time I had dried my eyes and made sure I looked presentable, Steve returned.

He saw me as he entered, and I flagged him into medical, noticing he was bleeding.

"Shirt off, I need to clean your wound," I said, pulling out a few things. Instead of him doing as I asked, he gently cupped my arm, asking me to turn around. I did, promising myself I wouldn't cry again.

"Did you know him well?"

"He was my friend. I guess you could say he was like a father to me, but that was putting it lightly," I said, letting a tear fall as he offered a hug. I fell into his arms, accepting his comfort.

"I'm so sorry Elle," He said softly.

"I am too. I could have helped you grab that guy," I said, muffled into his chest.

"Don't blame yourself," He said pulling away to look me in the eyes.

"But I do, I could have taken those bullets for him. I wasn't fast enough," I said, wiping my eyes again.

"No. We had no way of knowing this was going to happen, so we can't claim responsibility for not stopping it, or saving someone," He said sternly.

"He wasn't just someone Steve. He was a friend, but he was the heart of Project Rebirth. We can't make the serum without him. We are the first and last of our kind," I said sadly.

"Oh."

"But if it had to work just once, correctly might I add," I joked, making him smile sadly, "He would be glad it was you."

"I know he was glad you did as well," He said, "He told me last night."

"Well, I was a mistake," I joked, as he lifted my chin.

"Not to him. And not to me," He said, and I watched him duck his head to me.

"Steve, wait -" I said, stopping his approach to my lips. He looked perplexed for a moment until I
said, "I overheard you and Bucky at the Expo Enlistment office. I know that you love him."

He looked panicked for a moment, setting his jaw and waiting for me to continue.

"I don't mind. It's not a problem for me. Well, not in the normal way. The problem is, I didn't tell you about Bucky and myself," I said looking up at him.

"He was flirting with me his entire basic training, even managed to steal a kiss his last day. Not that I minded. He was sweet, and I really thought if I wasn't in a position of authority over him, I could fall for him. I guess I was falling, but I don't know if I will ever see him again."

"Did you hear him, what he said to me about you?" He asked.

"Yeah, super hearing has its downsides. You eavesdrop on conversations about yourself and find out what people really think of you," I teased.

"He said that if he couldn't have either of us, he would hope I had you and you had me," He recited, making me sigh.

"Steve-" I sighed, as he said, "No, life is too short. We don't know what is going to happen tomorrow. I could grow a second head for all we know."

I chuckled at the thought, and I knew he was right. I was well aware we didn't know what would happen tomorrow, so I threw caution to the wind and brought him down to meet my lips. He brought me flush against his body, and I moaned at the feeling of his hard muscles pressed up against me. And then something else hard was pressed up against me.

"Oh god," He flushed, separating us and turning away.

"Steve," I said softly, touching his shoulder.

"I'm sorry," He said, and I could see his ears turning pink in embarrassment.

"Steve, please, don't be embarrassed," I said, flushing a bit myself, "It's a natural reaction."

"I just… need a minute here," He said. I stayed quiet, while he breathed deeply. When he turned around, he couldn't meet my eye, but I got up in his face and said, "It's okay."

"Are you okay? I saw you get hit," He said, looking down to my arm trying to change the subject.

"All healed. Or it will be within the hour," I teased.

"It's been a long day. Phillips says you can bunk here for the night and we do your physical in the morning. They are going to want samples from you, so a good nights rest will be in order first."

"Samples?" He asked confused.

"Um, blood, and… other things," I said, blushing slightly. He understood, clearing his throat and said, "Is that necessary?"

"Erskine wanted to know if it effected your ability to conceive. That was a lot of radiation," I said, and Steve nodded.

"Was yours?" He asked before blushing again, "Not that its any of my business Major. Forgive me for my rudeness."
"It's not rude. Well, in this case it's not. It's hardwired into us to find a mate that can provide offspring, so I understand your questioning in regards to the Serum. As I didn't have the Vita-Rays, Abe theorized that I was actually the perfect incubator. But I won't know for sure until I have children," I blushed. This was a very deep conversation for us only having kissed. I didn't even know it he wanted to be with me.

"It's something very personal, and I shouldn't have asked. Forgive me Major," he said, shaking his head slightly and looking at me earnestly.

"If that's what you want, you're forgiven. But there is nothing to forgive," I said getting closer to him and reaching up to kiss him softly. He responded bringing me close and continuing the kiss, moaning softly and I tangled my fingers into his hair.

"You aren't like other dames," He smiled as we pulled back to catch our breath.

"I consider myself one of a kind," I teased, chuckling as I kissed him sweetly once more, before looking out the window.

"Well, it's getting late, and I should let you rest. I'll meet you tomorrow to bring you back," I said, gesturing to the door, "Peggy can find you a room for the night. She'll be downstairs."

We parted, with one last sweet kiss before I turned to go find my brother.
Chapter Four

I brought Steve to the medical room the next morning, giving him a small smile of encouragement, as I knew he was nervous about certain tests. A few kisses and he was smiling and laughing freely by the time we heard a knock.

I went to the door, to see it was Peggy and the nurse of Erskine's, Helen, I think her name was, and a doctor to give Steve his physical.

"I will step outside," I said, giving Steve a small smile, "Private."

"Major," He nodded back, as I walked into the hall with Peggy. She gave me a look and I said, "What?"

"Your lipstick is smudged a bit," She said, gesturing to the corner of my mouth. I quickly found a reflective surface and groaned trying to tidy up my mouth, "Shit."

"So, when did that start?" She asked, teasing me.

"The night before last. Abe… stood lookout as I talked to him alone in the barracks."

"I see. I'm sorry dear, you know I am. He was a good man," She said, and I nodded, "The best."

"It was Hydra, wasn't it?" I asked her.

"Yes. It's hard to tell where everything is going from here, but you need to know they are suspending the program," She said as I nodded, "That was to be expected."

"Peg, I hate war," I sighed.

"All the best soldiers do, Elizabeth," She said, patting my shoulder in comfort. Peg stayed behind to guide Steve back through the base and I made my way down to Howard, who looked up at me in question. I gave a gentle smile back and he nodded. It wasn't mind reading; we just knew each other that well. We were quiet a few minutes more as Howard worked, and I knew not to disturb him but handed him tools when he held out his hand behind him.

"Colonel Phillips, my committee is demanding answers," Senator Brandt said, following behind a determined Phillips.

"Great. Let's talk about how a German spy got a ride to my secret installation in your car? What have we got here?" Phillips directed the second question at my brother.

"Well, speaking modestly, I'm the best mechanical engineer in the country. But I don't know what's inside this thing or how it works. We're not even close to this technology," Howard said glumly.

"Well, who is?"

"Hydra," Chester said, before adding sarcastically, "I'm sure you've been reading our briefings."

"I'm on a number of committee's Colonel," The Senator bit back.

"Hydra is a Nazi Deep Science Division. It's led by Johann Schmidt. But they have much bigger ambitions," Peggy said, as I watched her and Steve come towards our gathering.
"Hydra is practically a cult. They worship Schmidt, they think he's invincible," Phillips added.

"So what are you going to do about it?"

"Spoke to the President this morning. As of today the SSR is being re-tasked," Phillips said, approaching me.

"Colonel?" I asked in confusion.

"We are taking the fight to Hydra. Pack your bags Major Stark, Agent Carter. You too Stark. We are flying to London tonight."

"Sir?" Steve said, as I shot him a panicked look. We had just started getting to know each other better, and we were being separated.

"If you are going after Schmidt, I want in," Steve says confidently.

"You are an experiment, you are going to Alamogordo."

"The serum worked," Steve said, wondering why he was being dismissed.

"I asked for an army, and all I got was you. You are not enough," Phillips said, and I felt my blood boil as I glared a hole into Phillips's head.

"Say goodbye to your boy Major," Phillips said, and I had to fight not to let angry tears gather in my eyes.

"Yes, I know about that," He said quietly, before turning to leave.

"With all due respect for the Colonel, I think we may be missing a point here. I've seen you in action Steve. More importantly, the country's seen it," He said before gesturing to his aide to bring over the newspaper over.

"The enlistment lines have been around the block since you hit the newsstands. You don't take a soldier, a symbol like that and hide him in a lab. Son, do you want to serve your country on the most important battlefield of the war?" Brandt said, and I could sense this wasn't going to be good.

"Sir, that's all I want," Steve said, and I screwed my eyes shut as I realized he put the final nail in the coffin with that line.

"Then congratulations, you just got promoted," Brandt said and I watched as Brandt walked away, and Peggy followed to make sure him and his aide got out alright after they gave Steve their contact information and where to go.

I gestured for him to follow me, weaving down halls and double-checking the coast was clear before I opened a door and gestured for him to walk inside. He did as I watched the hall, backing inside as I closed the door. I turned on the light, only to see Steve watching me.

"Phillips had no right to say what he did about you," I started off with.

"I don't know about that. I was supposed to be the first, not the last," He said, looking down.

"Steve, you know why I took a chance on you?" I said, taking one of his hands, "Because I saw something great in you. You faced Hodge everyday, his torment. You got up each day and didn't quit, even when the Absentee Father was kicking your ass. You refused to relieve your pain in that chamber yesterday, because you knew you weren't done yet. He is going to see it too."
"It doesn't matter. I am gonna serve. I'm gonna make you proud Major," He smiled.

"I'm already proud of you Steve," I smiled back. He didn't say anything, but brought me closer for another kiss. I squeaked a bit at his tight hold and he pulled back to ask if he hurt me.

"No, it was just a little unexpected. It was nice though," I said, splaying my hand over his heart.

"I wish I didn't have to go," I said, before he could lean in again. I had plenty of boyfriends before Steve, and I wasn't a virgin. I was Howard Stark's sister, but I wasn't loose. I had some self-control, at least enough to make sure Steve and I didn't go too fast.

"I know. I wish we had more time together Elle," He said, reaching up to cradle my cheek in his hand. It was larger than the other night, so it was weird for me. I pulled it from my face, to trace the lines on his palm and said, "If I knew where you were going, I would write you."

"Do it anyways," He suggested, "I'll write you once I get settled, and we'll just correspond. It's not enough for me, but it's enough for now. I can't lose touch with you. Not now that…"

"Not now that… what?" I asked, looking up.

"That I found the right partner," He said softly, brushing his lips across mine.

"Steve, you've known me less than two weeks," I smiled when he pulled away.

"I know that. But there has only been one other person I felt like this about. So that's how I know it's true," He said, kissing me once more.

"Steve, I…"

"What?" He asked, pulling back.

"I can't drag this out like I want to. I have to pack," I said, looking up at him.

"Write, please," He implored me.

"Of course Darling," I said, blushing furiously at his smile.

"Darling? Well I'm gonna have to come up with something just as endearing for you," He chuckled. I rolled my eyes and said, "Silly man. Elle will do just fine."

We corresponded for the better part of 6 months. Steve hated his job. He was a chorus girl, is the way he would describe his job. In that time, I was all over Europe and he was all over the US. We wrote tirelessly of our pasts and our hopes for the future. He would try out different pet names on me but none made me feel as giddy as when he called me Elle. His penmanship was remarkable, and I learned that it was because when the US joined the war, he was an art student. He would send me sketches along with his letters, and I kept them all, safe in a shoebox in my foot locker. He had drawn me once, stating that it was just a rough sketch, and he'd like to draw me again in person, the next time we saw one another.

The USO tour was coming to Italy, around the same time as I was there. It was unfortunate timing; because of the news I had to bear him when I found him drawing backstage, on a rainy November afternoon.

"Darling," I spoke softly. Steve put his sketchbook down quickly, hoping up to face me.
"Elle, what are you doing here?" He asked, pulling me into a hug, before giving me a tender kiss. I smiled sadly up at him.

"Officially, I'm not here at all. Peggy isn't either," I gave a weak smile, "I'm sorry about your audience. They didn't really appreciate it, the way they should have."

"The crowds I'm used to are usually more... twelve. But bond sales take a 10% bump in every state I visit," He said, sounding rehearsed in its delivery.

"I hate how Brandt can throw his voice like that," I said sarcastically and he scoffed, "At least he's got me doing this. Phillips would have had me stuck in a lab."

"And those are your only two options? A lab rat or a dancing monkey?" I heard Peggy say behind me. I was surprised she had managed to sneak up on me.

"I wouldn't have said dancing monkey. But you do call yourself a chorus girl. You were meant for more than this Steve. You know how strongly I believe that," I said, seeing where she was going. She was giving him a reason to fight.

"What?" Peggy asked, noticing his far away look.

"You know, for the longest time I dreamed about coming overseas, being on the front lines, serving my country. I finally got everything I wanted, and I'm wearing tights," He said, before we all looked over to the sound of an ambulance by the med tent.

"They look like they've been through hell," He said.

"These men more than most. Schmidt sent out a force to Azzano. 200 men went up against him, and less than 50 returned. Your audience contained what was left of the 107th," Peggy said, as I shook my head at her, eyes wide as I mouthed for her to stop, "The rest were either killed or captured- What is wrong Elizabeth?"

"The 107th?" Steve asked and I looked at him softly.

"Bucky is MIA. There is a chance..."

Steve didn't wait to hear what I was going to say, already striding towards the Command tent, with Peg and I following behind him, using our coats as cover from the rain.

"Colonel Phillips," Steve said as he entered the tent. I flicked a curl over my shoulder, in disgust at the way it was laying against my face.

"Well if it isn't The Star Spangled Man With The Plan? And what is our plan today?"

"I need the casualty list from Azzano," Steve said, as I touched his shoulder, wincing at his words. Not the smartest move Steve.

"You don't get to give me orders, Son," Phillips said. As Peggy readjusted her raincoat, and I moved my hand down to Steve's arm in support.

"I just need one name sir. Sergeant James Barnes from the 107th," Steve said, desperate.

"You two and I are going to have a conversation later that you are not going to enjoy," Phillips said, gesturing his pen at Peggy and I.

"Please tell me if he is alive sir. B-A-R-"
"I can spell," Colonel Phillips cut him off, before getting up to sort some papers and saying, "I have signed more of these condolence letters today than I would care to count. But the name does sound familiar, I'm sorry."

Steve was quiet for a moment, the fact his best friend might be dead sinking in, before doing a 180 and asking, "What about the others? Do you have a rescue mission?"

"Yeah, it's called winning the war," Phillips said and I closed my eyes in frustration. Don't yell, don't yell…

"But if you know where they are-

"They are thirty miles behind the lines, through some of the most heavily fortified area in Europe. We'd lose more men than we can save, but I don't expect you to understand that because you are a chorus girl," Phillips said, and I clenched one hand into a fist. If he wasn't the only man to take me seriously in the army... and if it wouldn't get me court martialed...

"I think I understand it just fine," Steve said, a quiet anger in his voice.

"Well, understand it somewhere else. If I read the posters correctly, you have somewhere you've got to be in thirty minutes."

"Yes sir, I do," Steve said studying the map. My eyes widened as I followed him, knowing exactly where his thought process was going.

"Darling, Steve, please tell me you aren't thinking-

"I'm going," He said simply.

"You want to walk to Austria?" I asked, wondering if his head was screwed on right.

"She's right, that's insane," Peggy said, coming up to us where Steve was gathering stuff from his dressing room he shared with the USO girls.

"You heard the Colonel, your friend is most likely dead. He's devising a strategy, and if he detects-

"By the time he's done that, it will be too late!"

"Darling, please," I begged, "You haven't been field tested since the serum."

"But you have," Steve said, making my eyes widen, as he realized Peggy was right behind me.

"Elle, I'm sorry," He said, and I looked back to see her amused smile.

"Oh you think I didn't know? I saw you get shot, and two days you were wearing short sleeves with no bandage or scar to show for it," She said, "I wasn't born yesterday."

"It's not the same one. Abe and I were drunk, and he gave me the unperfected version. Not the same as Steve's," I explained quickly as Steve put his fake shield in the back of a jeep.

"Elle, you told me you thought I was meant for more. You mean that?" He asked, and I smiled, "Every word Darling."

"Then you have to let me go."

"Wait, I can do on better than a jeep," I smiled, before pulling him along, grabbing his shield from
the back. Howard didn't put up much of a fuss, giving Steve a look as I held fast to his hand. I flicked his ear, and he agreed to fly us close enough to the Hydra base in Krausburg. I was silent our ride over, not wanting to let Steve go. Howard teased me mercilessly for how love sick I sounded after reading his letters all these months. Having him here was like a dream that was about to turn into a nightmare.

Peggy and him discussed his way back, handing him a transponder, while I had a crazy idea. I wasn't exactly dressed for it, but who cared? I was at least wearing pants.

Quickly pulling on a parachute while Steve was distracted by Howard asking Peggy if they could go for fondue in Lucerne. Peggy gave me a look, asking, "What are you doing?"

And then explosions fired around us. Howard did an evasive maneuver, while I undid the lock on the hatch.

"Elizabeth!" Peggy said, and Steve was looking at me in horror as I said, "See you down there Captain."

Jumping was a stupid idea, as I had no paratrooper training, and the only thing I knew was to pull the ripcord.

"Gah," I said as my chute got tangled in some branches. I had managed to direct it to a somewhat clear spot in the trees, but failed to keep in mind that my chute was several feet above me when I did a sharp turn. Looking up, I noticed it was caught on branches, and I growled to myself as I realized I was less than a foot off the ground. I unbuckled myself, and dropped to the ground. Looking up, I saw Steve was right above me, so I moved. My hair was falling into my face though and I sighed in frustration as I combed out the Victory Roll with my fingers.

"You wacky dame, what are you thinking?" He said as he approached me, making sure I was alright.

"I'm fine. Chute just got caught. Now I need to fix my hair," I sighed, quickly braiding it.

"But what were you thinking? Elle, this might be a one way trip," He said seriously.

"Steve, I can help. Please, I would never forgive myself if I didn't do everything I could to help you find answers, and to bring those men home," I said, as he stopped, and brought his goggles back to rest on his helmet. I finished tying my hair off with a piece of cord from the chute and he pushed a fallen curl behind my ear sweetly.

"Okay, then let's go," He said, directing us through the woods, using a compass with a very familiar picture in it.

It had been something a paper had taken of me in London, on a night out with Howard. I had been smiling at something, hair done up, red lips and a laugh bursting up from my stomach. It warmed my heart to know he had put me in his compass.

"I didn't have a pocket watch, but I had this," He said when he caught me staring at it.

"Am I your moral compass," I teased.

"Yeah. It was you that told me I was meant for something more, remember? You believe in me," He whispered, stopping to kiss me softly.

"Always. Let's go get them then, Captain," I smirked.
"Major, it would be my honor to escort you to this rescue," He smiled, taking my hand.

Slang translation:

wacky: crazy
Chapter Five

We were silent, as we approached a road in the forest that led to a gate of a heavily fortified factory. I heard a vehicle approaching and nodded my head towards it. He smirked, pulling me along with him, and waited for the perfect moment to jump into the back of the last truck. I smiled up at the two Hydra soldiers, "Care to dance boys?"

Steve took one, while I took the other, disarming him, and knocking him out cold. Steve threw them out the back of the truck, and smirked at me, "Thanks for teaching me how to throw a punch."

"You just about broke your thumb the way you tried at first," I whispered, as we made it past the gate. The truck was backed up, and Steve did the first thing that came to his mind apparently, because he held up his shield and waited for the flap to open. He knocked out the guard that was looking in, and we hopped out, only to start sneaking around corners, and tanks. He helped me up a tank that was parked close to a building, and we ran along the top of it silently, towards the factory.

We had to knock out one more guard as we snuck in, me grabbing tech and a gun as we ducked and weaved our way towards where I imagine the men were being kept.

Steve caught the single guard and knocked him out, while I grabbed his keys, making my way down to their doors.

"Who are you supposed to be?" I heard someone ask.

"I'm... Captain America," Steve answered, as I started unlocking doors. The men were silent in the thanks, gathering while Steve made his way to me.

"Major!" One called out, and I smiled, "Dugan!"

"Boy, am I glad to see you," He said, giving me a small salute.

"Give that a break here," I smiled, as he looked behind me.

"What? Are we taking everybody?" He said to an Asian man.

"I'm from Fresno, Ace," He snarked, "Good to see you Major."

"Morita! And Jones! Perfect, got all my favourites here. But the Captain is taking point on this rescue," I said, gesturing with my head for them to follow Steve. Jim and Dugan looked perplexed, but shrugged and followed Steve who was asking if there was anyone else.

"We're looking for a Sergeant James Barnes, Bucky is his more known moniker," I said as a British soldier said, "There's an isolation ward in the factory, but nobody has ever come back from it."

"Bucky, yeah he was pinned down with us in Azzano. They took him two days ago," Dugan said, and I grabbed his arm, "Thank you. You've given us hope."

"Alright, the tree line is northwest, 80 yards past the gate," Steve said, looking down the row of cells again, before I added.

"Get out fast and give 'em hell boys," I said, "That's an order to fuck shit up."

"Yes Major," Jim chuckled along with a few other soldiers.
"I'll meet you there with anyone I find," Steve said and I said, "What now?"

"Ell- Ma'am, I can't ask you to do more than get out safely. I've already put your life at risk," He said using his good soldier voice.

"Oh Darling, don't do this to me now," I said softly seeing some of the boys give Steve a look of amusement at my endearment use, "I'm with you, till the end."

"Till the end of the line," He said, giving me a boyish smile and taking my hand.

"Wait, do you know what your doing?" Jones asked, making us turn back.

"Yeah, I've knocked out Adolph Hitler over two hundred times, and she taught me how," Steve deadpanned, before we jogged to leave the prison room, in pursuit of Bucky. Within minutes the boys had done as I ordered and I heard an alarm sounding as Steve and I sprinted down hallways, searching for rooms where someone could be kept.

We noticed a man exiting a room quickly, glancing back at us, and then running further down the hallway. I sprinted to the room he just left, hearing a groaning.

"Bucky!" I sobbed, seeing him strapped to a table, looking like he had been tortured for information.

"Sergeant 32557-" 

"Bucky," Steve said, and his eyes opened slowly, glazed over as he tried to ask who he was.

"It's me, it's Steve," He said, ripping the strap holding his legs. I pulled the other free, releasing his top half, before holding his face sweetly, as a planted a kiss on him in relief.

"What did they do to you?" I whispered to myself, looking around at the machines close by, before spotting a map.

"I thought you were dead," Steve said, pulling Bucky up to take a good look at him.

"I thought you were smaller," Bucky said, confused by Steve's new height.

"Captain, get him out of here," I ordered as I heard an explosion that didn't sound like our boys made.

"He's got a self-destruct on the factory, has to be. He's getting rid of evidence," I said, moving closer to the map and seeing intelligence that could be valuable to the cause.

"Elle," He said softly.

"Get him out, now. That's an order Captain. He'll slow you down, and I can catch up," I said, taking down coordinates from the map of Hydra bases.

"What happened to you?" Bucky asked, as they left the room. Steve didn't hesitate any longer, knowing I could handle myself.

"I joined the Army," I heard as they left, like it was obvious. Once I was sure I had everything, including the plans for a huge plane, I checked the hallway before dashing after the sounds of Steve and Bucky's retreat. I caught up with them on the catwalk, bounding up, just as the flames erupted below.

"Up!" I shouted, taking the stairs three at a time up to the next catwalk. When we made it to the next
level, I pointed to a catwalk, before I saw movement in the corner of my eye.

"Ah, Captain America, how exciting! I am a great fan of your films," I heard from across the connecting catwalk. Schmidt, I thought, before talking in the measly looking man to his side. Zola, I snarled to myself. That was the man running from Bucky's holding room.

"And Major Stark, much stronger than a woman your size should be. So, Dr. Erskine managed it twice after all. Not exactly an improvement, but impressive," He goaded Steve as they met on the catwalk. Steve reeled back and punched him hard, enough for Schmidt to stumble backwards holding his jaw.

"You've got no idea."

"Haven't I?" Schmidt taunted, and I held Bucky up. Schmidt launched himself in a punch, which Steve blocked with his shield. But it left a fist imprint in its wake. Steve was distracted by that for a moment, so I took aim, waiting for a moment to strike. Steve sent Schmidt flying backwards with a ground kick, and Zola pulled a lever, separating the catwalk as it retracted to either side of the factory.

"No matter what lies Erskine told you, you see I was his greatest success!" He said, before reaching to his neck. He started peeling off his face, to our horror, revealing a red skull.

"You don't have one of those, do you?" Bucky asked, and I looked down on him, to see the fear in his eyes as he looked at Zola.

"You are deluded Captain. You pretend to be a simple soldier," He said, tossing his fake face to the burning floor below us, "But in reality, you are just afraid to admit that we have left humanity behind! Unlike you, I embrace it proudly, and without fear."

"Then why are you running?" He taunted Schmidt, who was smiling as their elevator closed.

"Come on," I said, looking up to see a roof access.

"Up," Steve said, seeing what I was looking at and helping Bucky. As I got up, I jumped over the railing onto the beam, moving quickly across.

"Bucky, go," Steve said, helping him over the railing. About halfway, it groaned against his weight and I shouted, "Move it Sergeant!!"

He booked it across at my order, falling slightly with the beam. I caught him, leaning against the railing, as I pulled him up singlehandedly.

"When did you get so strong Major?" He asked as I heaved him over.

"It's a long story, and I'll tell you over a drink later," I said, before kicking the bars of the railing. Steve understood where I was going, pushing a broken bar out of the way.

"Steve, don't think. Just jump!" I yelled, pushing Bucky out of the way as I used the bar I pushed forward to reach forward more, to catch him if he didn't make it.

He gave a little shrug, before taking a flying leap off, just as another explosion rushed up to meet him in the air.

As we hobbled down the road towards the 107th's camp, Steve's hand found mine for a brief second,
with a look. We were gonna be in trouble. Like a lot of trouble. Steve and I led the charge, as the barrier was lifted and we walked straight into camp. Men started clapping, and I saw Peggy fight her instincts to run and hug me. I gave her a smile, nodding that I saw her relief. WE stopped in front of Colonel Phillips, both Steve and I giving him a salute.

"Some of these men need medical attention," Steve said, as a call for a medic sounded behind us.

"Sir, we'd like to surrender ourselves for disciplinary action," I said, respectfully.

"Sir, this was my doing. Major Stark should not receive punishment," Steve added, and I looked at him, confused as to why he would take this alone. Chester smiled and said, "That won't be necessary."

"Yes sir."

"However, Stark, you will be in my office in ten minutes, after you've been checked over," Chester said, before walking away, saying to Peggy, "Faith, huh?"

Peggy walked up, gave me a quick hug and said, "You are both late."

"Couldn't call our ride," Steve sassed, pulling out the transponder that had been shot.

"Yeah, next time, don't give the knucklehead the tech," I teased, before I heard Bucky shout, "Hey, let's hear it for Captain America and Lady Liberty!"

"What on earth is a 'Lady Liberty'?" I chuckled softly to Steve who didn't respond, but gathered me into his arms to kiss me soundly, as men cheered and whistled around us. I blushed as he released me, saying, "Captain."

"That's for believing in me," He smiled, as Peggy took my hand, saying, "Come on, we best get this out of the way with Phillips. You can be with your man later."

I walked with her, glancing over my shoulder at Steve, who looked concerned for me. I gave him a small smile to ease his mind, before trudging with Peggy to the Command tent.

"Leave us," Phillips said to Peggy and his clerk. She understood his tone to not be questioned, because she gave my arm a small squeeze, conveying with her eyes she was sorry before leaving the tent with the clerk at her heels. He put down the stacks of papers in his hands and stared straight at me.

"You've been checked over?" Phillips said, gesturing with his head towards the medical tent.

"No. And I guess you know why I didn't need to be," I said, standing with my chin held high.

"Yes. Agent Carter regaled me with the story about how you were so drunk with Dr. Erskine, you thought it would be funny to take an untested earlier version of the Super Soldier serum we used on your boy. Almost a year before he was chosen. And how you jumped from a plane without any paratrooper training or sense of self preservation."

"I regret how it happened sir. I would hope you knew that. But I don't regret my actions yesterday," I said, looking him straight in the eye. He narrowed his slightly, before looking at a map on the wall.

"Before I tell you what I have deemed for your punishment, what intel did you gather?"

"Six bases," I said, taking a handful of pins and pushing them into the map, "With the parts made in
them, being shipped to another location that was undisclosed on the map. It's a plane sir, a big ass one. Pardon my language."

"Well, it's more intel than we've gotten in 6 months," He said, conceding that I did a good job.

"I was taught by the best, sir," I said, proudly. I wasn't trying to suck up, he really did teach me well. He paused, and I thought I saw one eye twitch. Whether that was in annoyance or humor however...

"Major Elizabeth Stark of the US Army, ID Number 31782413. Under the influence of alcohol, you took an experimental drug for a classified project of the Strategic Science Reserve, and did not report to your commanding officer about the incident. You took a civilian plane over enemy air space, dropped in without express permission of your commanding officer, on an unsanctioned rescue operation… and you saved hundreds of men."

I would not cry in front of Chester. I would never live it down.

"The punishment for your crimes against the US Army and her Allies… is to aid Captain Rogers, as his SO, when I give him his new orders of taking down the remaining Hydra bases. And to report to your brother for a uniform fitting," He added, and I paused for a second. Oh shit, Howard didn't know I was jumping. He thought Steve did. He was gonna be so pissed.

"So my punishment is to do my job and get yelled at by my brother for my recklessness… sir?" I summed up, confused.

"That about sums it up. Now, I have some letters to write, and you need to go pack for London. We leave first thing tomorrow morning," He ordered, and I nodded, "Thank you Sir. I think."

After a quick salute, I left his tent, suddenly dreading seeing my brother.

"Lilabit!" I heard shouted frantically in the crowd. Speak of the devil…

"Oh shit," I said, locking eyes with him. He marched up to me and grabbed me by the shoulders.

"Are you crazy? Elizabeth Hermione Stark, are you trying to kill me?" He screamed, and I winced as he shook me slightly. It didn't hurt, but I knew it meant I had made him extremely angry.

"Howie," I said, giving him a teasing smile.

"No, do not 'Howie' me! You have no idea what the thought of losing you does to me," He said, as I saw the raw emotion in his eyes.

"I can imagine," I said softly.

"I don't care if you are a super soldier, or a Major in the army; you are my little sister, and I am supposed to protect you. My sister, my responsibility," He said, not caring about the scene he was making.

"Howard, take a deep breath. I'm here," I said, taking his hands, "And I'm sorry."

"Dad told me to protect you," He said, tears glistening in his eyes, but I knew he wouldn't let them fall.

"And I told Dad I would protect you too. My brother, my responsibility," I said, smiling at him, as he scoffed.

"Like I need protection. You're the thrill seeker, the first dame to do everything she wants, even at
the expense of shaving years off my life in worry," He said, and I knew he was teasing, by his words.

"Nope, you are gonna be old and gray before you have much to worry about from me," I smiled. He laughed once, "Bullshit."

"It was worth a try," I shrugged, before hugging him close.

"You smell like an ashtray," He said, and I laughed heartily.
The next morning, we were all heading for London. We had a day to settle in after the trip, before we were all dragged in for our accounts of what happened at the factory, and I was fitted for a new uniform. Steve would be too, but he was needed in Command first to get his new orders. He was getting promoted to Captain, and I couldn't be more proud of him.

"Howie, this is ridiculous," I said looking at the suit design he had mocked up.

"Seriously, I'm a genius and that was rude," He said, taking the piece of paper out of my hands.

"Okay, loose the fingers on the gloves, and make it less… green," I said, curling my lip up in disgust.

"Lady Liberty, she's green. So will your uniform be," He said, adding my first suggestion.

"How about a big target on my chest, like Steve's?" I said sarcastically.

"The sass today is unbearable. But I can make it a darker green, to help you blend in, more like army green," He said, as if talking to himself while he looked at the design.

"Better, much better. No helmet though. My hair is enough of a nightmare without the added effect of helmet hair."

"Of course, we'll lose the one thing that will keep your brains from being blown out. How about a braid?" He suggested sarcastically. I knew he wanted me to be safe, but he was going a little overboard. But he wasn't far off with the hair suggestion. He knew that it wasn't the style I was going for, just keeping it out of my face. Function over fashion.

It's not horrible," I said, "It will keep the hair out of my face while I'm kicking Hydra ass."

"Exactly. And hey, I bought you this the last time we were in London, thought you could wear it tonight when you go to the pub with your Fella," He teased as an assistant brought over a garment bag. I eyed him suspiciously, before unzipping the bag and gasping, "Howie!"

"Like it?" He smirked. The dress was a deep purple and would fall just below my knees.

"I love it. Thank you," I smiled.

"There should be heels and some jewelry to go with that. The store clerk picked them out, but I think my sister would kill every man in there by the dress alone."

"Flatterer," I scoffed.

"Sis, you are the first women those men have seen since the last time they were around a nurse. It will cheer up their spirits after what they went through, to see a pretty girl."
"So you are suggesting I doll myself up to let men gawk at me, simply to raise their male libido? That is disgusting Howard," I said, folding my arms as I narrowed my eyes at him.

"That came out wrong," He said to himself, as I nodded, "I thought so."

"What I more meant, was that any guy in there would kill to have you. You're a beautiful girl Lilabit, don't doubt that. But you are Rogers' girl, so try not to break anymore hearts, okay?"

"Just one," I thought to myself sadly. While, I had grown to love Steve, I knew I couldn't keep him, not after seeing the way he looked at Bucky, lying on that table. And then I had kissed Bucky. Not that he probably remembers that part. Probably. He was a little out of it with the whole torture and exhaustion. But I knew Steve saw it.

"Hey, I was kidding. Don't make me regret, giving my blessing," He teased.

"Oh thank you Howard, for giving your blessing for Steve and I to continue dating," I said dramatically, "Now, shall he pay you in goats or cows when it comes time to ask for my hand?"

"No goats. And I'm not big on cows. How about a bear? That seems like a good exchange, right? He's getting one," He asked, giving me a grin.

"You have five seconds to run, before I shoot you," I said seriously. He thought about it for half a second before taking off, yelling, "Tell Rogers I need him at 8am tomorrow!"

I rolled my eyes and took my new dress and shoes back up to my room. Peggy came in to grab something and said, "I think I lent you my lipstick- Are you going out?"

I was halfway through putting the shoes on when I caught sight of her in the mirror.

"Yeah. Need to give Steve a message from Howard, and we are having a small get together in the Pub. The men asked if I would join, and then Steve's taking me for a walk. Don't wait up for me," I blushed, turning to look at her.

"Well, make sure to have some smelling salts on hand," She teased, "Did you want some help?"

"Thanks. I feel helpless with this stuff," I sighed.

"Why ever would you ever feel like that?" She asked, moving to sit me down at the vanity. She easily teased my hair to cooperate into soft waves as I said, "I'm a Major in the army. The men expect me to be in fatigues all the time, not dressing up to go to a pub."

"You have more reasons for dressing up now. You have a wonderful man that adores you, anyone can see that," She smiled at me.

"Thanks Peg," I smiled at her in return, "You're the best friend a girl could ever have."

"We stick together," She said, and I replied, "Show them who's boss."

She sent me off, with strict instructions to break hearts, waving off Howard's request to not. I laughed to myself as I walked up to the Pub. I shrugged off my coat, and hung it on a free rung by the door as I walked in. I heard the men singing loudly in the large room, so I followed Dugan's voice. As I walked in, they stopped singing along for a moment, to give me a nod of respect. Even inebriated, my boys still were respectful. Dugan pointed to the other room and I smiled, before
allowing my feet to carry me towards Steve.

Bucky was with him, and he turned as Steve's eyes widened and cheeks tinged pink. I blushed at Steve's look, and then smiled at Bucky's reaction. His pupils were blown wide as he took in my form.

"Major," He smirked.

"Sergeant," I said, trying not to sound breathless. I was in the presence of my fella after all, even if I might be breaking his heart tonight.

"Elle, you look beautiful," Steve said, coming to take my hands and kiss my cheek.

"Now Captain, surely you can do better than that?" I teased him. He smiled, leaning down to kiss me softly, gently cradling my cheek and jaw in one hand.

"That's better," I smiled, swooning a little.

"Captain, I wanted to speak with you for a moment outside," I said, hurting inside at what I was about to do.

"Of course. Excuse us, be right back," Steve said to Bucky, who smiled tightly in our direction.

"What's on your mind Elle?" He asked as I stepped out with my coat, understanding I would need to leave after our talk.

"Steve, I need to give you back," I said softly. He seemed to not understand what I was saying for a moment, before setting his jaw.

"If you would like to stop seeing each other, I understand," He said, using his Captain voice.

"I don't want that. I want you, and simultaneously, I want Bucky. I want you to be happy, and if he makes you happy, I have to set you free," I said, being wary that someone could overhear.

"You want Bucky? Is that why you kissed him?" He asked.

"Is that what you zeroed in on? I just said I want you to be happy, and if that means, pretending in public so that you can be with him in private without suspicion, I will do it," I said sighing, "But if you want me gone, I would understand too."

He took my hand and said lowly, "But what do you want? Because I already told you where I stand on this. He said that if we couldn't be together, he wished 'we' could be happy together."

"But are you happy? Truly happy? Or could you be happier with him?" I asked softly.

"I don't know how to answer that, because I love you both," He said, and I looked at him in shock.

"You love me?" I squeaked, wondering if I heard that right. He stopped and looked like he was thinking back over his words, until he said, "Yes. I love you Elle."

"And I love you too," I said, stepping closer to his chest, "But I fell in love with Bucky too."

"Then I will step aside so he can have you," He said sadly.

"No, no, no. Now we are all martyrs," I sighed, turning away from him and saying, "There has to be an easier way."
I suddenly had a very bad thought, which would land me in hell for even thinking of it. But it seemed like our only option, if I could get Steve to agree, the only person who might put up a fight was still sitting inside, nursing his wounds. I was a cad for using my super hearing on them, let alone using the information for my own benefit. If I couldn't convince him, I would walk away, ask for a transfer, and disappear into the wind…

"Steve, have you ever heard of… A ménage à trios?" I asked, blushing. He looked confused for a moment before blushing, hard.

"Oh. Yes."

"Is that a yes to my question, or to what I am suggesting?" I said, confused.

"Yes to both," He said, coming to take my hand, "You would… be okay with that?"


He laughed, "If I could have both of you, I would give up everything."

"I won't ask you to," I said, stepping close to hug him. He wrapped me up tightly in his arms saying, "So, when should we tell him?"

"Well, hopefully soon, because I have a place for us for the night."

"Did you think…" He asked, as I heard his heart race as he finished his thought internally.

"Yes. Steve, I know it must seem really loose of me, but I'm not a virgin. I'm not welcoming every guy into my bed, but I'm not uptight about it. My brother is Howard Stark, the playboy," I smirked.

"No, I just, you wanted to… with me?"

"I still want to. I love you. Now, why don't you bring the good Sergeant out, so we can get going?"

He nodded as he released me, quickly making his way back inside. I waited five minutes, putting on my coat when I got chilly. He was probably saying goodnight to the boys.

Bucky stumbled out first, confused as to why I was waiting for them. I hailed a taxi, and smiled at them when I motioned for them to get in. Steve pushed him forward slightly, and we all piled into the car. I had the driver drop us off a block from the penthouse, where I went up alone to my room and they followed later. Bucky was wondering why all the cloak and dagger until he saw the adjoining door to my room.

"What's this all about?" He asked, noticing I had brushed my hair out, and taken my heels off.

"This is my suite here in London. I was getting tired of Howard bringing home girls, so I asked for a place of my own. He bought me this," I said, before turning the floor over to Steve.

"Bucky, Elle knows about us," Steve said, as Bucky shook his head.

"I don't know what you are talking about," Bucky denied, scared for what we would say.

"Bucky, I overheard your conversation at the Expo. Super hearing," I said, pointing to my ears, "But I don't care."

He sighed, sitting down on the end of the bed, he looked up at me, "It doesn't… disgust you?"
"I know that's the normal reaction to... queers. But all I could think about when I hear that, was how much I still wanted you both," I said, as Bucky coughed.

"What?"

"It's called a ménage à trois," I said softly, sitting down beside him.

"What?" He repeated in a shocked tone, looking like he was going to faint. Maybe we should have waited and slowly approached the subject with him. Steve came over to sit on his other side, touching Bucky's knee lightly.

"Buck, we both love her, and we love each other. There is no need for anyone to choose."

"Wait! I don't... I don't know if I could do this," He said, and I wilted.

I nodded as I swallowed the urge to cry, before getting up and making my way to the door to my room. As I pulled it shut, I bit my lip to keep myself from sobbing, as my tears started to flow.

I wasn't going to wait for them, as I picked up my small overnight bag and pulled my heels on.

"Elle, wait," Steve said, coming through the door and saying, "Please, don't leave."

"I can't do this if we aren't all agreed Steve," I said, "Otherwise we are forcing something on him that he doesn't want."

"But I do," Bucky's voice sounded from the adjoining doorway. I waited, for him to come further into the room, where I would then drop my bag.

"Beth," He said softly, "I want you. I want you with every fiber of my being, just like I want Steve."

He walked towards me, a predatory look in his eyes, before he wrapped an arm around my waist and brought me in close.

"If you're sure about this," I said, letting Steve uncurl my fingers to take my bag.

"If you're sure," He stressed, "We can't be seen in public together like you and Steve. We'd have to remain a secret."

"I know that. I hate it, but I know it," I said sadly.

"But whenever the three of us are together," He said, running a hand down my back slowly, inching towards my backside.

"I'm all yours," I smiled as Steve's hand joined his.

"Have you ever... done this before Elle?" Steve asked, with shaking hands.

"Not this, but you know I'm not a virgin," I blushed, as Bucky hand cupped my left butt cheek.

"Punk here is. Well, he hasn't had a woman," Bucky smiled. Steve hand copied Bucky's, cupping my other cheek and giving a small squeeze.

"Well, what are we waiting for?" I smiled, "I think I saw the record player in the corner."

"Music?"
"To set the mood. No one can hear us in here," I said, reaching behind me to pull the rest of the zipper down on my dress as I walked to put on some music. I had worn some of my nicest lingerie, with the intent of only Steve seeing it, but now I was happy I had worn it. I could hear both men gasp as I let the dress pool at my feet, suddenly nervous. I looked back at them as I started some music, and gave them a soft smile.

"Well, aren't you gonna make this even?" I teased. Both men were undoing their ties, as I walked towards them. I helped ease Steve out of his jacket, carefully laying it over a chair, before turning to do the same with Bucky's jacket. Steve was down to his boxers first, un-tucking his undershirt and pulling it over his head, as Bucky continued to ogle my backside.

"Sergeant," I teased, "I believe you are still overdressed."

"With all due respect Major, I think the Captain should get to undress you now," Bucky said snapping out of his haze, and finishing getting his pants off.

"Is that what you'd like Steve? Do you want to undress me?" I asked, as Bucky came up behind me to kiss and nibble on my neck.

"I don't know how," Steve said, in a small voice.

"That's alright Darling. Bucky will show you," I said, smiling deviously as I parted my neck from Bucky's lips, and lounged back on the bed.

They looked at each other before lying on either side of me, propping themselves up on elbows to face me.

"Teach him," I said to Bucky, pulling him in for a kiss. He got lost in it a second before I pulled away and he smiled dazed, "Of course Doll."

Steve copied Bucky's movements, starting at my knees, lightly dragging their fingers up to the clasp that held my pantyhose and undoing it.

"Do we have protection?" Steve asked suddenly, and Bucky nodded, pointing to the small metal case on my nightstand.

"I stole those from Howard's stash," I smirked, "Not that he'll miss them. He's got stock in condoms."

Bucky chuckled for a moment before I lifted my hips for them to drag my girdle down my legs, and Bucky moved to kiss my lips. I sighed into the kiss, feeling his fingers dancing around my panties, and Steve's copying him on the other hip.

"Roll towards me Doll," Bucky breathed out, and I did as I was asked, rolling into his chest.

"Steve, see the hooks at the back?" Bucky asked. Steve must have been rendered mute, because Bucky continued, "Undo them."

I felt Steve's fingers as Bucky continued to kiss me senseless. The last time we kissed before the Hydra factory, was almost a year ago, and I forgot how weak in the knees he could make me with just a kiss.

"Bucky," I moaned as he rolled me back, "Steve."

"Lift your arms Doll," Bucky whispered, and I obeyed. They peeled my brassiere off, gasping as
they did. I looked down at both of them, and could plainly see the tents in their shorts.

"Next, her panties," Bucky said, giving Steve a heated look.

They hooked their fingers in and again I lifted my hips, helping them ease them down my legs. I was finally naked to them, and I could see they both were holding back for the other.

"Someone do something, please?" I asked, wanting to cover up if all they were going to do was stare. Steve brought me in for a heated kiss, as I felt someone's fingers tracing along my hipbone.

"Ah," I breathed as someone traced my folds. Steve's hand came up to cup one breast, massaging gently.

Bucky's mouth enveloped the other in soft kisses before it started kissing down my body. I moaned into Steve's mouth as Bucky's opened mouth kisses met my center.

"Bucky," I sighed, as Steve released my mouth to see what his friend was doing. I looked down as well, seeing that Bucky had unbuttoned Steve's boxers and was pumping him as he continued his ministrations on me.

I got a look at Steve in the low light of the room, and sighed. He looked bigger than the few guys I had ever been with, and I shuddered at the thought of him inside me. Not out of fear, but lust.

"Who would you like first Doll?" Bucky asked, as I neared the edge. I sighed as I felt the tension coming to a crescendo, "Whoever wants me first."

Without warning, he stopped, moving to grab a rubber from the bedside table, and roll it over himself. Steve nodded, "I should watch right now. I can have my turn later."

"Are you sure? It won't be long before I could go a second time," I assured him.

"How much could you handle?" Steve asked concerned.

"Darling, I can go all night," I smiled, and he blushed, "With my refresh rate, that might be a possibility."

"As long as I get some of that," Bucky said, smirking up at Steve, leaning over me to capture his lips in a searing kiss. He was still kissing Steve, as he pushed into me. I sighed in ecstacy, as I finally felt full. Bucky moaned into Steve's mouth, thrusting into me slowly.

They parted lips for a moment that I rose up to kiss Steve and then Bucky sweetly. I tentatively reached down to grab Steve's thick member.

"Elle," He breathed, shuddering in need. Bucky looked at me with hooded eyes as he continued to thrust. I felt the tension return, as Bucky thrust, and I pumped Steve.

"Oh Beth," Bucky shuddered, closing his eyes and thrusting into me sharply as I felt the tension snap like a rubber band. I exhaled, riding the waves of pleasure as Steve dropped his lips to my breast, to mimic Bucky's earlier actions, prolonging my ecstacy.

Bucky stopped, breathing hard as he looked up at me, "That was amazing."

"After being up on the front lines, you deserve a little pleasure," I teased as I collected myself. My heart raced as Bucky withdrew from inside me, and breathed hard.

"Bathroom?" He asked, still trying to gather strength in his legs.
"The door on the right," I said, before Steve got up the courage to grab a rubber and settled on top of me. It was just sweet kisses as we heard Bucky cleaning up. And when I felt ready, I reached behind Steve to push him into me. He understood that I was ready, because he pulled back to line himself up with my center, gently pushing in.

I threw my head back, feeling the width and length I had wondered about. It was a wonderful feeling, being one with him. He had to stop, saying, "I don't think… I'm gonna last very long for you."

"No Darling, don't worry about me," I smiled, reaching up to kiss him as Bucky came back out.

"I'll finish her off for you if you can't," Bucky promised, gently massaging Steve's other cheek with me.

Steve started slow, building in speed as he closed his eyes. Bucky kissed him hard as his thrusts got harder. I felt the tension building again, moaning as it got to an almost unbearable point, and then I was flying over the edge. Bucky had reached a hand down between Steve and I, to play with my folds, and it seemed to drive Steve over the edge too.

"Oh boy," I said, before chuckling as we caught our breath. Steve grinned down at me, "I may have died if I tried that before the serum."

I started laughing, as Bucky joined in. Soon the three of us were laughing and clutching our stomachs. I calmed down enough to shimmy out of their hold on me, and go clean myself up, slipping on a loose nightgown as I did. Steve knocked at the door, and I smiled shyly at him as I exited, "All yours."

Bucky was relaxing on the bed, staring up at the ceiling in wonder.

"So, that just happened," I teased. He gave a chuckle, before saying, "That was amazing."

"You said you wanted some," Steve said as he exited the bathroom, looking refreshed, like he said he would be.

"Mmm, now I must watch this," I said, scooting over to the edge of the bed to get a better view.

"You want to watch?" Bucky asked, as Steve grabbed the last rubber.

"I want to see how you take pleasure from each other," I said honestly. Steve crawled on top of Bucky, kissing him softly, while he started massaging Bucky's ass. I breathed heavily, watching Steve move closer to the anus, tracing his fingers around the hole as Bucky spread his legs wider.

Bucky sighed as Steve pushed a finger into him, adding a second and third after a couple thrusts each, stretching Bucky, before removing them and replacing them with himself. Bucky moaned lowly as Steve pushed in, about a far as he felt was safe without hurting Bucky. They were slow, Bucky wrapping his legs around Steve, and Steve reaching down to pump Bucky's hardening member. Mimicking Bucky from earlier, I scooted back towards them and plastered them both with kisses, taking over for Steve by pumping Bucky. Watching them was arousing, because they were both so beautiful, and it was easy to tell they had chemistry.

Bucky spilled into my hand, crying out in pleasure along with Steve. They collapsed, and I retreated to the bathroom to grab some towels to wash up with. They were kissing sweetly when I returned, and I smiled at the lovers. They turned to see me, and beckoned me back with a curl of their fingers.
I climbed back onto the bed, receiving a kiss from both of them, before they cleaned up and put their boxers back on. I laid down on one side of the bed, with Steve spooning me and Bucky spooning Steve.

"Can we do that again sometime?" Bucky asked, and I chuckled, "Whenever we can."

I was so exhausted, I don't remember falling asleep.
Chapter Seven

Hello faithful readers! So excited to see people are liking the story so far! Friday's will be update day, so I hope you are on the lookout now. Giving you three today, because they string together so well.

"Boys," I said softly, waking them up with a gentle shake to the shoulders.

"Morning Elle," Steve smiled as he opened his eyes and stretched. Bucky mumbled into Steve's neck, and I chuckled.

"I made breakfast. Come get it while it's hot, and then we need to split up for the morning. Steve, you need to be back to base to meet with Howard. He's got those designs he wants you to look over. A new uniform," I said, leaning over to kiss Bucky's head, and then Steve's.

"A new uniform?" He asked.

"If your gonna fight a war, you've got to wear a uniform," I quipped, "And you'll thank me for waking you for food first."

"Where are you going?" Bucky mumbled, as I turned from the bed.

"I've already eaten," I said, smiling over my shoulder as I sat down at my vanity, "And now I need to get ready for the day."

Steve got up, dropping a kiss to my shoulder as he passed me, and Bucky lazily got off the bed. He did the same, but stopped to watch me brush my hair out and pin it back for the day in Victory Rolls.

"You're gorgeous," He said softly, making me blush.

"Flatterer," I teased, "Shouldn't you be eating? You need your strength."

"I was hoping you'd sit with us. After last night, it feels wrong that you aren't included in everything," He said plainly.

"Some things I won't be able to be around for. Boys time, certain missions, and I'll be okay. You know that you can have him to yourself for a night, when it's possible, right? I won't be upset."

"Okay," He said, giving me a small smile, before leaning in to kiss me.

"I have to do my make up and get dressed… Go eat with Steve, and steal a kiss or three," I joked. He laughed once and said, "I will."

"I love you," I said, watching his face light up in wonder of my words.

"I… love you too Beth," He said, rocketing forward to kiss me. I smiled into the kiss, as did he, before I pushed him back slightly.

"Go be with Steve Sweetie," I said, and he smirked, before giving me one last kiss in parting.
I finished getting myself ready, changing into my dress uniform and a pair of low heels. And by the
time I was ready, the boys had eaten and cleaned up the dishes for me, before running back to
change. I called a car for myself, and then calling a taxi for the guys. I would head in first, to be there
for my morning meeting with Phillips at 0730 hours, and then Steve and Bucky would be by to
sneak into their bunks and pretend they had gone out for breakfast to catch up.

With one last parting kiss for Bucky, I gave Steve a quick peck, since he would be able to kiss me in
public. Bucky understood, and if this was how he could have both of us, he was happy to pretend to
be the supportive friend around the others.

Steve and Bucky would lock up when their cab came for them, and I got into my car, telling the
driver, "Headquarters."

When I arrived, I put my bag into my room quickly, before finding Peggy downstairs in our office.

"Good morning," I smiled softly, setting my coat over the back of my chair.

"Well, it must have been a good night," She teased quietly.

"It was perfect," I said, sighing as I recalled the way the boys drove me wild. Not that I would tell
Peggy that.

"Well, let's go get the meeting out of the way and you can find your fella afterwards," She smirked.

It was a standard morning meeting, consisting of what information we had gathered, who the squad
would consist of and more paperwork for me. Hooray. It was the one downside to promotions. More
paperwork, and less of the fun stuff like blowing up the enemy. You win some, you lose some.

And as Peg and I left the office, I overheard a feminine voice saying, "The women of America owe
you their thanks."

"And seeing as how they aren't here…" I heard Private Lorraine say, before Steve said, "Please
ma'am. I'm seeing someone."

"You're a hero and heroes deserve to be treated right," She said as we rounded the corner to see her
trying to lead Steve by the tie.

"She'll be right-"

I saw red as Private Lorraine had the audacity to kiss Steve against his will. He wouldn't hurt a
woman, that's why I knew he wouldn't push her away. And it wouldn't earn me any points with
Colonel Phillips if I punched his clerk. So I did the next best thing.

"Private," I barked, watching with glee as she broke the kiss, looking fearful of me.

"If you will stop trying to force your advances on Captain Rogers, you'll have been told that I was
about to walk back out of Colonel Phillips office," I said, as Steve straightened his tie.

"I apologize Captain Rogers, Major Stark," She said, even though I could see the ire behind her
sincere eyes. What a little actress.

"Captain, please go see Mr. Stark in the lab. He should be there by now," I said, not looking at Steve
as Peggy and I stared Lorraine down with hard eyes.

Steve was quick about leaving, and I promised myself I would find him soon and explain I wasn't
"Lorraine, you're a smart girl. When a man says he is seeing someone, what does that usually mean?" I asked her, knowing how it felt when people talked down to me. But in this moment, I didn't care. She put her paws on one of my guys, and she was going to know fear, if it was the last thing I did.

"That he is taken, ma'am," She said politely, even with eyes blazing at me.

"So the good Captain said he was taken and you decided that meant nothing?" Peggy said, rounding on the girl.

"No, I only meant to thank him for his bravery-"

"A simple "Thank you," would have sufficed. The next time I hear about you even trying something like that, on someone who does not want it, I will put you on report. It shouldn't be just the men that get punished for unwelcome advances, should it Agent Carter?"

"Absolutely not. Equal rights for women, means accepting we are no more above the law than men," She said, giving Lorraine a little smirk.

"It won't happen again," She said, understanding that we weren't kidding around.

"Good. Back to work," I said, turning to go find Steve.

Peggy put a hand on my shoulder and gave a nod of affirmation as we walked, "She won't be trying that again."

"She better not," I said as we parted and I walked into the lab. Howard finished his spiel about vibranium that I made my presence known.

Steve was just trying out a new shield, when I walked around the bench to face him, "Is he done Howard? I need to have a word with the Captain."

"Almost Lilabit," Howard smirked.

"What do you think?" Steve asked, facing me with the shield, a childish gleam in his eye as he showed off his new toy. I don't know exactly what came over me, but I grabbed a gun from the workbench next to me and fired at the shield that Steve ducked behind. Four rounds left the chamber, I then sighed and said, "Yes, I think that works."

"My office when you're done Captain," I said as I passed him, placing the gun back on a table. The labs techs all came out from behind whatever surface they hid behind when I started firing. A few concerned heads were peering into the lab as I exited, before the scrambled to get back to work as I approached them. As I made it to my office, I sat down, sighing loudly. It was a good five minutes before I heard footsteps approaching.

"Major," Steve said, knocking on the doorframe. I said, "Come in Captain. Close the door behind you."

He did as I asked, and waited, looking like a sad puppy. I wasn't even mad at him, how could I be?

"Elle, that wasn't what it looked like," He said quietly.

"Oh Darling, I know that. She just makes me so mad," I sighed.
"Wait, you aren't upset with me?"

"No, of course not. Steve, I remember those letters, where you would say that women didn't give you a second look before the serum. She was attracted to Captain America, not Steve Rogers," I explained, "But I fell in love with Steve. And I hope he fell in love with me, not Major Stark, or Lady Liberty. God, I could kill Bucky for that nonsense"

"Yeah, I know what you mean. You just described how I felt about all the looks girls would give me after the Serum," He sighed, as I asked him to sit down. I sat myself across his lap and said, "Darling, you were amazing before the serum. You may not think it, but I do."

"But, you like how I look now?" He asked, a little self-conscious.

"Darling, you could grow a beard and I would still like how you looked. Your looks don't matter though, I only want your heart," I said, leaning down to give him a little kiss. He pulled me closer, deepening the kiss.

The next 6 months saw us on surveillance and taking down the bases, and there was very little time for Steve and I, let alone Bucky. I tried to take shifts with Bucky, to spend some time with him, and help our budding relationship grow. He would steal kisses when no one was looking, from both Steve and I, and I knew this was enough for now. Some nights, Steve would take watch so Bucky and I could spend a little alone time together, or vice versa, or I would. We got reprieves from blowing up Hydra factories, a little excursion in the odd village, and sometimes we could even sneak away from the Commandos for a few hours to find a secluded spot for the three of us.

We had film crews tailing us around Europe, mainly for Army records, but sometimes for the folks back home. 'Lady Liberty' was painted as a hero for women, showing that even a woman can become a great aid in the war, no matter her rank. It sickened me how much they sugar coated.

It was a bright June day when Bucky approached me with an offer.

"Marry Steve," He said, and I had to shake my head in confusion of his sudden proposition, "What?"

"We can't be official," He said softly and I nodded in agreement. The world wasn't ready for what we had.

"But you and Steve can. I would be so happy if you married him Doll," He said, stopping as a soldier passed by where we sat in camp.

"He hasn't asked, silly man."

"But he will. Marry him," He implored.

"I know why you are saying this," I said, noticing the look on his face, "You think you aren't going to make it home."

"And I want you to both to be happy, if I don't," He said, giving me his puppy dog eyes.

"Bucky, we are happy now," I said before taking a quick look around, "With you."

"I know that. But you know that nothing in life is certain, and I want to know that if I go, you'll have a long and happy life without me," He said, as I saw Steve approaching us over his shoulder.

"Major, care to join me for a walk?" Steve asked, and I saw Bucky's encouraging smile to me at the
"Of course Captain," I replied, patting Bucky's shoulder. Steve guided me along a little path, where he showed me a break in the trees. There was a little meadow, where he had brought out a blanket and a bit of food for us. He helped me sit down, before joining me on the blanket.

"I think you know what I'm about to say," He said, and I nodded, "Bucky told me his reasoning."

"But, my reasoning," He started, "Is because I love you. And I don't want to keep living in sin with you. You deserve a wedding, one not in a camp, but in a church. But a camp wedding is all I can offer you right now, along with my heart. And Bucky reasons that this way we can still be together, but without it being as bad as two unmarried men being with an unmarried woman."

"He's our lover, though," I teased.

"And he still will be. We want to do right by you. So, I'm asking you, Elizabeth Hermione Stark, will you please marry me, so we can all still be together?" He asked, and I smiled, through my tears.

"Yes, Steven Grant Rogers, I would be honored to be your wife," I said softly. He breathed a sigh of relief, and started fishing around in his pocket. He opened his palm to show a small jewelry box. He opened it, glancing up at me looking so nervous that I had to kiss him first before I looked down. He relaxed a bit, as I gazed at the modest diamonds on a thin silver band, placing a hand over my heart as I admired the ring.

"Your brother said he had a little of the Vibranium left, so he helped design it with me. Said he wanted to front the cost of the metal, but Bucky and I bought the stones. I wanted something bright, to remind you that Bucky and I are with you till the end of the line."

I choked up, seeing the princess cut diamond in the center, with little diamonds extending half way down the ring on both sides. I held out my hand for him, and he gently slipped it on my ring finger, before kissing my hand.

"Should we go tell the boys?" I smiled.

"Bucky said he would be up in a few minutes, to see if I had chickened out or not," He blushed.


"I brood?" He said, laughing with me.

"You do! And I love you for it. I love everything about you. Including the dimple on your right cheek," I chuckled.

"Wait, I don't- Oh no."

"Oh yes!"

"On my…"

"Yes, your bottom," I teased, before kissing him, "I think it's cute."

We were still laughing when Bucky came into view. He waved over to us and I motioned for him to come over quickly. He smiled down at Steve and I as he approached and I asked, "Were you followed?"

"No, I think all the guys went down to cool off in the lake," He smiled, before I pulled him down
beside me and planted a big, wet one right on his mouth.

"I love it. I love you," I said softly.

"I love you too Beth," He said, cupping my face and giving me another kiss.

"So, when's the wedding?" He teased, and I rolled my eyes, "Give me five more minutes and I might have a plan."

"What about Steve? He should have a plan," He teased our lover. I laughed along with him, and then we started singing The Star Spangled Man With A Plan, because we knew it would rile Steve up.

We married in that meadow, a week after Steve proposed. The Father assigned to our camp performed the ceremony, and Howard had a dress flown in for me, with me not caring about the length or color. He gave me away, happy to send us away on a small honeymoon, but we declined, knowing we couldn't leave Bucky behind. As we were married now, Steve and I shared a tent, not needing to sneak around to find somewhere private. Bucky could sneak in the back of our tent for a quick and quiet romp before he had to bunk with the other guys. For the next six months, we were taking down Hydra cells and rescuing Allied forces trapped in Stalingrad due to a blizzard, and once again, Hydra.

It was a little after the last known Hydra base was destroyed that I felt really off. The Serum shouldn't allow me to get sick, but I was throwing up constantly in the mornings. I went to see a doctor the next time we were in London, who plainly told me what ailed me.

"Pregnant," I whispered, confused. We had been careful, using protection, because we didn't need anyone wondering why our baby looked more like Bucky than Steve. It would not be fun to explain.

"My dear that's wonderful!" Peggy said, "Congratulations."

"I'm… I'm still trying to wrap my head around it," I said, stunned.

"Have you told Steve?" She asked softly.

"No… I think I will tonight. I think I'll make him dinner or something. I'm not sure, I'm a bit frazzled."

"Wait, this means you can't go out into the field," She said, and I nodded.

"They are following this intelligence about Schmidt moving the doctor by train through the mountains in a week or so. It won't be easy," I said, wondering aloud, "Should I wait until after to tell him?"

"No dear, just tell him tonight. He'll be thrilled with the good news," She smiled at me.

"Thanks Peg," I smiled softly at her reassurance. In reality, I was still very worried.

Steve 'brought' Bucky over for dinner, and I was nervous as hell thinking of how to tell them. I kept thinking about dropping it casually, or getting their attention and blurting it out, but as I was dishing myself some food, I asked Bucky, "Can you pass the baby?"

"The what?" He chuckled.

"The butter, sorry," I said, shaking my head. Steve sensed I wasn't all right though, even after receiving the butter, he asked, "Elle, what's wrong?"
"I... I'm pregnant," I said softly, dropping my face into my hands.

"Pregnant?" Steve asked, sounding scared.

"Yes," I sniffled out, before sobbing again.

"Doll, please look at us," Bucky said, putting a hand on my knee. I lowered my hands to see both men smiling at me.

"Why are you happy?" I asked, confused.

"Elle, a baby, that's wonderful," Steve smiled at me, taking a hand to kiss sweetly.

"But I thought we said-"

"I know, but even if the kid comes out with brown hair, we say he got that from your side. Steve and I both have blue eyes, so there isn't anything to worry about," Bucky said, drying my eyes with a napkin.

"So, you are happy?" I repeated, calming myself down.

"Over the moon," Steve said, getting out of his seat to kiss me passionately.

"I was worried for nothing," I sighed. We talked about what to name the baby if it was a boy or a girl, and where we would live after the war. It was a relieving conversation after the scare I had given myself. They knew they would retrieve Zola without me, but knew I would be safer for me to stay at base.

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We couldn't help but love on each other that night, the boys whispering to my stomach all the plans they had for building tree forts and days at the beach, and all the stories they would tell at bedtime. We spent a week in the apartment, just enjoying our time together as we waited for their ship out to Austria. And then reality set in a few days later, with Steve and the Commandos leaving for the Alps. Peggy kept me company as we waited for confirmation that they made it onto the train. I was on pins and needles, as a feeling rose up in my gut. I had voiced my concern to the guys before they left and the whole week leading up to, and they reassured me they would come back to me. London was being bombed at the same time as we waited, so transmissions were choppy and sometimes had to be repeated. Jim was the radioman, signaling base that Steve, Bucky and Gabe had made it onto the train.

Suddenly, the shelling stopped above ground, and we all breathed a sigh of relief. And when Jim came back on, his sigh sounded weighted, like something had gone wrong. Like he was mourning.

"Barnes fell off the train, into the ravine," He said, before I shook my head. This wasn't happening.

"He's gone," Jim finished, before I ran to a wastebasket and threw up. I stumbled into my office, crying in anguish, even as Peggy tried to comfort me. I sobbed like a widow in mourning, unable to control myself enough to remember he wasn't my husband. But I loved him as though he was. I cried for all the lost dreams, for all the stories he would never get to tell our child, for how Steve was probably in agony. Just like I was. I winced when I got up, intending to dry my eyes and fix my make up, when I felt wet. I grabbed my midsection as a wave of pain came over me, and I felt the wetness running down my legs.

I blacked out as Peggy caught me.
Chapter Eight

Chapter Notes

Hello faithful readers! 2/3 chapters for today, and I hope you enjoy it.

When I woke, Peggy was by my side, with Howard right behind her, pacing. I took one look at her face and knew. I had miscarried. Howard's red eyes found mine and he said, "Lilabit, I'm sorry."

"For what? For losing the baby, or for Bucky? Because both feel like the end of the world right now," I said, closing my eyes and feeling a few tears leak out.

"Steve's on his way back right now. They took Zola prisoner," Peggy said softly.

"When can I get out of this damn bed?" I asked, trying to sit up.

"Anytime you want Sis," Howard said, and I frowned, swinging my legs over the side. Peggy got up to hand me my robe, which I tied tightly to my body as I stood up.

"Does Steve know?" I asked, seeing my clothes folded neatly on top of a chair in the corner.

"We thought it best to tell him when you fell unconscious. He… he was already broken up over Barnes-" Howards started.

"Bucky. His name was Bucky," I said, feeling a fresh wave of tears. One of the loves of my life was gone.

"I hate this war. It's costing us everything. When will it end?" I said, wiping my eyes.

"When we stop Schmidt," Peggy said, in a strong voice, coming to give me strength via a hug.

"I promise you, we will stop him," She said, holding my chin up so I could look in her eyes. Howard left us after that, so I could change, and wait for Steve. He was to arrive in a few hours, so I gathered up Bucky's things from his bunk. Peggy helped, labeling a box for me, and packing his clothes gently. He still had his parents in Brooklyn, and I knew Steve would want to write them. After the war was over, I would bring his belongings to them. They deserved more than a courier to deliver the remaining memories of their son.

I was still putting things away when I found three letters under his pillow. The top one was addressed to Steve and I. Peggy saw what I was staring at and asked, "Do you want to wait?"

"I think I should," I said, noticing the time. Steve should have been here by now.

I excused myself, tucking the letter into my purse, and shrugging on my coat. I asked Phillips if Steve had arrived and he said, "Came, filed his report, dropped Zola off and left."

Snow fell softly as I walked outside. The driver that brought the Commandos back, said he dropped Steve off at a bar after he filed his report. The same bar from our first time in London together. Back when things were simpler. I had him drive me there as well, before asking him to wait until we came out.
"Darling," I whispered softly as I stepped over rubble. Steve turned to see me eyes red, and still overflowing with tears, before jumping out of his seat to gather me in his arms as he sobbed. I joined in; unable to hold back the dam I had been building since I found the letter.

"Steve, I'm sorry. About Bucky and the baby," I said, as he held me tightly, trying to hold together the fragile pieces of our mutual loss. He didn't say a word, and I noticed the bottles on the half charred table. I looked up at him, and said, "Sit down. I have something you'll want to hear."

"Dr. Erskine said that the serum wouldn't just effect my muscles, it would effect my cells. Create a protective system of regeneration and healing, which means… I can't get drunk. But I guess you know that, Elle," He said, pouring himself another drink after he sat down.

"Your metabolism, like mine, burns four times faster than the average person. Which is why we eat so often, or we feel fatigued. It's one of the more undesirable side effects. I saw it as a punishment for taking the serum while drunk. But now it feels like an affront on us both. All I want to do right now is drink until my veins run amber with scotch and I forget the pain. But it's only a temporary patch," I said softly, wiping away my tears.

"It wasn't your fault," I said, taking his hand over the table.

"Did you read the report?" He asked, curtly.

"Yes," I whispered, feeling like my eyes would never stop leaking.

"Then you know that's not true," He said, taking another drink.

"You did everything you could Steve, I believe that. I know you would have jumped into the Ravine in his place, or to try and break his fall. You would have killed me, but you would have done it to spare him. Something you said to me when Abe died applies: We had no way of knowing this was going to happen, so we can't claim responsibility for not stopping it, or saving someone."

"Bucky left a letter," I said, sitting down opposite of him, taking a half empty bottle and bringing it to my lips. It would do nothing, but I needed some liquid courage for what I was about to read. I pulled it out of my purse, and took his hand after I opened it.

"To the two loves of my life," I said, voice getting tighter as I read aloud.

"Tomorrow we leave again. This time we leave you behind Beth, pregnant and glowing, but worried. You are always worried. I update this every time we ship out from London, isn't that morbid? But I wanted to be able to speak to you from beyond the grave, give you some peace. I died, that's true enough, cause otherwise you wouldn't have found this letter," I sobbed. I could hear him speaking the words I was reading aloud, and it brought me a miniscule amount of comfort.

"I don't want you to cry for me. I died doing what I love; following that kid from Brooklyn that was too dumb to walk away from a fight. I died fighting for our child's future. There isn't enough words to tell you both how much I love you, so I'll leave you with my favorite memories of you separately and then together."

"Steve, you had stood up to this kid in fourth grade that was twice your size, for picking on some girl, Dolores, I think. And when I stepped in to help you, breaking the bullies nose, he ran off to the nurse's office, while I picked your ass up off the ground. You were a dripping blood and bruised but you screamed at me, "Jerk, I had him on the ropes!"

"It always amazed me how you could pick up a whiff of a bully and take off without a lick of self preservation. It was one of the reasons I fell in love with you. Always willing to stand up for those
who can't defend themselves," I smiled up at him. His eyes were running like a faucet, so I
continued.

"Beth, you looked like a dream in your uniform that first day. You walked right up to a bunch of
green recruits, picked the biggest guy there and chose him for a demonstration. You were a foot
shorter than him and I kept wondering when the real instructor was coming out. He made some
comment that a woman should be helping the doctors and that you could give him a physical
anytime you liked. You promptly kicked his ass, and told him to never underestimate his opponent.
He was polite and respectful to you the rest of basic training. I never doubted you again," I read,
smiling at the memory.

"But you trained me well, allowing my little flirtations, while I got to see what an amazing woman
you are. You kept my ass in line, and never once showed the men you deserved anything less than
respect and perfection. Man, that course was brutal. I hope you keep our kid in line, the way you
kept us in line."

"Now these are my two favorite memories of the two of you together," I said, looking up at Steve.

"The first would have to be the night Steve and you approached the idea of us being together. Never
in my wildest dreams did I imagine I would get to have you both, especially after the month I had in
that factory. I can't even remember half of that night, but I was vaguely aware you kissed me Beth
and I thought I had died and gone to heaven. No, that was a few nights later when we made love for
the first time. When I got to have you both."

"And my last favorite memory was when you told us you were pregnant Beth. You were so worried
about what Steve and I would think, about what others would think. But I couldn't stop thinking
about how I hoped it was a little girl with your beautiful hair, or a little boy with your eyes. I know
you are going to make great parents, and I'm sorry that I won't be there to see this baby grow up," I
read, sobbing hard. I heard Steve sniffle, but he raised his glass to his lips as I looked over.

"But I can go happy, knowing you loved me, and that you will both have a long and happy life
together. Name a kid after me, or something. Just tell them one day that I loved them, and I loved
you. We don't have to be ashamed of what we had, because I'm not. It doesn't matter if the world
thinks it's strange, but I love you both, and no one can take that away from us. Beth, promise me
you'll keep his ass in line. Don't let him do anything stupid. Same goes for you Steve. She's reckless
just like you, and she'll jump first and ask for a parachute second if you don't watch her. Take care
of each other. Till the end of the line, I am yours and you are mine," I cried, "Your Bucky."

"Stop blaming yourself Steve," I said, seeing the hard look in his eyes as he stared down into his
glass.

"He knew you were worth it, worth following. Damn the costs," I said, squeezing his hand.

"I'm going after Schmidt. I'm not gonna stop until all of Hydra is dead or captured," He said, still
looking into his glass.

"You won't be alone," I said, "I'm following that scrawny kid that came onto my base, determined
that he was deserving of fighting for his country, because he had no right to do any less than the ones
already serving."

He looked up at me and said, "What do we do now?"

"Now, we go to work. And when this is all over, we'll start over. We only have each other now
Darling. He wants us to stick together," I said, passing him the letter. He didn't take it, but watched it
hang limply from my hand for a moment. I dropped it on the table, raising the bottle in a toast.

"To my love, I promise to honor you, in everything I do. Rest well Bucky," I said, and Steve raised his glass.

"To my best friend and love, you deserved more. I'll honor your sacrifice. I will avenge you," He said, clinking it with my bottle. I immediately took a swig, and set the bottle down.

"Let's get to work Captain," I said, standing, and tucking Bucky's letter back in my purse.

"Yes ma'am," He said, taking my hand and leading me back to base. As we sat down at the conference table, I watched the Commandoes glance at me with sad eyes. I straightened my spine and held my head high, because we have more important things to do than mourn. We needed to stop Schmidt.

"Johann Schmidt belongs in a bug house. He thinks he's a god and is willing to blow up half the world to prove it. Starting with the USA," Phillips said as Howard approached the table.

"Schmidt's working with powers beyond our capabilities. If he gets across the Atlantic, he will wipe out the entire Eastern Sea board in an hour," Howard said, giving my hand a small squeeze under the table.

"How much time we got?" Gabe asked as Steve tossed surveillance photos back onto the table in silence.

"According to my new best friend, under 24 hours."

"Alright, where is he now?" Jacques asked.

"Hydra's last base is here, in the Alps. 500 feet below the surface," Phillips said tossing the photo down in front of Jim.

"So what are we supposed to do? It's not like we can knock on the front door," Jim said sarcastically.

"Why not?" Steve said, making all heads turn to our end of the table.

"That's exactly what we are going to do," Steve said, and I nodded, "I'm with you."

Steve got into Hydra's Headquarters easily, captured at the gate, but the real offense was waiting for the Commandos signal. Once we had it, I was with Peggy and Phillips, storming the halls and using my submachine gun to inflict damage on Hydra. And by damage, I mean most of my shots were for the head. Steve was pinned down and I managed to shoot the tank of the flamethrower, blowing the guy to hell.

"Thanks Elle," Steve said, jogging over to give me a quick kiss.

"Weren't you just…" I said, gesturing to his stuck shield in the doorway.

"Right," He said, running to dislodge it and continue after Schmidt.

Phillips caught up with me, seeing Steve needed an added boost, so he grabbed the Red Skull's car, with me jumping in the back seat. It took off at high speeds, and we caught up to Steve with Phillips saying, "Get in!"

We took off again when Steve got seated, at speeds that should be insane for a normal car to go. The
plane sped up, and we were losing it, but Colonel Phillips pushed some button and we lurched forward, gravity pushing us further back into our seats as we caught up to the plane.

"Keep it steady!" Steve said to Phillips as he clung to the edge of the car.

"Wait!" I yelled, giving him one last kiss, before looking up at him, "I love you. Go get him."

"I'm not kissing you," Phillips said and I rolled my eyes. The propeller we were driving under narrowly missed Steve's head by a duck, scraping along the shield on his back. The opened hangar door was fast approaching and I watched as Steve leapt onto the landing gear of the massive plane as it ascended from the runway. Phillips braked, spinning the car backwards to help slow our momentum.

The car stopped, with the back left wheels hanging off the cliff face, and the plane getting small by the second. I quickly jumped over the hood of the car, pulling it back completely onto the runway. Phillips drove us back, where I ran up to the communications room. We waited for a sign, for the radio to come to life. And it felt like hours to my worried stomach. Bucky was right, I worried a lot.

"Come in, this is Captain Rogers. Do you read me?" The radio sounded, and I hurried over to where Jim was responding, "Captain Rogers, what is your loc-"

"Steve! Are you alright?" I said taking the radio from Jim, waiting for a quick response.

"Elle, Schmidt's dead."

"What about the plane?" I asked as Peggy came to stand beside me, a hand on my shoulder.

"That's a little bit tougher to explain." He said, a slight tone of humor to his voice.

"Give us your coordinates, we'll find you a safe landing site," Peggy said.

"There's not going to be a safe landing, but I can try and force it down."

"I'll get Howard on the line, he'll know what to do," I said, feeling myself clam up with fear.

"There's not enough time. This thing is going too fast and it's headed for New York. I've got to put her in the water."

"Please, don't do this. We have time, we can work it out," I said, as Peggy's hand left my shoulder. I watched everyone leave the room and I knew they were giving me space to say goodbye.

"Right now, I'm in the middle of nowhere. If I wait any longer a lot of people are going to die," He said and I sobbed, knowing this is who I married. The selfless man that would give his life for his country.

"Elle, this is my choice," He said, and I heard him say, "Peggy."

"I'm here Steve," She said, coming up beside me again.

"Take care of her, please."

"I promise Captain… I promise Steve."

"Elle, I'm sorry we won't get to do everything we talked about. The house, the kids, the dog…"

"I know Darling, I am too," I said through my tears.
"Can you do something for me? Can you go see Bucky's parents and tell them, how loved their son was?"

"I will, I promise."

"I'm with you, until the end of the line Elizabeth."

"I am yours, and you are mine Darling," I sobbed, "I love you."

"I love you t-"

And the line went dead. I was sobbing out his name, hoping he would respond, that he had survived the crash. But all I got was static. Eventually, Peggy's arms wrapped around me in a tight hug, rubbing my back in comfort as she cried as well. She and Steve had gotten close over our time working together, and she valued his friendship and courage. I knew it was hard on her too.

But I had just lost both loves of my life, and our unborn child within 72 hours.

When I felt I could stand without collapsing, I got up and left the communications room. I couldn't look anyone in the eye, even thought I knew they were staring after me, sympathetic looks on their faces as news of my husband's sacrifice reached them. I swore I knew the moment my heart hardened, when I turned to stone. I armored myself against the grief, shutting it out and focused on my short-term goals.

One, make sure Hydra was finished.

Two, get back to the States and speak to Bucky's parents.

When I looked up, I saw Phillips's cool gaze and I said, "Orders sir."
Chapter Nine

Hello faithful readers. 3rd chapter for today, and it's a weird one. It moves seamlessly through 60 years quickly, so don't blink or you'll miss it! Some pretty important plot points were born out of this chapter... You'll see.

The world learned of Steve's sacrifice, and Hitler's reign was ended. Japan surrendered, and treaties were signed. For our efforts during the war against Hydra, the Commandos and myself were given promotions. I would later learn that Dugan and Phillips had started a petition for me to even get promoted. Washington deemed my efforts valiant, despite my loss. I was promoted to Colonel, taking over for Chester, who would be retiring in the coming years. The world spun on for everyone else, but for me it stood still. I got back to the States, staying with Howard for a bit in New York, before I would head to Greece, to take in the calm of my parents homeland. Phillips granted me an open ended leave, knowing when I came back, I would be ready to work. I had assumed command of the Howling Commandos, but for now that role would be taken by Chester and Dugan until I was up to the task.

Howard was the first goodbye. He was heading out on a mission to find Steve's body, with the hope that he might actually still be alive. After several (53) failed attempts at taking my own life, Howard was puzzled how nothing I did had worked, only knowing about the last three. He didn't want them to, but it puzzled him enough to recruit a scientist or two to study my cells. I waited for news, hoping to have some reason my attempts failed, to try better in the future.

It was at the moment that Howard told me I wasn't aging, that I knew I was in for an eternity of hell. I just wanted to join Steve and Bucky. Because being alone and young, while everyone I ever loved grew old and died, was purgatory. Howard wanted to have me committed, but I told him I just needed time. It was a lot to wrap my head around after all I lost. And he kept it quiet, to keep me from being discharged. He knew how important it was for me that I had a distraction, something for me to feel useful at.

Peggy was the second goodbye. Tearful, because I didn't know when I would be back. Howard would fly over to see me every now and then, just to ensure I didn't follow through with my suicide attempts again. But Peggy assured me I was stronger than this, no humor intended.

Ana and Edwin were next, giving me best wishes and their condolences. Ana assured me that she would look after Howard, as Jarvis did. Of course, Howard would be Howard, there was no stopping him.

My last stop was in Brooklyn, at a modest Brownstone across the road from a diner. I rung the bell to have a woman in her late fourties answer, "May I help you?"

"Are you Mary Barnes?" I asked softly, clutching the box of Bucky's things tighter in my hands.

"I am."

"My name is Elizabeth... Rogers," I said, feeling my eyes well up without permission. Her eyes softened on me, and she gave a watery smile to me, "Come in please."
As I stepped inside, I asked if I needed to remove my shoes. She waved me off, telling me to find a seat in the living room. She called upstairs, "Robert! Can you come down here?"

"I just boiled some water. Would you like some tea, or coffee?" She said, as I took a seat.

"Tea please."

"Cream or sugar?"

"Two sugars, thank you," I said, taking my gloves off. A man came down the stairs, still reading a paper, where I saw Steve's picture with the headline, HERO REMEMBERED.

There had been an empty grave, marked for Steve next to his parents in the Brooklyn cemetery, and another in Arlington in DC. I was at the one that mattered.

I wiped my eyes slightly, as the man looked up at my sniffle. He closed the paper and said, "Hello."

"Hello Mr. Barnes," I said, standing to hold out my hand.

"Robert, this is Steve's wife, Elizabeth," Mary said coming back to the parlor with the tea on a tray. Robert shook my offered hand and said, "Pleasure to meet you. I wish it could be under different circumstances."

"The pleasure is all mine. I wanted to meet the parents who raised such a good man, and you were like second parents for Steve as well. He loved you very much," I said, as we all sat down.

"We loved Steve like a second son. Rebecca thought of him as her brother too. James was very lucky to have had someone like Steve as a friend," Robert said, taking the cup of tea his wife offered him. She got up to set my own on a saucer on the coffee table in front of me.

"Thank you."

"You seem like you have something on your mind," Mary said, as I took my first sip of tea.

"I do. I came here today, because… I promised myself and Steve I would return these to you in person," I said, putting down my cup and gently placing the box on the table in front of them.

"I thought you deserved a personal delivery, not an army courier," I said, noticing Mary's eyes swimming with tears.

"We were worried when nothing showed up," Robert said as Mary tentatively reached for the box containing what remained of their son's life.

"There is a letter for you two in there, and one for Rebecca. He wrote one for Steve and I as well," I said, stopping to sniffle, "That Steve got to hear before…"

Mary was crying silently as she opened the box, seeing his dog tags and said letters first. A few books, his dress uniform, and a few knick-knacks from Hydra bases we raided. Mary raised the letter to her lap, squeezing her eyes shut as she tore into it. She held the letter with shaking hands, as Robert lifted the dog tags from the box. Steve had forgotten his in his bunk, and I had worn one on my own chain since I found it. I had wanted one of Bucky's but his spare set was meant for his family.

Mary sobbed as she read, Robert waiting to read it himself, as his wife cried. I looked down at my ring, the last reminder I had of them both and cried.
The letter switched hands, as Mary suddenly left the room, quickly taking the stairs to the next floor. Robert sighed heavily, nodding his head at the letter, as if agreeing with something Bucky wrote. He finished the letter in silence, looking up at me inquisitively and looking up at the ceiling as we heard Mary moving around for a few minutes.

Mary walked back down the stairs slowly, cradling something in her hands, and giving me a watery smile. She sat back down, as Robert handed me the letter.

"No, it's for you," I said, "I already have my own."

"You'll want to read what he says," He said, putting it down on the table, and wiping his eyes.

_Dear Mom and Dad,_

_If this makes it to you, I didn't make it home. I'm sorry I won't be there to see Becca get married or for you to meet your grandchild._

My blood ran cold at those words, glancing up at the Barnes' faces.

_This is going to seem wrong to you, because the world says its wrong, but Steve and I both loved Beth, and she loved us. And Steve and I loved each other. Don't look on them with disgust, because they gave me more joy in the last two years than I ever deserved. I asked Steve if he wanted to marry Beth, because that way they would have each other, and I would get them too. It was only yesterday that Beth told us she was pregnant. If I don't make it, please love that baby, even if it's Steve's. Because it's partly mine too. They are the two loves of my life and I would hate to know that our baby couldn't have any grandparents._

_Mom, Beth deserves Grandma Anne's locket. It was meant for my bride on her wedding day, and I couldn't give it to her when she married Steve. Please give her it with your love. Steve needs you to smother him as well, but don't tell him I said that._

_Dad, Steve is going to mess up sometimes. Make sure he doesn't do anything stupid that upsets Elizabeth. Help him out of his own way. And love Beth too, because she needs more family than just Howard. He gets in his own head and forgets the outside world at times. So does she, but she hides it better._

_Love her as you would my bride, because that's what she is to me. Love Steve in my place, because I know he is a son to you as well. Kiss that baby for me and tell Beth and Steve not to cry for me. I already wrote them not to, but I know they won't listen._

_I'm at peace, and I hope you know I died doing what I believed in. I was incredibly lucky to have you guys as parents, and remember that you raised me right. Tell Becky to read her letter and not just stare at it for hours, will ya? I know I could have been doing something safer during the war, but this was my choice. To fight for our futures, and now I can be at peace knowing you are safe._

_I love you both,_

_Bucky_

I pulled my handkerchief from my purse, drying my eyes after my sobbing stopped. I looked up at Robert and Mary to see them giving me small smiles, eyes shining with what looked like acceptance.

"How far along are you?" She asked, and I sobbed again, shaking my head.

"When Bucky… when I heard what had happened, I was in a lot of pain. I didn't know what was
physical or emotional. But I blacked out, and woke up, no longer…” I said, as Mary got up to come wrap her arms around me shoulders, letting me cry against her.

The front door opened after a minute of my crying and a voice said, "Ma? Pa?"

"In here Rebecca," Robert said, moving towards the kitchen.

A girl appeared at the doorway to the hallway, and I wiped my eyes.

"Rebecca, this is Steve's wife, Elizabeth… Beth."

"Bucky called me Beth, Steve called me Elle, Howard calls me Lilabit," I said, giving her a small smile and holding out my hand. She bypassed my arm, enveloping me in a hug. She released me after a moment and said, "It's so good to finally meet you."

"It's good to meet you too Becca. Bucky talked about you guys so much, I felt as though you were already family I knew you so well," I said, as she sat down next to her father, who handed her a cup of tea.

"I felt as though I knew you too. Bucky would write about how amazing you were, and I knew he loved you and Steve with his whole heart," She said, and both her parents looked at her.

"I mean, as siblings," She said, trying to take back her words, "Shit."

"Language, young lady," Mary said and then softened.

"We know Becca," Robert said, handing her the letter on the table and saying, "He explained everything to us."

"A baby?" she said halfway through, excited. I shook my head as Mary said, "A lot has happened since he wrote these letters."

"I'm sorry Beth," She said, deflating before turning back to read the rest of the letter to her parents.

"Where are you working now?" Mary asked, changing the subject.

"I am on an extended leave from the Army. The SSR is re-tasking, and I don't have my head on right yet. I needed a little time, so I was going to go back to Europe for a bit. Greece specifically, see where my parents grew up, reevaluate where my place is in the world."

"Reevaluate?" Robert asked.

"I'm not aging. The Serum I got was like Steve's, so if I am aging, it's extremely slower than the average person. I'm… I'm trying to find meaning in my life, if I don't have either of them in it."

"You have us," Mary said after a moment, before pulling something out of her pocket.

"This was Robert's mother's. She gave it to me on my wedding day and asked it go to our son's bride on theirs," She said, opening my hand to place a small box in it. She smiled at me, "Open it."

I did as asked, my breath catching as I eyed the silver locket. It was a medium sized circle, with a filigree wreath design on the front. It had two jewels hanging from above the locket, with two silver leaf charms. I looked up at her in awe, "It's beautiful."

"I found a small picture of the boys upstairs when I grabbed it from my room," she said, "I thought it might fit well."
I opened it to see my fellas, smiling at the camera, obviously from before the war. Steve was a foot shorter than Bucky, with his head tucked in the crook of Bucky's arm. My boys, I thought sadly.

"This is how I want to remember them, carefree and happy," I said, looking up at Mary. She smiled at me and said, "We're the only ones that will remember them how they were before the war. So we need to stick together."

"You are family now," Robert said, handing my one of Bucky's dog tags as well, and I nodded, "Yes sir."

I left the Barnes's home, knowing I would be back to see them. I still was headed to Greece, but I would be in touch with them. Howard came to lay low with me for a month as he was branded a traitor when his inventions were stolen. He eventually had to move on since he didn't want to get me in trouble. Rebecca was enthusiastic in her letters, always so in love with the pictures I took. She wanted me to come home to meet her beau, so I took a week off of my self-isolation to catch up with my other family. Peggy was ecstatic to see me, introducing me to her friend Angie at the Automat and regaling me with the latest in the intelligence agency, and how all the men were sexist.

It made me want to come home, just to give her some support, but I wasn't ready yet.

A year later, I came back for Becca's wedding, standing up as her matron of honor. And then another year later when she gave birth to her first child, a baby boy they named James, for her brother. And of course for Peggy's wedding. And after the fourth year of travelling home to see my family and friends from time to time, I came back to New York, where Peggy had been given the New York division of the SSR.

I came back to help her, but Howard had other ideas. He brought all of us together, Peggy and her husband Daniel, Colonel Phillips, the Commandos and myself, forming a new agency from the SSR. The Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division.

I had to hold back my tears as I realized they had made the name to form SHIELD, for Steve. Howard stopped actively searching for him, and Project Rebirth was officially closed, making SHIELD a bittersweet reminder of my husband's sacrifice.

It had been almost 20 years since the war, with another come and gone, and the Vietnam War still raging. As Colonel, I was overseeing agents and soldiers, working on the front lines and in the shadows. I had been going through Project Rebirth one day for nostalgia's sake, when I discovered the samples they had taken from Steve had stuck around Howard's secret storage facility upstate. They had been forgotten in a freezer, locked away under a fake name. Which I was happy about after hearing about Howard and Peggy's run in with Leviathan. So, one crisp fall day, I made the drive up to collect the sample.

They were still viable. Which, is what Howard surmised, was from the constant cellular regeneration Steve's cells went through. I had cried at the thought of doing this without Steve or Bucky, but I wanted a piece of him. If a baby was all I could have of my fellas, it would be more than enough.

Four days after Steve's birthday the next year, Phillip James Rogers was born, and I knew love again. Chester was honored that I named Phil after him. He was the first man to give me a chance, to help me make something more of myself; who saw me as more than I was to the world. I couldn't name him after Steve, because I knew he would feel like he had to live up to Steve's memory. But he had his last name, and his eyes.

Events passed like days to me. Nothing changed, at least not for me. My friends were aging, and Howard was too. My son started looking more like a younger brother. I had Ana watching Phil
when I was away on missions, and pretending to be his Aunt when taking him to and from school. He understood that it was a secret and he couldn't tell anyone or he might be taken from me. It was my biggest concern when I was hiding my pregnancy. The government might say that the samples were the property of the US government and take him to try and restart Project Rebirth.

Howard finally got married at 50, becoming a father at 53 to Anthony Edward. I was just tickled pink to see Howard the womanizer, as a husband and father. I watched him neglect his own son though, trying to save the world through SHIELD and Stark Industries. Tony couldn't know his cousin, and it killed me to lie to him. Howard agreed that it was better for Phil to not be in the limelight like Howard and Tony were. But I tried to split my time with them equally, as well as working for SHIELD. It was awful, living a triple life.

Robert and Mary passed, then the Commandos and Colonel Phillips one by one. Then Rebecca and her husband. I was at every funeral, with most people knowing who I was, but as time passed, less and less recognized me. Which was a good thing in espionage, but it sucked in reality. It meant that the generation who I really belonged to was dying off. Soon, I would be the last, and I only had my memories.

I already had been dying inside when Phil joined SHIELD in 1984. He told Peggy everything, and how he wanted to be under a different last name than me, to help keep things from being confusing. Me being Rogers too, and because he wanted to earn his place, not have it handed to him because of our last name.

Phil used the last name Coulson, after a family we had known while he was growing up. He was one of my favorite trainee's, despite being my son. Didn't want handouts from me, and rose through the ranks quickly. To keep up the pretense that he wasn't my son, he used the Captain America fan club as a means to stay close to me, under the guise of wanting to know everything about the war and what Steve was like. I was happy to share my memories with my son, about his father. I even told him about Bucky, and there wasn't judgment, which I always assumed I would get from everyone.

Phil met Melinda and there were instant sparks. They married in secret, dropping the ball on Peggy's desk the following Monday that Melinda was pregnant. And July 2nd, two days before what would have been Steve's 70th birthday, they had Daisy Elizabeth Rogers. My world was sweet again, if only for a moment. And at 5 months old, we lost her. She had been kidnapped from her crib in the middle of the night, snatched from our lives. And I held Melinda as she cried in anguish when Peggy told them the trail had gone cold. Peggy would retire later the next year, after Howard and Hank Pym had a falling out from trying to replicate the Pym Particle.

When Howard and Maria died, I was waiting at headquarters for them, ready to ream Howard out for recreating the serum. But instead, I got a call from the police saying they found their bodies. I took Tony to identify them, where I said goodbye to my twin, my older brother, my protector. Phil couldn't attend his own Uncle's funeral, and it killed him.

The coroner's report had been switched and the original coroner was killed, after I had already seen the original cause of deaths. Maria had been strangled and Howard had his skull bashed in. It was a hit and a cover up.

It was then I started to suspect someone had a hidden agenda. Pierce started making changes, wanting to reopen Project Rebirth, but stop looking for Steve. Ever since Zola had been brought into the fold after Project Paperclip, something had seemed fishy to me. He was a little too eager to work with us, even after being so loyal to Schmidt. It was more out of fear, but I suspected that he now craved that power Schmidt wielded. Hydra was growing underneath our nose, but I had no proof.

My whole time at SHIELD was either spent in the field or I was in charge of training the recruits,
making me nostalgic for the war. I still used the Absentee Father, but tweaking it every few years, making it more rigorous and demanding. The recruits knew me as Athena, the Goddess of War. After a particularly bloody mission during the Korean war, Howard changed the original nickname Bucky gave me. The other thing was that they knew I was 95 years old. It made for a long explanation to those who didn't know of my involvement during the war. I was too paranoid about Hydra's possible reemergence to enjoy life. I took some college courses, learned thirteen different languages, and tried to track Hydra covertly while I worked. But they were covering their tracks well. And another decade passed, almost rounding my years without my guys to 65. It was a lonely existence, made easier by Phil, Fury, Natasha and Clint. And then Tony finally wanting to hang around me, when he wasn't jetting around as a superhero in a high tech suit. He suggested a cat, and I rolled my eyes, but rescued a dog instead. Phil thought it was funny too, when he learned the Blue Nose Pit Bull's name was Zeus.

Year 67 and there was something big happening when I got into work this particular day. I was cranky, and ready to kick some recruit ass. Phil had just told me he was resigning from Project TAHITI, and along with it, he was reassigned to our Arizona base that was a joint effort with NASA. I knew Fury wanted the Avengers Initiative in play, but we weren't sure if the GH-325 would affect me the same as it would Tony, Nat or Clint. I heard them yelling about a Code 13, and wondered who the hell had escaped custody. I chose to stay out of it for once, making sure my recruits didn't think the code got them out of training.

"Faster!" I yelled, as they climbed the indoor course. I heard the gym door open behind me as I said, "If you don't complete this in the allotted time, I will have you running it until you puke!"

"Geez, slave driver," I heard a familiar voice say to my right. I looked over and saw one of my recruits from 4 years ago, Brock Rumlow. SHIELD had picked him out of the SEALs before his third tour was up, and I took him under my wing like I had with Nick. At 28 years old, he had more drive than most of my top level recruits, and I trusted him explicitly. He's been a good set of eyes on the inside, giving me intel on the higher ups when I couldn't be there. Fury didn't even know I had a spy inside, and then he got promoted to STRIKE Commander of Team Alpha. My 'eyes' now had direct orders from the World Security council Secretary, Alexander Pierce. He was busy playing a triple agent for me, knowing he could get close to information that was being kept from SHIELD, within the organization. This was my chance to find out if Hydra was back in play.

Even if I passed up the job as Director from Howard, and then from Peggy when she retired, I still wouldn't want Fury's job. Knowing me, I'd be in charge for the rest of eternity. Cause this whole not aging thing was getting old. Howard and Peggy had still come to me, still included me in the big decisions as I was Omega clearance. And once I rooted out the rot, I was done.

"Not now Rumlow," I sighed, watching as one recruit fell, and someone helped her up. Thankfully a few of these maggots had compassion, which is attributes I looked for in my evaluations.

"Found a book I thought you might like. It is a rotten read, but it's a story you might know. If you're not in the mood for books, find me later to blow off some steam," He said lowly into my ear.

"Can it, and leave before I break my foot off in your ass for interrupting," I narrowed my eyes at him. He nodded, "Colonel."

"Agent Rumlow," I said, wishing he would disappear. We had dead drops for a reason, so this must have been big. And that part about propositioning me? He would never do that.
As he did, I heard him say, "Director."

"Colonel Rogers," Nick called out.

"Now's not a good time Nick," I said over my shoulder, as I watched the stragglers finish, collapsing hard on the mat. I was the only one that got away with that, specifically because I had trained him.

"There is gonna be a time your enemy will have the advantage, where you will be running, climbing, dodging, doing everything you can to survive. This will give you the endurance you need. Soon enough, you'll be running this for fun, to keep your skills up. I have personally trained every single person in SHIELD, and your instructors at your respective academies will have you running another version for your PT," I said as they all looked behind me, and standing up straighter for Nick. Kiss asses.

"We are stopping early for today, but don't think I'm going easy on you. Tomorrow, you better bring more than you brought today. Hydrate, fuel up and get a good night’s rest, because this was only part one. But before we end for the day, I will remind you that this course has shaped the best and brightest at SHIELD. It deserves your best, to do its predecessors proud. And I won't tolerate whiny bitches who try to weasel out of it with a medical note. This isn't high school gym, and this isn't boot camp. This is the big leagues, the pinnacle of world security. SHIELD deserves excellence, not quitters. Do you understand me?" I said, and they answered, "Yes, Colonel!"

I smirked at them before glancing behind me, to where I assumed Nick was waiting for me. Instead, I had to do a double take.

A mirage that looked like my Steve, stood beside the Director. The coiffed hair still familiar, wearing an SSR t-shirt and beige pants. He looked like a dream, and I walked toward him, unaware of anything else in the training room.

"Elle," The mirage said, coming towards me, smiling brightly. Seeing his face again, I was confused. Was someone wearing a photostatic veil as a prank? Was this a dream? Or was this real? Because Fury would never interrupt a training session. He knew better. And only a few people knew Steve called me Elle. All but two were dead.

So it had to be real. He was alive. But how? He put the plane in the water.

And as he got closer, a red hot rage came over me. His smile was interrupted by my fist to his jaw, before I Sparta kicked him in the chest, sending him sliding backwards on the floor.

"Dismissed," I snarled to the recruits, before walking past Fury, past where Steve was just getting up. I grabbed my things from the locker room and took the back stairwell towards the garage as fast as my legs would allow.
Music blaring inside my Camaro, I sped through the streets, putting as much distance as I could between me and the facility. The grey clouds that were over the island had passed and the April sun was warming the pavement, giving the air a moist smell. I rolled up to my garage, backing in and locking the car before walking back out of the closing garage door. The two minute walk to the daycare center was fine, no one gave me a second glance, and sometimes the fact that I stayed far away from the media helped. I wasn't 'dead' to the world, but after we started SHIELD, I had to reevaluate the time I spent in front of cameras. The less people recognized me, the better for my line of work. Even if I used Photostatic veils for most of my missions.

"Elizabeth, you're here early," Tammy, the young woman at the front desk said, and I forced a smile, "Couldn't wait to see my boy. And it was just orientation day again, half day so the interns can get their feet wet. How was he?"

"Well, he was excellent today as always. Mrs. Jenkins did have a complaint about how rough he and Lucy were being around Georgia, again."

"The most timid Great Dane ever. Well, if she has a problem with my dog, she can tell me. It's not a reflection on you guys," I said to her, as she smiled.

"That's nice of you to say Elizabeth. I'll go get Zeus," She said, before disappearing. She came back only a minute later, with my giant of a dog, who was being very careful not to pull on Tammy's arm.
He gave a low 'ruff' before running to greet me.

"Hey boy! How was your day?" I asked in a baby voice, dropping to a crouch to let him lick my face. I brushed my hands over his cropped ears and his tail wagged a mile a minute, as I pressed a kiss to his head.

"He had three walks today, one recently, and Jen gave him a treat for his good behaviour. Will we be seeing Zeus tomorrow?" Tammy asked, and I shook my head, "I'm taking him to work tomorrow, to scare my interns a bit. But I'll call if I'm bringing him in on Thursday."

"Sounds good," She smiled, as another owner came in the door, "I hope you have a great afternoon."

"Thanks Tammy, you too," I said, picking up his leash and walking him out the door. People would give Zeus and me a wide berth on the sidewalk home, and Natasha blamed it on my 'murder glare' or 'resting bitch face', but today I didn't really notice. There were days when I knew the way home so well that I would zone out. And zone out I did, so much that I was standing in the apartment elevator when I came back to myself. Exiting the lift, and unlocking the only door on the floor, I dropped my bag on the table by the door. I dropped Zeus's leash as I slammed the door in frustration, locking it angrily behind me.

His soft bark made me look down to see him looking on edge.

"Sorry Zeusy," I sighed, unclipping him from his leash, dropping my keys in the bowl and peeling off my leather jacket. I pulled Rumlów's dead drop from out of my bag. We had been using flash paper and invisible ink, so I knew that nothing would be traced back to either of us. We were playing a dangerous game, and I was responsible for his well being on this assignment. It's why I was so angry about him approaching me in view of security cameras, as we were rarely spotted together unless on an op or when he was scouting new talent for STRIKE. When he first came to SHIELD, we were close, like Phil and I seemed to our colleagues, but had a 'falling out' for show. So his proposition seemed a little weird to me.

The dog gave a little growl at me, rubbing up against my legs in comfort, as I grabbed a large glass of wine. It was a comfort for me now, as was any alcohol. The burn of tequila, the smoke of scotch and whiskey, the oak of bourbon and the tannins of wine... It was an expensive and useless habit, because I was basically drinking flavoured water. I had turned into an alcoholic that couldn't get drunk.

I walked upstairs to the master bathroom with the bottle as well, filling up the tub with a few essential oils to soothe my nerves. Zeus followed, laying at the doorway and resting his head on his paws. I turned on some music, as I grabbed my tablet. Ella Fitzgerald's voice filled the room as I searched through some files, finally seeing what I wanted; answers.

Project ICEMAN, so aptly named was the retrieval of the Valkyrie, that had re-appeared on a glacier that had shifted in Greenland. Of course Howard never found him. He never thought to look that far North, I thought sadly, the memory of my brother bittersweet. Steve's body was recovered, and it was discovered as they tried to thaw him out slowly, that he was still alive. Pictures from the project made me realize just how bad the crash had been. His shield had been frozen in ice, which led them to believe his body was still on the plane and frozen as well. Seeing his body, still clothed in the suit, looking peaceful as he was being thawed like a package of meat was unnerving.

I put the tablet down, pulling my hair up into a pile on my head. I disrobed and crawled into the scorching hot tub with a bottle of wine, resting my chin on my knees as I hugged them. I hadn't cried since Howard died, and even when Tony was missing, I promised myself not to cry and trust the system. Phil even told me he would go looking against Fury's orders, but I told him not to. We had
no jurisdiction in Afghanistan and I wouldn't start an international conflict when I knew Tony was still alive. Obadiah had always rubbed me the wrong way, but he was irked at Tony's disappearance and not distraught like the 'father-figure' he pretended to be should. It's how I knew.

Everything I had gone through, was worn like armor around my heart. I believed I wouldn't have room in it for anyone, other than my son, my nephew and my few remaining friends. But even for all my talk of being tough and being made of stone, everything about that day came rushing back from where I had buried it.

"I've got to put her in the water."

"Please, don't do this. We have time, we can work it out," I said, as Peggy's hand left my shoulder. I watched everyone leave the room and I knew they were giving me space to say goodbye. Peggy stood at the door, looking mournful already.

"Right now, I'm in the middle of nowhere. If I wait any longer a lot of people are going to die."

"Elle, this is my choice," He said, and I heard him say, "Peggy."

"I'm here Steve," She said, coming up beside me again.

"Take care of her, please."

"I promise Captain... I promise Steve."

"Elle, I'm sorry we won't get to do everything we talked about. The house, the kids, the dog..."

"I know Darling, I am too," I said through my tears.

"Can you do something for me? Can you go see Bucky's parents and tell them, how loved their son was?"

"I will, I promise."

"I'm with you, until the end of the line Elizabeth."

"I am yours, and you are mine Darling," I sobbed, "I love you."

"I love you t-"

I screamed in agony as the emotions I had been withholding for years, burst forth from my chest. Zeus came over to lick my arm in comfort, and I rested my head against his for a moment in gratitude. I felt like I was having a panic attack as I cried, sobbing into my glass and my tears flavoring the wine. It was pathetic how long I cried, and Natasha would surely make some comment if she was here to witness it, like "How do you get water from stone? You knew Moses, right?"

Draining the now cold tub, I heard my phone go off. Picking it up, I sighed, "So you heard."

"I knew about it as soon as they brought him in, still frozen. He's alive," Phil said quietly and carefully, knowing SHIELD could be listening in, "Why do you sound like you've been crying?"

"Because up until an hour ago, I thought he had drowned 67 years ago with that damn plane. And no one told me they found him," I said, frustrated as I slipped my towel on, moving to sit down at my vanity to put on some lotion.

"You don't sound happy that he's back... And why did you attack him?"
"I thought someone was playing a prank on me, and then I knew it had to be him, because no one other than Peggy and you knew he called me Elle. Everyone else is dead," I said, twisting my ring around my finger, "And then-"

"You were mad because he left you. I get it."

"Did you want to meet him?"

"Not right now. He needs to adjust to modern life first, and he doesn't need to know me right now," He said, and I knew the real reason. Phil was worried Steve would be disappointed in him, which was insane. My son was a badass in his own right, never mind the slight cellular regeneration he got from Steve and myself. He stopped a gas station robbery with a bag of flour, after giving up his gun, and before the tank filled on his SHIELD issued car.

"If you're sure," I said, hearing the elevator coming up, but dismissed it when I didn't hear a knock at my door. It must be a glitch. Wouldn't be the first time it happened.

"I'm sure. Just... give him a chance. I know he hurt you, but this is a second chance for you."

"It's days like these that make me wish I could get drunk... or high. Anything to alleviate this pain, even temporarily."

"I know. I would take it for you if I could. Finish the bottle I'm sure you're already on, and we can talk later. Goodbye Colonel," He said, as I heard a passing conversation in the background. I heard the implied, "Love you Mom."

"Goodbye Phil," I replied before hanging up, a subtle, "Love you too my boy," in my tone.

I pulled on soft yoga pants, a sport bra and a flowing wine racerback tank top before I walked downstairs. I pulled my hair into a high ponytail, flipping on my stereo with my Spotify playlist, hating the silence. I had enough silence in my life. I grabbed a bottle of tequila, taking a long swig from the bottle making my way towards the living room. I needed the burn today. I stared out the window of my loft, taking another swig and setting the bottle down on the table beside the couch, drumming my fingers against it. Zeus settled at my feet, huffing as he closed his eyes to the April sun streaming through the window walls, and I focused on the music.

_it takes so much out of me to pretend_

_Tell me now, tell me how to make amends_

_Maybe, I need to see the daylight_

_Leave behind the half-life_

_Don't you see I'm breaking down_

_Oh lately, something here don't feel right_

_This is just a half-life_

_Is there really no escape?_

I unrolled Rumlow’s dead drop. Using my blacklight pen from my bag, I felt my stomach drop a little as I saw the symbol of my enemy. It glared back at me, confirming my worst fear. The reason I trusted so few people, the reason I kept Phil from public knowledge.
No escape from time

Of any kind

I looked over the skyline, sun shining brightly down on the city, and started crying again. I hadn’t wanted to come back to New York, but it was where SHIELD started. It’s where our story started. And now I had to deal with the rot inside of SHIELD. Or from what Rumlow has been telling me, Hydra. I knew bringing Zola in was a bad idea, but Peggy and Howard kept saying he wasn’t a true believer.

The little rat died before I could wring the life from his body myself. He cost me Bucky, and it had taken everything in me to not kill him once Steve died. Or apparently didn’t.

It takes so much out of me to pretend

Maybe, I need to see the daylight

Leave behind the half-life

Don’t you see I’m breaking down

Lately, something here don’t feel right

This is just a half-life

Is there really no escape?

No escape from time

Of any kind

Come on let’s fall in love

Come on let’s fall in love

Again

’Cause lately something here don’t feel right

This is just a half-life,

Without you I am breaking down

Wake me, let me see the daylight

Save me from this half-life

Let’s you and I escape

Escape from time

Come on let’s-

Changing the song, I got up from the couch, grabbing the dead drop. Striding over to the wall, I pinned it to the dart board with one of my throwing knifes. Grabbing another eight from where they
were stuck from my last practice, I positioned myself a good fifteen feet from the board. I yelled out as I threw the first knife, watching in satisfaction as it clipped another corner of the paper to the board.

*Can you hear the silence?*
*Can you see the dark?*
*Can you fix the broken?*
*Can you feel... can you feel my heart?*
*Can you help the hopeless?*
*Well, I'm begging on my knees,*
*Can you save my bastard soul?*
*Will you wait for me?*

Every knife left my hand with an expletive, or a scream, tears leaking from my eyes still despite my anger. I drank greedily from the bottle, retrieving my knives again and again.

*I'm sorry, brother*
*So sorry, lover*
*Forgive me, father*
*I love you, mother*

*Can you hear the silence?*
*Can you see the dark?*
*Can you fix the broken?*
*Can you feel my heart? [3x]*
*I'm scared to get close and I hate being alone.*
*I long for that feeling to not feel at all.*
*The higher I get, the lower I'll sink.*
*I can't drown my demons, they know how to swim.*

[3x]
*Can you feel my heart?*
*Can you hear the silence?*
*Can you see the dark?*
*Can you fix the broken?*
I angrily turned off the stereo, dropping to the floor and began crying again. The dead drop was shredded long ago, and I had grown tired of my outlet. There was silence for a few minutes, as I sobbed. Zeus whimpered slightly, resting his head on my knees, sighing. I gave a soft chuckle amid my crying. As I drained the bottle of tequila, I cursed the stupidity of my youth and the serum. While not having it, I would be old and grey, or dead, but then I would still have the ability to get drunk to forget my pain. The pain had caused me to do almost anything to die after Steve put the plane down.

But I had done a lot of growing in the last 70 years or so. I learned so much about myself, and what I could handle. It had been hard, and days I wondered why I hadn't tried something more powerful in my attempts at ending my life. But Phil was my reason for not. Cause if I had succeeded, I wouldn't have him.

But the universe was trying to tell me something. Or it was laughing at me.

Knock, knock, knock.

"Elle? Please... It's me," Steve's voice sounds, and I shudder at the memories it brought up. The base in London, the pub, the penthouse, Bucky's death... The plane, mourning, anger...

"Elle, please," He said, sounding so desperate. I could imagine why. Suddenly, you are 70 years in the future, with no recollection of time passing. I at least, suffered the hell of watching the world change around me, while never changing myself. I mean, I couldn't cut my hair more than an inch or it would take 20 years to grow back. It was that slow. At least I didn't have split ends.

Zeus growled at the door, getting up to stand in front of me protectively. I snapped at him to go lay on his bed, and he obeyed with mild annoyance. The last time I heard the elevator was almost 15 minutes ago, so he had heard everything, all of my meltdown since Phil's call. I looked down the hall for a moment, before squaring my shoulders and padding over the polished concrete, down the hall to the door. I unlocked it, and rested my fingertips on the handle, before quickly opening it. I looked up at him, eyes hard taking in his relieved face, and blue eyes. What most people assumed about Steve, was that his eyes were only blue, but I saw the flecks of green in them. It reinforced the fact that this was really him, and I wasn't hallucinating.

"Elle," He breathed, moving to wrap his arms around me. It took everything in me to not kick and scream as he held me, but to wrap my arms around him, breathing in his scent. He was warm and familiar, even after all these years.

He pulled away from me to look me in the eyes, before leaning in. I heard the smack before I registered that I had raised my hand to him again. He held his cheek in shock that I had struck him again, twice in one day.

"I had to do it Elle," He said, realizing I was mad, "I won't apologize."

"Then we are at an impasse Captain. Because I think I deserve one after having to live almost 70 years alone."

He looked affronted for a moment before saying, "Elle, I was surprised to hear you are alive, let alone... As beautiful as the day I met you."

"Flattery will get you nowhere Steven," I said darkly, before padding across the hall into the kitchen. I heard the door close as I made it to the counter, grabbing my discarded wine glass, rinsing it out and putting it in the dishwasher.
"Elle, I am so confused right now. It's been 67 years since the war? The world upended itself and in the midst of all it, you're here. You're here. How?"

"I may be here, but that doesn't mean I will accept you back into my life with open arms. I learned how to survive on my own," I said, moving back to the living room, "I had no choice."

"Elle, please, stop walking away. Please help me understand. You are my wife," He said and I rounded on him snarling, "And you left me!"

He was silent a moment, so I turned to look out the window at the skyline, taking a few calming breaths.

"Why did you leave me?" I whispered, cursing the emotion in my voice.

"I did. I'm sorry I left you. But I had to put the plane down-"

"You broke my heart, and all you can say is 'I'm sorry'? I know damn well you had to put the plane down Steve, it's who you are. But you made a choice for me in that moment, to make me a widow instead of trusting that I could have helped you."

He looked ready to open his mouth again and I shook my head, before saying, "I have lived through 67 years, of watching our friends and family die, while I stayed young. It was purgatory of the highest order, watching the world change around you while you are frozen in time. Nothing about our situation has changed. You could have given me a moment to think, to suggest rigging something to the steering column while you grabbed a fucking parachute!"

"I didn't have time," He argued. I grabbed the wine bottle, throwing it at the back wall behind his head, as he ducked slightly in shock.

"Bullshit! You just couldn't live without Bucky," I bit out, turning back to him.

He paused; stunned at either my language or my accusation, but I knew I was right.

"I didn't want to live either, after you were gone. Howard wanted to put me in an institution, because I wouldn't stop trying to kill myself," I said, watching him pale.

"But nothing I tried stuck. Drowning, throwing myself off a cliff, shooting myself, a grenade, poison, slitting my throat... After the 53rd attempt, I had to accept that this was my hell, this was my fate. Because of my suicide attempts, I found out my cells were regenerating so fast, my natural aging cycle had been almost halted. I watched everyone turn old and grey, and then die. And I guess I did die, at least the Elizabeth you knew did," I sighed, moving into the living room and dropping onto a couch. Steve sat beside me, giving me room in between us. I guess he didn't want to be hit again.

"But you? You got to rest, to be at peace with Bucky, while I suffered. You were selfish Steve," I said, as he hung his head.

"It wasn't the end of the line for me though. It was cruel punishment. I had to leave for a few years, stay far away from New York. I did as you asked of me though. I went to see Robert and Mary," I said and he looked up at me, with eyes shining.

"Bucky had a letter for them and one for Rebecca. He asked his Mom to give me Grandma Anne's locket, because I was his bride too. He told them in that letter, about the three of us. I was sure they were going to scream at me to leave their house, for perverting their son's memory. I didn't know he did that, or I wouldn't have stayed for tea. They let me read it, and then I had to tell them that the baby Bucky mentioned had been a miscarriage."
"They brought me into the family as if I had been Bucky's wife," I said, wiping my eyes at the fond memory. Steve reached for my hand and I pulled back, "Please, let me get through this."

He nodded, waiting silently for me to continue. I told him about my promotion to Colonel and how Phillips distracted me with work, that he knew I needed it. My time in Greece, because after the war I needed a break, some perspective. Becca's marriage, her children, Peggy marrying Daniel and their children, Howard and Maria, Tony, anything I could think of. I told him how Jim got cancer, and Falsworth died of liver failure. Dugan was a heart attack, Phillips, Gabe and Jacques were of old age. I told him about the children and grandchildren, and for a few, great-grandchildren of the Commandos and how I was Auntie Elizabeth to all of them. I told him about Howard's death, and how the Commandos were disbanded after we founded SHIELD. The history of SHIELD was rich, so I told a brief overview of the last 60 years. But I wouldn't mention what I had just learned about my beloved organization.

I told him how my nephew was twice my physical age and flew around in a metal suit. And of the mild mannered physicist who turned into a giant green rage monster when provoked and the general that tried to restart Project Rebirth for selfish gain. The gods that descended on New Mexico, and how in the midst of all that, I found agents I really enjoyed spending time with outside of work. It took me over half an hour to get the condensed version out.

"And Tony told me to get a cat because I was lonely when everyone was on missions. I was all set to adopt a cat, but then I met this handsome boy. Zeus," I said, calling him come sit in front of my feet, "Was the sweetest thing I had ever seen. His previous owner was a kingpin in a drug operation that operated a dog fighting ring, and I rescued him from the pound. He is the biggest suck though, and protective of me. His breed is demonized for attacking people, but he only would if I was in danger, or I told him to. He comes with me to scare my recruits, especially with his spiked collar, but mainly he has a doggy daycare he is at while I'm at work."

"He seems… sweet," He said as the dog sniffed his fingers, before letting him scratch his head softly. I could tell Zeus was still a little wary of Steve. Heck, he even bit Clint's ass the first time he came over, but loved Natasha to no end. The dog was fickle with his love.

"Family," I said to Zeus, pointing at Steve, even though my throat felt tight with the word. He gave another sigh of mild annoyance, making me smirk and kiss the top of his head.

"Steve, I can forgive you for leaving me. I knew you had your reasons, however you justified them. But what you did has haunted me for 67 years. It shaped who I've become," I said, looking down at his hand, "I'm a ghost of the person you knew."

"I understand. You have every right to be angry though," He sighed in agreement.

"Did they have somewhere for you to stay?" I asked.

"I don't know. Fury had given the impression you'd be housing me. If not…"

"Well, I've got three extra bedrooms. I will have your stuff brought over," I said getting up and drying my eyes.

"Elle," he said, gently taking my hand. I stopped moving, as it traced up my arm to my shoulder, settling in a familiar weight. I couldn't help but lean into his touch, starved of affection for so long. Like Zeus had been with me for the first year, grateful for a normal life and actual love. He moved to step in front of me, gently lifting my chin so I looked into his eyes.

"Elle, do you not want me anymore?" He asked, eyes glassy with unshed tears.
I looked softly on him, "I would be lying through my teeth if I said I didn't miss you, every day. Or that having you near me didn't send my heart racing. Or if I said I didn't still love you with my whole being."

"Is that a yes? I still feel like I don't know how to talk to women," He teased.

"Right now, I don't know if I want to kiss you or throw you off a bridge."

"Can I pick?" He said, a slight teasing tone to his voice, unsure if I was being serious. I gave a sad smile, before slowly wrapping my arms around his neck. I could feel his heart beating out of control, as I said, "I've held onto my anger for 67 years. But they say holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die."

He nodded, before I said, "I couldn't... No, I can't be angry in this moment. The moment I dreamed about for so long, even if I thought it would be in death. You're here. I'm not hallucinating from blood loss, or carbon monoxide poisoning."

"I'm here," He whispered, carefully resting his hands on my waist.

I pressed my lips to his, feeling the tears leak out, as he kissed back. I moaned softly against him, as he drew me closer to his chest, threading his fingers in my hair. My hands found their way to his waist, fingers reaching underneath his shirt to trace his abs. I thought I had forgotten the dips of his muscles, but it was I shuddered as he traced his hand down my back towards my butt.

I pulled back, taking his hand again, and leading him upstairs to my room, telling Zeus to go lay down on his bed. Steve looked around when we got to my room, as I pressed a button for the privacy shutter. It covered the window, and the interior lights were dimmed by the slide of a switch. I looked at him and got his attention, before running and jumping into his arms. He met my mouth in a fiery kiss, tearing the shirt from my body, and sitting down on the bed to attack my neck. I sighed as I ground myself down on his lap, where his pants weren't tight enough to hide his growing member.

I climbed off of him, to start undoing his pants. He groaned as I had freed him and taken him in hand for a quick pump. He grabbed me and pulled me down on the bed, pulling my own pants down. I keened as he hastily ripped my sport bra over my head, taking one breast into his mouth, lavishing it while his hand found my center.

"Steve," I breathed, pushing him onto his back, and straddling him. I lined him up with my center and sunk down, crying out at being stretched this way for the first time in 67 years. Childbirth didn't count, it was completely different. He sat up to kiss me, whispering, "Go slow. I don't want you hurting."

"I need the pain," I said, locking my eyes with his, and I think he understood. I had to know it was real.

But I made it, panting and heaving as I adjusted. I looked into his eyes, rocking and lifting my hips, before gently riding him. He fell back onto the pillows, watching me with hooded eyes, low groans escaping his lips.

I hadn't been with a man since Bucky and Steve left to retrieve Zola, but I forgot how sensitive Steve made me. I dug my nails into his biceps, relishing in the sensations my body was experiencing, with Steve's fingers tracing up my inner thighs to gently rub my clit in time with our thrusts. I was trying to catch my breath as I felt the beginnings of an orgasm.

Steve apparently did too, because his hands were on my hips, guiding me down to meet his own. It
got faster and harder, as I pulled him up for a kiss. He had other ideas, flipping us over and driving home over and over as he assaulted my mouth. I crashed over hard, moaning his name in between gasps for breath, and I felt him release inside of me. His body went limp, with weight settling on top of me that I missed.

"I love you," He said, kissing my neck tenderly, and up my jawline as we caught our breath.

"I love you too, you knucklehead," I said, crying as he pulled back to look at me. He withdrew from me, only to pull me against his chest, pulling the sheets over our bodies. He held me as I sobbed against him, and I felt his own chest rise with soft sobs every few seconds.

"Don't leave me again," I said, hating the insecurity in my voice, when I had calmed down.

"I know, I won't," he said, kissing my head, "If you had to live that long without us, I won't make you go through another day. I'm sorry I forgot my promise. But now, I'm really with you. Until the end of the line Elle."

"That's all I need to hear," I sighed, leaning up to kiss him again. He reciprocated gently, and I felt him stir again against my thigh.

I pulled back to look at him, wondering if this was a dream. After all of that, I still had my doubts.

"I'm here," He said, reassuring me, as he pulled me closer to continue our kiss.

Hours later when we were both too hungry to continue, I left him to relax in bed, while I made dinner. I turned on some tunes while I did so, singing along softly to the playlist. I could see the sun setting from the kitchen's windows, and I texted Fury to have Steve's things sent over ASAP. I would send for the stuff in storage tomorrow.

As I put the casserole in the oven, I got one back from Fury saying it was already in the hallway. I rolled my eyes, going to open the door, pulling in the few boxes and single duffle bag. I bit my thumb as I thought about opening the top one, shaking my head and taking the bag of clothes and hygiene products SHIELD provided up to him. He smiled at me softly, bringing me in for a kiss, before I left him to change. The music followed me as I thought about the last 12 hours of my life.

My phone rang and I looked down to the caller ID.

"Hello," I smiled.

"Hey, what's with the second heat signature at your apartment. I know it's not the mutt," The voice responded.

"ANTHONY EDWARD STARK, do not spy on me. And you know damn well Zeus is not a mutt," I growled, annoyed with my nephew.

"I can't help it, it's the suit. Hey, are you making food? Pepper is working late."

"Go home Tony. Stop spying you brat," I smiled; waving to what I thought was his suit in the distance.

"It's not spying when I'm making sure you are alright. Someone has to look out for you. Other than the dog. Like you did for me, even when I didn't want it," He said. I smiled at the subtle fondness in his voice.
"I love you Tony, remember that. I will introduce you to him soon, but please, give me some time. It's... this is the first time since the war I felt a semblance of happiness. Well, except the day you were born."

"Yeah, like I need a reminder you're an old warhorse. And of course, I'm awesome."

"And humble. Do you know what I do to recruits who call me an old warhorse? I make them eat their teeth."

"Okay, noted."

"I have to go Tony. I love you nephew," I smiled.

"Love you too," He said, before the line cut. I put the phone down beside my glass on the ledge. I turned to go back inside, when I saw Steve standing there, looking at me with a very confused expression.

"Sorry, Tony likes to be a pain in the ass. He was ignored a lot as a child and makes up for it by being annoying and obnoxious now," I said, grabbing my phone and wine glass.

"You were talking to him, on that?"

I understood his confusion, so I asked, "Did they tell you any of what you missed?"

"No, just that I'd been asleep for almost 70 years and that the war was over."

"Oh boy, I have my work cut out for me," I sighed.

"I think Fury said something about assigning someone to get me up to date," He said, looking embarrassed, "But I don't-"

"No, no, no. That's a bad idea. They'll just assign some bimbo that barely knows how to operate a computer, let alone teach you the in's and out's of the modern world. I will teach you, because I know I had difficulty with things I didn't grow up with."

"Okay," He said, before striding forward to take me in his arms, giving me a fiery kiss, pulling back to hold me tight.

"Hey what's wrong?" Reading his body language like an open book.

"I feel really stupid. Something in the kitchen made a noise and I... jumped."

"Oh Darling that's-" I paused, realizing it was the first time I had used the term of endearment since he had put the plane in the water. His 1000-watt smile at the term melted the last of the ice around my heart. I buried my head into his chest, breathing him in.

"Let's make a list as we eat. I will get you a small notebook, to write down what confuses you, and we can go over the list each day after I'm off work," I suggested, looking up at him.

"That sounds perfect Elle," He smiled, as I heard my timer go off in the kitchen.

"I'm gonna start a salad. Do you want to help?" I smiled, pulling him back through the patio door to the living room.

"Sounds perfect," He said, as I looked back. He was a little mesmerized by the fridge, at the sleek
metal and bright light inside. I got out a few veggies for the salad, gave him a cutting board and explained what I wanted. He got to work as I set the table, grabbing another wine glass as I refilled mine. I head banged a little to a new song, cleaning up a bit as I waited for the casserole to finish.

"So I noticed the boxes," Raising his voice over the music a bit.

"Sorry," I said, lowering the volume via remote, "I'm used to loud nowadays. My neighbors downstairs are an architect firm, that are usually gone by now."

"That's all there had been?" He asked sounding a little disappointed.

"I have the rest," I said sadly.

"The rest?" He asked, confused.

"I packed up your apartment and put it in storage. Mary and Robert let me take a few things of Bucky's, some I think you'd appreciate now as it would have more sentimental value for you. Howard was so sure he would find you. I… I was a little more cynical. If you had put it in the water, you might have drowned," I said, putting a fresh bowl of water for Zeus down. He ran at it, skidding to a halt and waited for his dinner, which followed shortly after.

"It wasn't the water. It was a-"

"Glacier, I know. I read the report after I left HQ," I said softly, "I'm sorry about my reaction. I first thought someone was playing a prank on me."

"I understand," He said, setting the finished salad on the table, as I reached into the oven.

"Shit, shit, shit!" I said, quickly pulling the dish out onto the stovetop and grabbing my wrist.

"What?" He asked, closing the oven door and looking me over.

"I was distracted by your ass, forgot the oven mitt," I smirked, hissing as I moved to run my hand under cool water. He smiled, "Do you forget the mitt often?"

"Not as often as you'd think, but yes, this isn't the first time. The last guy I had over was Clint and you couldn't pay me enough to stare at his ass," I laughed, checking the damage on my hand, "Should be gone in half an hour."

"Friend of yours?" He asked, and I thought I saw the green-eyed monster hiding behind his tight smile.

"And Agent that I work with. He's a top marksman. They call him Hawkeye. He's just a friend that likes to annoy me by hanging out in the rafters as I train recruits, firing foam darts at me," I said, grabbing the oven mitt and bringing the dish to the table. He nodded, and I thought I saw the relief roll off of him in waves.

"I never had anyone, after the war… after you for lack of a better term 'died'," I said, remembering not to mention Phil, knowing he would feel betrayed when he eventually found out, "It was hard enough to be without you. The thought of betraying your memory with a one night stand or even another guy… I didn't want anyone to leave."

"I'm sorry Elle," He said as we sat down.

"I know Darling. It was lonely, but I had work and Peggy to distract me. And Rebecca. She wrote
me whenever I wasn't in the same city, making sure to include her parents in the correspondence," I smiled, remembering my sister-in-law fondly as Zeus came to rest at my feet under the table.

"I think that's where I want to start. To know what everyone was like after the war."

"I will tell you everything, but I might have to condense a bit. I know we have another 70 years, but I'd rather not chance it," I teased. He smiled, "Sounds like a plan."

I started humming the Star Spangled Man With a Plan under my breath, and he choked on his water laughing.
Chapter Eleven

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! Okay, we are back on track for Friday updates. I'm so glad everyone has liked the story so far. Its funny, when I upload them to the site, I end up adding so much more than I wrote, and changing things. So, five chapters out is different than I had already written. It's good though, don't worry. Enjoy this chapter!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, or the Avengers.

The next morning, I woke up to an arm around my middle and my phone buzzing. I shut off the alarm quickly, wondering who the arm belonged to, as I was too tired to remember what happened the night before. Seeing it was Steve's arm, the day before slowly came back to me, and my heartbeat calmed a little. Before I felt a moment of unbridled joy and happiness that he was here. It was the most elating feeling after my years alone, to see his sleeping face. But he looked to be having a nightmare. I firmly laid my hand on his arm and said, "Darling?"

He sucked in a sharp breath, eyes shooting open.

"Steve," I said, before he started looking around in a panic, breathing hard.

"Steve," I repeated in a flat tone, to help him calm down, "You were having a nightmare."

"Where am I?" He panted, and I softened my voice to say, "New York. Tribeca. 2012."

"That... yesterday wasn't a dream?" He said softly, reaching for me.

"No, it wasn't a dream," I said, smiling at the way his hand found mine.

"Did you dream in the ice?" I asked him, putting his hand against my heart. He closed his eyes, catching his breath.

"I think I did," He said, as I laid back down. He shifted his head to rest his ear to my chest, sagging in relief with each beat of my heart.

"What sort of things did you see?" I asked, softly.

"Flashes, or memories. You and Bucky mostly. Our wedding, Bucky falling, our last conversation. And then over and over again... I couldn't stop them or change them. I thought I was in Hell," He said, and I gave a sad smirk to the ceiling.

"We both were," I said, causing him to lift his head. He looked in my eyes for a moment, before looking out the windows in confusion.

"What time is it?"

"4:30am. This is my run time," I said, and he nodded.

"Did you want to come with me?" I asked, "It might help."
"Yeah, that might be a good idea," He said, dragging lazy kisses across my collarbone. I hummed in appreciation as he moved to nibble my neck.

"Or, we stay in bed instead of run. It's just as much exercise," I teased.

"I like that better," He said, as Zeus jumped onto the bed, giving a light whine by my head.

"Does he do this alot?" He asked, between gentle kisses.

"Yes. He's very particular about being fed when I wake up. And then immediately going to the bathroom," I chuckled, kissing his lips and then pressing a single finger against them as I whispered, "I'll be right back."

"You promise?" He challenged, as I got up letting the blanket fall from my naked body, and grabbing some underthings from my dresser. Zeus bolted out the door to go wait in the kitchen, while I grabbed a change of clothes and pulled those on too.

"Be back before you know it," I said, biting my lip coyly. I made myself hurry to feed Zeus, knowing the promise of a great morning was waiting for me.

We used our morning well, not just making love, but talking and discussing normal things. Such as getting him added to my accounts after SHIELD sorted out identification for him, and how to work a phone in case I was out and there was a fire. When I left him to go have a shower and get changed, I went down to start water for my morning tea, and making Steve coffee.

I looked out the window, having a sense of nostalgia. With all the talk of our friends and Howard, I was brought back to a place not so long ago.

"Liz, you don't have to check up on me," Dugan said from his hospital bed as I sipped my tea.

"Nonsense Tim. This is your second attack," I said, carefully assessing his aged face. He nodded, "I know. And they say my hearts gonna give out the next time."

"Phil... he wanted to come see you," I said, "Got called away on a mission. He should be wrapping it up tomorrow morning and coming here as fast as he can."

"Tell him I'm fine," He said, raising a liver spotted hand.

"I'm not lying to him," I said seriously, "You, Chester and Howard were the only father figures he had. He didn't get to say goodbye to Howard or Chester. Don't you think he deserves to say goodbye?"

"Already counting me out, are you?" He coughed, giving me a smile.

"Just that the doctor told me."

"Ah, yeah. That the third could be any day now. Maggie is already gathering the kids and grandkids to come say goodbye. Of course he should come. I know how busy life has been for him the last few years."

"Has Peggy called?"

"Called while I was asleep, and the nurse said she'd call again soon."

"Anything you want me to say when I see him?" He teased after a moment of silence.
"No."

"Nothing? You don't want me to smack him upside the head?" He teased.

"I can fight my own battles Sergeant," I said, "Just... hug them for me."

"So... it was true," He said, and I looked at him alarmed.

"What was true?"

"I didn't want to ask after the war, and then it didn't seem important. But the guys didn't want to say anything to offend you by bringing it up. Were you with Bucky too?"

I was quiet a moment, feeling both a weight off my chest and a heaviness in my heart as I nodded,

"We both were."

"Ah."

I made to get up as I said, "If you want me to go-"

"Colonel, hold your horses. I'm not in any position to judge you on how you lived your life. I favored the fried chicken a little too much and see where that got me. I might not understand it, but what I understand is that they loved you. A blind man could see that. Does Peggy know?"

"I told her a few years ago. Howard learned a year before he died," I said, looking up at him from my seat, "Tim, I'm not ready."

"Ready for what?" He asked, concerned.

"To be the last. The last to remember, the last..."

"I know Liz. I know you are gonna be lonely, I won't sugarcoat that, but you have to promise me something."

"What's that?"

"The next chance you get at happiness, take it. Don't think, just jump. They would want you to be happy and not feel guilty. Doesn't matter if it's with another man, or a new friend. Take every moment you can, and enjoy life to its fullest. You might have another 300 years more than the rest of us, but any chance we get to give and receive love and friendship, is not a waste. It's a blessing."

"I promise Tim."

"It was an honor, serving with you Colonel," He said, in a final tone.

"I'm staying right here. You won't be alone," I said, taking his hand, "They'll all be waiting for you, all those knuckleheads. You'll be with them soon, so remember to say hi for me, and that I miss them."

The whistle of the kettle tore me from my memory, and I came back to the present. I poured the hot water into my waiting mug and whispered, "I promise Tim."

I heard Steve coming downstairs, greeting Zeus at the doorway of the kitchen, as I poured a cup of coffee for him from the machine. I set it on the island, pulling out cream out from the fridge and sugar from the cupboard for him.
"I should warn you, coffee is one of those things that changed too. Clint likes his strong, so-"

"Wow, yeah. That's okay though, I like it," He said, holding a hand up that he didn't need cream. I smirked as I put it back, grabbing milk for my tea and a bowl of cut fruit from the fridge.

"I'm gonna have to go shopping after work," I said, noticing how there was only enough for myself for another day. Two super soldiers would mean triple the groceries. My phone vibrated on the counter, so I picked it up to see Jacques daughter Marie was calling.

"Hello?" I answered in French, scooping a bit of sugar into my cup.

"Aunt Elizabeth, I hope we aren't catching you at a bad time," Came the responding French from my niece.

"Of course not Marie. How are you?"

"I am well. But little Jacques is over right now. Leon and Adele are in Switzerland for their holiday, and he has a project on the war due on Monday."

"Ah, that little procrastinator," I laughed, and Steve seemed to be following along with the conversation.

"Yes, he is. Would you be willing to answer a few questions for him?"

"As long as it not about anything classified. I was just getting ready for work, but if you email me the questions I can do my best. I don't want you to get charged for international calling," I said, putting the milk back.

"That sounds wonderful. Are you still set for your July visit?" She said, and I saw Steve's head quirk. Jacques and Gabe had both taught us French on the front lines, so I knew he wasn't confused with any words, just what she was saying about me visiting

"Yes, I will be there with bells on. I need to hear from Paul and Madelina how their year was at Lyon. I'll be there around the 27th, and I may have a surprise with me."

"I'm sure the twins will have lots of stories. And it's not another dog, is it?"

"No," I chuckled, "You'll see."

"Alright Aunt Elizabeth, have a good day."

"Have a good evening Marie. Kiss little Jacques for me please?" I asked, smiling fondly.

"I will, but he will protest," She laughed.

"He's 16, of course he will. Goodbye my dear."

"Goodbye Aunt Elizabeth," Marie said, and I hung up. Steve glanced up at me and said, "Am I the surprise?"

"If you want to be. It's a few months away, so if you are up for it, I would love to show you off," I said, coming around the island to wrap my arms around his neck.

"Last time I was in France wasn't really for sightseeing, so yeah. I'd like to play tourist."

"Well, July is my month off. I normally travel the States on the bike, visiting the nieces and nephews.
Meet any new family members. James and Jacques were across the pond, so I head out the last 10 days or so for London and Marsielle."

"Sounds peaceful," He smiled, wrapping his around my waist. I snorted, "It's hectic. Zeus came with me last time, so I took the car. They usually gather in one place so I'm not all over the map and run ragged. The Morita's moved to New York after the war, so I usually visit them when I get back. The Jones's are in Georgia, and the Dugan Tribe are mainly in Louisiana. Ah, New Orleans in July."

"Sounds nice."

"It's wonderful. I swear, I'd be as big as a house by now if not for the super soldier serum. They make good food in Louisiana. Beignets are to die for there," I said, pouring a hefty amount of cut fruit into bowls for us, "And then the Sawyer's are in Nevada and the Pinkerton's in York, so I stop in while in England."

"Sorry, who?" Steve asked, and I shook my head a moment, "Sorry. After the war. Jim, Gabe, Jacques and Falsworth went home, and Dugan took command of the Commandos while I was in Greece on my 'leave'. They added three new members to their ranks. Junior Juniper, Pinky Pinkerton and Happy Sam Sawyer. I got to know Junior very briefly. He was killed on a mission to aid Peggy and the SSR in Russia. Dugan and the rest of them dropped in unannounced several times over the years, before I came back. Wanted them to meet me, and wanted to see if he could bring me out of my shell, back to the real world."

I wiped a tear away and said, "I miss that man dearly. He was the last of the original eight, unless you include Peggy, to pass. He would laugh and say he kicked the fried chicken bucket."

Steve got up, moving to hold me, gently resting his cheek to the top of my head.

"He's the reason I didn't kick you out yesterday," I said softly.

"Why's that?"

"Well, I went to visit him in the hospital, and keep him company right until the end. He told me the next time I got the chance at happiness, to take it. Because you would have wanted me to be happy, with new friends or someone else. I couldn't do the latter, though. It hurt too much of sharing myself with someone, only for them to age and die," I said, and he kissed my head.

"I would have, you know that right? Bucky as well," He said softly. I nodded gently, "I just missed you too much to let someone in. Now, I'm glad I didn't."

My stomach started growling, and then Steve's did. I chuckled, as I withdrew from his arms and said, "Eat up. Toast is coming up," I said, pushing his fruit bowl towards him. After I had showered, dressed and showed Steve how to operate the second cell phone I had, I packed Zeus into the car. I always made it a point to put a spiked collar on Zeus, and he wasn't on a leash when I was at SHIELD. I walked up to my office, sticking my head in on Hill.

"Is he here?" I asked, and she smirked, "He's avoiding you."

"Good. Next time he thinks about pulling something like that on me again, I take the other eye," I said, power walking towards the locker rooms, storing my bag. I walked out into the room, seeing my still green recruits in a sloppy formation.

"I hope you all got a good night's sleep. Because someone pissed me off and you'll find out very quickly that I am not someone you want pissed off," I said, smirking at them. Zeus growled a little at my side, and they straightened up in fear.
"This is Zeus. If someone does piss me off today, he will eat that person," I said, looking down to where Zeus licked his lips and let out a small woof. It was something I had taught him, not that I would ever make him attack anyone after learning his background. I smirked at my well trained dog, before facing the recruits and shrugging, "Depends on my how well you all do today."

Every night we went to bed for the first week, I held Steve close, worried he might vanish into thin air. I had a bed to myself for so long, I forgot how it felt to have another body beside me. He couldn't sleep some nights, for fear he wouldn't wake up. So I would hum to him, running my hands through his hair and reassuring him with my heartbeat.

He would wake up halfway through the night, plagued by nightmares and shivering, even though it was never less than 65 degrees in the house. I told him what helped me after he put the plane down. I would go back to a simpler time in my mind, where we were all together and happy. And when that didn't work, the punching bag did. I had a gym in the basement of the building, where I would go in the middle of the night and wail on a punching bag. Howard designed them for me after I kept breaking bags, making the lining like Kevlar. Now, I had someone to spar with, that wouldn't whine about me cheating via Super Soldier serum.

He did as well, and some nights I would join him. But mostly I liked to sit out on the patio at night, remembering and listening to music. Steve would join me after his time in the gym, holding me close as we watched the stars.

I taught Steve about the microwave, the computer, the radio, the cellphone, the Internet, world events and anything I could think of. We would take breaks, listening to music from our era, and ignore the outside world for a few hours. I introduced him to new music, going by decade and showing how it progressed to what it is today. Books, TV, movies, we covered it all, because I knew how he learned. The Serum had given us eidetic memories and we retained everything. And once he mastered Google and Wikipedia, (even though I said don't always trust the latter) he was able to figure things out without asking me. Mostly.

Another thing Steve threw himself into, was making it up to me for being 'away'. I was a different person from the Elle he knew during the war. His and Bucky's deaths changed me, and not for the better, as was evident by my service record and reclusive tendencies. He was enthusiastic in his lovemaking, making sure to turn me to putty first. After 67 years of being celibate, I thought I would have grown body shy. But there were some nights I would be wearing yoga pants and a ratty t-shirt, my hair up in a messy bun and he would rip them off and take me on the couch. Or I would doll myself up and put on a little lingerie, watching as his eyes landed on me in lust before he chased me up the stairs. At times it felt odd, not feeling a second set of hands on my body, and I knew Steve felt his lack of presence too. But it never took away from our time together, just reinforced how special it was to be reunited.

Though our rekindled relationship wasn't without its problems. I had certain routines and Steve was slowly getting used to how I did things. He folded laundry differently, and sometimes still left his dishes in the sink, even after I explained that the dishwasher was where they should go. I was used to unwinding after a long day with a book or a movie, and he just wanted to go exploring and learn more of this new world he woke up in. I rarely left the house, except for groceries, gas and work. The odd time Natasha would drag me to a club for girl's night, but it had been awhile. So there were nights he sat and watched an old movie with me, and nights I was dragged out with Zeus to explore Brooklyn, while I regaled him with stories of our friends and family.

He would come out on runs with me in the mornings, and wanted to be with me everytime I said I was going out. He would watch Zeus for me while I was at work each day, taking him for walks and...
down to visit his friend in doggy daycare. He got so overwhelmed when we went grocery shopping the first time, that I said we may need to slow down on outings. But he powered through his PTSD, even surprising me with a bouquet of flowers as I finished purchasing our food for the week. We had gotten his name added to my accounts, and gotten his ID in order with SHIELD. But teaching him how his debit and credit cards worked was not something I wanted to repeat. Ever. But I also sneakily told him that the shirts I bought him didn't come in larger sizes, so he couldn't exchange them.

I liked seeing the tight t-shirts on his muscles, sue me.

I stood back as he paid his respects to Robert, Mary and Rebecca at the cemetery one spring night in April. Bucky's memorial marker had been well maintained, as were the rest of the Barnes' plots. I felt my throat go dry as I looked at Steve. And I watched him look over to a little corner and furrow his brow. I knew what he was looking at, but I didn't follow him right he had stopped at his intended destination, I pressed my fingers to my lips, and lightly touched Bucky's marker, "I'll keep my promise, always."

When I did follow, he was standing over a joint granite gravestone that had been inscribed with the names of his parents. Where once had been wooden crosses painted with their names, date of birth and date of death, there was now an epitaph joining their plots.

"Your love will light my way," It read. I had spent months finding the perfect words, before I realized that their love gave the world Steve. Who loved Bucky, who loved me, who loved his country. And the memory of their love, their sacrifice, pushed me forward during our time apart.

"Elle, did you..." He trailed off, not looking up at me.

"They gave the world my husband. They deserved to be remembered," I said, before he gathered me in his arms.

"Thank you," He said, kissing me once and looking down on me with watery eyes.

"I think they would have loved you. I know for fact, my Ma would have," He said, laying down the third bouquet in front of the joint epitaph.

"Why do you say that?" I asked, confused by the sudden confession.

"Because of things like this. You are amazing and selfless. This must have cost a small fortune after the war."

"Well, I used your money too," I said, blushing, as I looked over to where his empty memorial marker once was. The day after he reappeared, I had to explain to the cemetery that he wasn't dead and they removed the memorial I had given Steve, back when I had his parents done.

"My money? Like what I earned during the war?"

"Yes, and no," I said, as I gestured for us to walk. He gave one last look at the gravestone, before taking my hand. As we started moving I said, "Well, after the war, I invested a lot of my money. When Howard became a success, he halved the money with me. A promise he made to our father was to protect me, to take care of me. So when the war started, I had more than I should have as an unmarried woman. And all my Army pay... I invested it in Stark Industries and later SHIELD. It grew well with the economy, as we had five more wars I was involved in. The Army liked my teaching style and contracted me for their boot camps. And because I was your wife, I had combined our money..."
"You did? Not that I didn't want you to have it," He said quickly, as if he offended me.

"It's okay Darling. I made a couple safe investments and used the interest to re-invest in other things. I invested in Apple, which pissed Howard off to no end," I smiled at the memory of my brother grumbling his sister was a traitor. Of course, Tony thought it was hilarious, and then tickled pink when I reinvested that interest in Stark Industries, after he shut down the weapons manufacturing. I believed in him, and I thought it was the right move.

"That's the phone company," He said, hoping that he said the right thing.

"Close. They make tech, phones, computers, and etcetera. But they don't provide the signal like the telephone company," I said, cuddling a little closer to him on our walk.

"So what else do you have? Other than the cars and the bike."

"When Rebecca died, James Jr wanted to move out of the city, so I bought the Brownstone. And I was out in California a lot for work, so I had a house in Burbank. And when Howard and Maria died, Tony started acting out a bit more, so I bought some land in '90 in Los Angeles and I had the Pacific Palisades house built. But Tony didn't want anything to do with me for a few years. And after he was kidnapped and escaped, he did want be around again, so I finally got to use the house more. So, four places, including the London penthouse, but I haven't been there since the war. I was actually thinking of selling it now. My accountant loves me because I hardly spend anything, and my stockbroker just keeps making good investments for me. I thought if I was going to be around longer, I should be able to support myself for that whole time. I set Rebecca's kids and grandkids up with college funds though," I smiled, looking back to where Robert and Mary's stones were.

"They are family," Steve concluded, smiling as he leaned down to kiss my temple.

"They are. And I take care of family," I said, hugging him closer.

"So, where are we going now?" He asked, as I grabbed my car keys.

"Back home. I have to make dinner. You are gonna meet your nephew," I smirked.
Chapter Twelve

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! My husband says I have a problem. I can't stop posting chapters... Oh well, I'm happy living in my addiction :D

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney or the Avengers.

Steve was nervous. It was a quiet nervous, because of how much he knew of Tony. The Internet didn't help, but when I explained how Tony was raised, he understood that privilege and neglect made him who he was. I was making a classic Greek dinner, which Tony declared I had to make every time he came over. Something my mother ingrained in me before she died were all the recipes of her mother and grandmother before her. It had been hard during the Depression to get certain foods, so it made me appreciate having such an abundance now. It made me miss the good old days, of growing up with Howard, but I was happy that we had the marvels of the modern kitchen to cook things faster.

I still had yet to tell Tony or Steve about Phil. I knew if I told Tony, the secret would be out, and I didn't want to blow Phil's cover. And Phil hadn't given me the go ahead to tell Steve.

The door opened and I heard Tony announce, "I'm here, the party can start!"

"In the kitchen!" I yelled back, as Zeus growled from his bed at the end of the island. Tony and Zeus were not the best of friends.

"Yes, this will do," He said, taking a deep sniff of the air upon entering. He smiled at me, grabbed a piece of tomato from the salad, as I smacked his hand with my wooden spoon.

"Mmm, delicious," He teased as he cheeked the tomato. He kissed my cheek as I rolled my eyes.

"So, what's the special occasion? I usually just drop in, and you can whip this up on the spot," He said, leaning against the counter as far from Zeus as he could, as Pepper came in.

"Hello Liz," Pepper smiled at me, giving me a hug.

"Pepper, it's been too long! How's everything at the company?"

"Why are you ignoring me? Rude," Tony said, huffing as Pepper gave him a look.

"Everything's fine. The Tower is almost done. We'll have you over as soon as the top floors are presentable," She smiled, before turning to see Tony peering into the oven.

"Pita is in the warming drawer," I said, as I heard Steve moving upstairs. He had been mulling over what to wear, like a girl, until I laid an outfit out for him five minutes ago. Pepper had bent down to pet Zeus, who rolled over in search of a belly rub, tail wagging at the attention.

"Wine, scotch?" I asked the pair.

"Yes," They replied in unison, and I knew who was having what. I poured Pepper hers first, handing
it to her as I put the bottle on the tray. Tony held up a hand to me and poured his own scotch, taking a sip as he looked out my kitchen window.

"I thought since it was such a warm night we could eat outside," I smiled, bringing the warmed food out of the drawer, and gesturing for them to follow.

"That sounds wonderful," Pepper said, as Tony casually asked, "How are the signal jammers working for you?"

He was looking out at one from where he stood on in the kitchen. Along the terrace of my building, I had Tony make signal jammers, that would only allow certain people to contact me. My phone couldn't be traced from inside the penthouse, so I knew Hydra couldn't listen in. Plus any surveillance equipment such as cameras pointed at my building, wouldn't get past the wall of signal. I was practically invisible up here in my glass box.

"They are working well. No complaints."

"You aren't too late for me to install JARVIS. He could tell you if you're being paranoid or not," Tony sassied, and Pepper rolled her eyes at him. I shot him a look. "Remember that Fury got into your house, even with JARVIS running. No, thank you."

"Can I help you?" Pepper said, trying to prevent an argument.

"If you wouldn't mind grabbing the salad before Tony eats it all," I laughed at Tony who had his hand reaching for the olives. Pepper stole it from him, directing him out, where he commented, "Who is joining us?"

So he noticed the fourth plate.

"Well Tony, you are right, this is a special occasion. I wanted to introduce you guys to someone," I said, nervous for how Tony would react. He had grown up hating Steve because of how much Howard mentioned him, and I felt like this wouldn't go the way I hoped.

Steve came through the kitchen quietly, only making noise as he bent down to pat Zeus's head. Tony turned as Steve straightened up, and I saw the recognition in his widening eyes right away.

"How?" Tony asked, knowing it was not possible for Steve to still look this young.

"Tony, this is Steve, my husband," I said, introducing them, "Steve this is Tony, our nephew, Howard's son."

"It's nice to meet you Tony," Steve said, holding out a hand to Tony, "Elle speaks very highly of you."

"Yeah, you too. She and Dad wouldn't shut up about you," Tony said, not sounding rude, but his words made me question if he was being extremely sarcastic or not as he shook Steve's hand.

"Well, I hope I live up to their word," Steve said, giving a small smile.

"And, this is Pepper, Tony's better half. Pepper, Steve," I said as the red head came up beside Tony.

"It's wonderful to meet you Steve. Liz didn't tell us they had found you," She said shaking his hand, and giving a warm smile.

"It's wonderful to meet you as well. Elle has nothing but praise for you. Yeah, it's been a bit of a
whirlwind since I woke up," Steve said honestly.

"It was a surprise to me," I said, "He walked right into the training room at SHIELD, and I thought someone was pulling a prank on me. But Fury was with him, so I knew it had to be real."

"Yeah, and with a good punch to the mouth and kick to the chest, she stormed out of there," Steve teased.

"I was pretty pissed at you. But he showed up here about an hour after and then I slapped him and started yelling at this knucklehead. But I had been so confused when I realized it was real. Half mad as hell, and the other half relieved he was alive," I said, holding him close.

"I know the feeling. It must have been so wonderful to be reunited after all those years, Liz," Pepper said as we sat down.

"It was," I smiled at Steve, and Tony faked gagged.

"Don't want to hear about that," He said, taking another drink of scotch, as Pepper and I rolled our eyes.

"So Cap, how did you survive?" Tony asked plainly. I gave him a little stare and he added, "If you wouldn't mind explaining."

"Well, the serum kept my body in stasis. Constantly regenerating the cells that died off from hypothermia. At least that's what SHIELD told me."

"Suspended animation, cool," Tony said as we started passing around food.

"Darling, did you want a drink?" I asked Steve.

"I think scotch will do," He smiled, taking my hand, before pouring a glass for himself from the decanter on the table.

"Wonderful as always Liz," Tony said after his first bite.

"Just save room for dessert," I laughed. Tony always gorged himself when I made Greek food.

"Loukoumades?" He asked, wide eyed like when he was a little boy.

"Of course, in the warming drawer," I smiled, scooping some Tzatziki onto my plate. We ate, making small talk, Tony asking Steve questions, with an underlying sarcastic tone that I picked up on. Steve was polite, but I knew he thought Tony was being a little disrespectful. Not outright, but subtly. It was Tony in a nutshell.

Pepper gave her apologies to Steve about what he went through, and Tony half-heartedly did as well.

At the end of the night, we were all stuffed, and retired to the small library to talk. I could see Tony was green with jealousy as I smiled at Steve, and held his hand. He didn't like sharing his aunt, and I knew his hatred of Steve was clouding his judgement. When I got up to start on some dishes, Tony followed me.

"So you think it will stick this time?" He joked.

"Yes Tony, he's sticking around. I know you don't like him-"
"Understatement," He grumbled, taking an apple from my fruit bowl and biting into it.

"He was ashamed of Howard, when I told him how he treated you. He hates that Howard used him as a reason to neglect you-"

"Yeah, well that doesn't change the fact that it happened."

"Do you know how many times I talked to your father, begged him to teach you how to throw a baseball, or fly a kite? All he ever did was heap expectations on you Tony. I was ashamed of him for putting work ahead of his family. But I could at least separate myself from SHIELD long enough to be with you for three days a week. Your father's neglect wasn't Steve's fault, that was Howard's. Just because Steve is back, doesn't mean I'm going to forget you," I said, shutting the dishwasher. He was silent a bit, and I knew I struck a chord.

Unfortunately, it was the wrong one.

"So what's the deal?" He asked, folding his arms across his chest.

"What?" I asked, confused.

"Well, you don't seem totally happy, over the moon in love. So what's up? Fall out of love while he was frozen?" He asked, bitingly.

"No, of course not. He's my husband," I said, "What is your problem Tony?"

"Just because I overheard Dad say there was a rumor going around, that you had been seeing Barnes on the side. You had a 'miscarriage' after Barnes fell. Some people thought you might be trying to hide the fact you were having his bast-"

The slap I gave him echoed off the walls and I heard Steve and Pepper's conversation stop mid sentence. Tony's face rapidly began turning red from the force of my slap, and he was frozen as we both registered what happened. Zeus stood up growling, ready to defend me, until I held a hand up to him.

"Just because I love you Tony, doesn't mean I am going to stand here and let you run your mouth. You are trying to hurt me by being petty, and you can leave if you aren't finished bringing up the darkest days of my life. This is my home, and I will not be disrespected in it, nor will I let you drag Bucky's name through the mud as a cheap shot at Steve," I said, watching as Tony held a hand to his cheek in shock. Instead of giving him the option to leave first, I walked out of the kitchen and to the living room.

"I'm sorry, I'm feeling a little under the weather Pepper. I think it's best if you take Tony home now. Before he does too," I added lowly, and she nodded knowingly.

"It was lovely to see you Liz. I'm sorry," She whispered in my ear, hugging me.

"I know. We'll have lunch soon," I smiled, before walking up the stairs and to my bedroom. I closed the door softly, walking over to my vanity and sat down, staring into the mirror for a moment at my grief drawn face. I pulled the drawer open to reveal sorted jewelry. One piece sat by itself on a bed of satin. I picked it up gently, opening it to reveal the picture of my pre-war fellas.

I cried softly, taking in Bucky's bright smile. Another picture on my vanity in a double silver frame carried his military picture, him looking so dashing in his uniform. In the opposite spot was a picture of Steve, pre-serum, during his training at Camp Lehigh. How I wished for simpler times when I looked at those pictures. Steve came in quietly, carrying a bottle of wine and two glasses. He walked
past me into the bathroom, where I heard the water start running. He came back into the bedroom a few minutes later, offering a hand. I accepted, putting the locket down on the satin again, and letting him lead me to the bathroom.

He peeled my clothes off, helping me into the bathtub, before disrobing and getting in to hold me.

"I heard what he said. It took everything in me not to kill him as they left," He said as I cried against his chest.

I didn't say anything, but took the glass of wine he offered.

"He doesn't know what Bucky meant to us," I said, after a moment, downing half the glass chasing the comfort the liquid offered.

"No one does. It was a secret," He sighed.

"I know what Tony was talking about. Howard confronted me about a year before he and Maria died, on the anniversary... of Bucky's fall. I told him the truth. He didn't know how to take it. For one, you were both gone, so he couldn't attempt to threaten you, and two, we didn't know which one of you was the father. But he conceded that I had known true love with you both. I told Peggy as well, and she said she had a gut feeling about it since our first night together, after seeing you and Bucky sneak in together. She never brought it up until I did, teasing me that I had been a lucky girl to have two handsome men at my feet." I said, shaking my head as I chuckled.

"In more ways than one. You still outranked me," Steve teased back.

"But I never abused that power," I said, looking up at him.

"No. You made me feel ten feet tall whenever you addressed me as Captain, or even before the Serum. You didn't see a sickly thin version of myself. You just saw... me."

"I've always seen you. Brave, headstrong," I teased, "and compassionate to a fault."

"I miss him," I said, laying my head back on his shoulder.

"You know what I realized when I woke up? I could have jumped, I would have survived. I might have been able to save him," He said, holding me tighter.

"Steve, you can't think that way. We can't live our lives wondering what if. He wouldn't want that. Do you not remember what you said to me after Abe died? What I told you after Bucky fell?"

"I know. I do know one thing though. He would want me to make you feel loved everyday, to keep you happy and smiling. He loved your smile. You don't smile the same anymore, and I know why. I hurt you, but I want to do everything I can to make it right," He said seriously, dropping a kiss to my shoulder.

"I know Steve. And so far, most of that hurt is gone. It's just the pain of missing Bucky now," I said, leaning up to kiss his jaw.

"Let me help you. We need to lean on one another. You've helped me navigate my way through this weird time, and now I want to help you cope. I'm sad that I can't have him too. It's not fair that it was only me," He said, and I shook my head.

"We can't think that way either. I know how incredible it is that I got you back. And Bucky would be so happy for us to be reunited again. We can miss him, we can love him still, but we can't be
ungrateful for the second chance the universe gave us, just because it denied us our third. We were the Three Musketeers," I smiled at Dugan's term, "We were soulmates, the three of us, I believe that. And he is still with us. Just in our hearts."

"He lives on in our memories."

"And in Rebecca's kids and grandkids. I wouldn't shut up about you two to them either," I laughed, "Little James would say, "I get it Aunt Elizabeth. I'm named after a hero. Can I go play now?""

"Sounds like a punk," Steve said, and I laughed again.

"Thank you. I needed to laugh."

"I think I know what else you need," He said, taking my glass from my hand. He stood up with me, as I shrieked in laughter that we were getting water everywhere. He carried me into the shower, turning it on and trapping me against the wall in a steamy kiss. He turned me against the wall, wrapping one arm around my front to reach down and trace my folds gently, as his lips attacked my neck. I moaned loudly, as I lifted my hips to grind back against him. He shuddered, at the ready. I turned back to him, jumping into his arms. He caught me easily, sliding me down onto his length gently.

"Fuck," I sighed, as he slammed me back against the wall, thrusting into me hard.

"Look at me," He said, and I did as asked, studying his eyes as my body tightened and worked around him. He brought his lips to mine, nipping me lightly, as he sighed.

"More," I moaned, pulling him closer by threading my fingers in his hair. He pumped into me harder, and I knew I could take it. A minute or two more, and I felt myself approaching the edge. He reached in between us with one hand, stimulating me further. I cried out as waves of pleasure rolled over me and he thrust into me a few moments more, before stopping deep inside me. I watched as his body relaxed, but he didn't withdraw from me. He leaned up to kiss me again, softly massaging my outer thigh with one hand and cradling my face with the other.

"Steve," I sighed as I relaxed.

"Elle," He smirked. He gently lifted me off of himself, to wash me well, lovingly kissing my shoulders as he did. Once he had finished, I washed him softly, kneeling down to give him an experience he wouldn't soon forget. He moaned as I took his rehardened member into my mouth, licking and sucking at different pressures, driving him wild. I wrapped my hand around what I couldn't get in my mouth, looking up at him as I continued. His hands threaded through my hair, pulling away pieces that were stuck to my skin.

"Elle, ohh," He said, tensing as he came down my throat, trying to pull away from me too late. As he relaxed, I released him from my mouth, smiling up at his dazed expression.

"I haven't had that in awhile," He sighed.

"Well, that was my first time," I said, standing up to lean into his warmth.

"Really?"

"I said there was no one for me after you guys were gone. Sure there were offers, but I didn't want any of them. And I hadn't tried that with either of you," I reminded him, as he leaned in to kiss me.

"If it had been the other way around, I wouldn't want anyone else after you two either," He said as
he pulled back, before shutting the water off. I stepped out quickly to grab us towels, handing him one while I toweled off my hair. I eased myself into the closet, grabbing a soft pair of underwear and a short nightgown. As I finished drying my hair to sleep, braiding it softly, Steve said he was going to take Zeus out for one last bathroom trip. I padded back into the bedroom, pulling back the covers and settling down for the night, my mind racing with what had transpired this evening. I was mid yawn, as Steve came back a few minutes later, licking his fingers to get rid of the evidence he had been eating.


"I brought you some," He said, showing the plate behind his back. I laughed, sitting up in bed to share the plate of cookies with my husband. He moaned in approval, "Food has gotten much better."

"Amen. I can hardly believe we ever boiled things the way we used to," I smiled, using my other hand to catch crumbs. We were silent awhile, just enjoying the city lights out the windows, and the food we shared. When the plate was finished, I put it down on the bedside table, before turning back to Steve. He was staring at me, a worried expression on his face.

"What?"

"I don't want to come between you and Tony. He's your family and he's had you longer-"

"Steve, Tony has gotten his way long enough. And while he is family, you are my family too. You are my husband," I said, straddling his hips, and cupping his jaw sweetly, "And no one gets to treat you like that. Especially in front of me, and especially Tony."

"I just-"

"Steve, you are both important to me. He's gonna have to get over the problems Howard created. Lord knows I tried to fix them, but I can't let him get away with what he said tonight. He disrespected Bucky's memory, you and me," I said, as I held a finger up to Steve's lips.

He pulled it away gently and said, "Okay. Let's sleep, things will be better tomorrow."

"Yes, please," I chuckled, slipping off of his hips and cuddling into his side.

When I woke up to my weekend alarm of 8am, I had a missed call from Phil, and another from Maria. Listening to the voice messages, I sighed.

"What's wrong?" Steve said, still half asleep.

"I have to go out of town for a few days. They need me at our base in Arizona," I said, groaning, texting them I would be there at 2pm, depending on the headwind.

"Did they say why?"

"No, but if Maria and Phil called, it's important," I said, getting out of bed and going into the closet. I pulled open the last door, sighing as I grabbed my tactical suit, tucking it into the duffle bag on the floor. My guns were next, stun batons, and finally I zipped it up, standing to see Steve leaning against the doorway in just his boxers.

"When do you have to leave?" He said, and I could see his eyes roaming over my backside.

"Eh, they can wait a half hour more," I smirked, running into his arms. An hour later, I was pulling
up on my bike to the hangar outside city limits. The Helicarrier was sailing away after her maintenance check, and I grabbed my personal Quinjet. It was a five-hour flight normally in the Quinjet, so I chose to get a bit more sleep while the autopilot did its thing. As I approached base, I thought about landing closer, but I'd park it a bit further away from the base. I needed the exercise, since I missed my Saturday run today. Cloaking the Quinjet to anything passing overhead, I grabbed the tactical bag and started my trek.

As I got into the air-conditioned building, I sighed in relief.

"Where's Agent Coulson?" I asked one of the scientists. They pointed me towards an underground lab where they used to test rocket engines.

I had to go winding around the outer walls, and down some stairs, but I eventually made it. As I walked in I saw Dr. Selvig and I waved.

"Colonel Rogers, nice to see you again."

"You as well Doctor. I'm surprised you are… here," I said, after quickly glancing behind me. For some reason, I didn't expect to see that blasted cube. But there it was.

"The…. FUCK!" I said, as I saw Phil approaching me.

"Colonel Rogers, you said you wouldn't be here until 2pm," Phil said, looking at his watch, but I could see he was glad to see me.

"I thought I would beat the Christmas rush. Why is that thing not locked up in the deepest part of the FRIDGE like I was assured?"

"Oh the Tesseract?" He said, suddenly remembering the glowing blue cube behind us.

"Yes, that. What is it doing here Phillip?" I asked again, using my Mom voice.

"That… is an excellent story."

"It better be a good one," I said, crossing my arms.

"Well…"

"The Tesseract was brought out for testing a year ago. We've been trying to conduct experiments on it, to harness the power as a clean, renewable energy source," Maria's voice sounded from behind me.

"We all know that's bullshit. What's the real reason?"

"Puenta Antiguo. Director wants to be ready in case we have another visitor," She said, making me close my eyes and sigh.

"Did we not learn our lesson? We should have sent that thing into outer space, put it on the moon! This is technology we should not be tampering with!" I said, before I felt something hit my forehead.

I looked down and growled at the offending piece of foam.

"CLINTON! Get down here," I shouted at the perch in the rafters.

"Uh, no thanks!" I heard yelled back.
"Get down here, or I'm coming up!" I said, prepared to march over to the wall and scale it if I had to.

"Colonel, what did Rogers tell you about the Tesseract and what happened to Johann Schmidt on the Valkyrie?"

"Only that once the housing of the Tesseract's storage was damaged, Schmidt took it out. It opened up a rift, I'm assuming from the description, and Steve could see stars and nebulas. Schmidt was sucked up, and the Tesseract fell to the floor, burning through the metal of the plane," I said, wondering why they needed to know this.

"Did the cube open up the portal, or did Schmidt?" Maria asked.

"The cube sent out bursts of light and then it sucked Schmidt up. Steve thinks he's dead, but now I'm not sure."

"We need to evacuate," Phil said, and I watched the lights in the lab very carefully.

"It's powering everything now, isn't it?" I asked, seeing them pulse.

"She turned the power back on. She's… Let's just say Dr. Zola had a better handle on harnessing the power than we did," Phil said and I groaned. There was the rub. Hydra was always one step ahead of us, but this time SHIELD would be the one in the lead when I took them down.

"If you're looking for the okay, you've got it. Has Fury been notified?" I asked, as Phil hurried off to evacuate the facility. Maria said, "I'll notify him now."

"Why am I the first person you called? I'm not the Director here," I said, sitting down in the chair, watching the stupid cube.

Another two hours later, I had finally gotten Erik to explain where they were, in English not science talk. I may be Howard Stark's sister, but I still couldn't understand half the things we dealt with, and it wasn't my age talking.

"Talk to me Doctor," Fury's voice said and I yelled, "Finally!"

"Director."

"Is there anything we know for certain?"

"The Tesseract is misbehaving."

"Is that supposed to be funny?"

"No sir, not funny at all. Not only is the Tesseract active, she's behaving."

"I assumed you pulled the plug."

"She's an energy source. We turn the power off, she turns it back on again. If she reaches peak level-

"We're prepared for this doctor, harnessing energy from space."

"We don't have the harness. My calculations are far from complete. She's throwing off interference, radiation. Nothing harmful, low levels of gamma radiation."

"That can be harmful. Where's Agent Barton?"
"That chicken is in his nest," I said, towards the perch in the rafters.

"Agent Barton, report. What are you doing here? I thought you were integrating Rogers into modern life... It's your damn day off," He said looking at his watch as we walked.

"Yeah, that's what I wanted to be doing today. But your Deputy and Phil called me first thing. Apparently they needed Steve's account of what happened on the plane with Schmidt and the Tesseract, and for me to give the order to evacuate. And Clint decided to fire a foam dart at me, so please let me hit him first. Why the hell are we making a renewable energy source Nick? Even Howard knew that was a failed avenue."

"Denied, but maybe later," He smirked slightly, "I'm assuming you know about Phase Two now."

"Yeah, again, bad idea."

"Director, Colonel," He said, before I narrowed my eyes at him.

"I gave you this detail so you could keep a close eye on things."

"I see better from a distance."

"Have you seen anything the might set this thing off?"

"No ones come or gone, except the Colonel. And Selvig's clean. No contacts, no IM's. If there was any tampering sir, it wasn't at this end."

"At this end?"

"Yeah, the cube is a doorway to the other end of the space, right? Door's open from both sides," Clint said, making my stomach drop. Sometimes Clint was a little too perceptive.

Suddenly the cube flared, and the ground shook. When it flared again, energy shot out, causing a rift to open at the other end of the room. When the energy peaked, it shot out like a wave around the room, before collecting in the ceiling. When we looked back, there was a figure crouched on the platform, a mad grin on his face as he lifted his head.

"Sir, please put down the spear," Nick said, and I watched the psychopath, look down in contemplation, before thrusting it forward. Energy shot out from it, and I quickly kicked down a table and dragged Fury behind it. There was gunfire, and the sound of metal piercing flesh. When the fighting stopped for a moment, I saw Barton off to the side, crumpled on the floor. I looked to my other side and Fury was gone.

"You," A voice said, and I looked up at the psychopath with long black hair. How did he move that fast?

The tip of his spear was against my chest before I could bat it away.
Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! So, this chapter didn't exist originally. It came to life last week, and I have been grooming it over the last week to make sure it is perfect. But I am human and can miss even the most obvious of errors. I will be re-posting the last 12 chapters after combing them over for errors I seemed to have missed. Anyways, enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney or the Avengers.

Steve POV

Elle had been gone for a day and a half, and I couldn't sleep. I woke up in a panic and decided I didn't want to try sleeping again. The dreams were too real. Elle had been patient, explaining that shell shock had been an issue for thousands of men after the wars she fought in over the years. But it was now called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. She had dealt with a lot of cases and she said it would take me awhile with the trauma I went through, so I shouldn't be too hard on myself when I had a bad day. It was about our normal run time when I did wake up, so I fed Zeus and took him out for the morning. We then headed back inside to the basement, where I needed to work out some frustration.

Just like my dreams, memories would flash in my head as I punched the bag.

Bucky! I screamed, helpless as my love and best friend plunged to his death.

Steve, Elizabeth lost the baby, Howard's voice had said over the radio.

You won't be alone, Elizabeth's voice said as I stared at the picture of her in my compass, from where it sat on the instrument panel on the Valkyrie.

Oh my god, this guy is still alive, Someone said.

Despite what Elle told me about the bags, it flew off the chain, breaking open as it slid across the floor. I huffed once, and Zeus gave a low whine. Reaching down to pet him once, I grabbed a new bag. As I hooked it on the chain, I shook myself loose before starting the combo again.

"Trouble sleeping?" a voice said, making me look up. Director Fury was standing at the elevator that I hadn't heard approaching.

"Slept for 70 years sir. I think I've had my fill," I said, hitting the bag, as Fury kept walking towards me.

"Zeus," Fury said to the dog. I was surprised when the dog nodded his head at the man, who looked back at me and said, "Then you should be out, celebrating. Seeing the world. Has the Colonel not been getting you acquainted with it?"

"When I went under," I said, unwrapping my hands as I walked towards my bag, "The world was at war. When I woke up, Elle said we won. And then Elle told me what we lost."
"We've made some mistakes along the way, some very recently," He said, and I noticed the folder in his hands.

"You here with a mission sir? Trying to get me back into the world?"

"Trying to save it," He said, handing me the folder. I opened it as I sat down, pushing down the unease the first picture brought up in me.

"Hydra's secret weapon," I said lowly.

"Howard Stark, fished that out of the ocean when he was looking for you," He said, "He thought what we think. That the Tesseract could be the key to unlimited sustainable energy. That is something the world sorely needs."

"And what does the Colonel say?"

"She wanted it flung into the sun. Can't say I blame her after what you went through with Hydra. She placed blame on the cube for your... disappearance. Stark kept it hidden from her. Didn't want to have her do something reckless with it," He said, and I felt there was a reason I was being shown this. Retrieval.

"Who took it from you?" I asked, handing the folder back.

"He's called Loki. He's not from around here," Fury said, as I stared at him.

"There is a lot you're gonna have to be brought up to speed on if you're in. The world has gotten stranger than you already know."

"At this point, I doubt anything can surprise me," I said, grabbing my bag.

"Ten bucks says you're wrong," He bet.

"Captain," Fury said, making me turn. He looked upset, almost nervous. And from what Elle told me about the man, that was something he never showed.

"He didn't just take the Tesseract. He has technology capable of turning a person's mind with a single touch," He said, "We lost a few good agents. And he's got the Colonel too."

"What?" I said, feeling my blood turn cold.

"This is a Level 10. We've got no idea what kind of information she will have given him on SHIELD, and she knows everything," He said, "And we have no way of putting her down gently. You may need to make a tough call."

"I will do everything in my power to get her back, but I will not be losing her again," I said, calling Zeus and walking towards the elevator with my bag.

"There's a de-briefing packet waiting upstairs for you. Is there anything about the Tesseract we don't know, that we ought to know now?"

"You should have left it in the ocean," I said as the doors closed.

A few hours later, I was pulling up in Elle's car to the airfield Fury had designated. A man stood, by the edge of the lot, flagging me over. I parked the car in the spot he pointed to, noticing the sign. Colonel Elizabeth Rogers, it read, and I saw the bike had been moved onto the sidewalk and
"Captain Rogers," The man said, taking off his aviators and smiling at me. He had a friendly face, and I held my hand out as he did saying, "Agent Phil Coulson."

"The Colonel has told me a lot about you Agent Coulson," I said, shaking his hand and dropping it as he did, "She speaks highly of you, and not many get that high of praise from her."

"The Colonel is a big teddy bear when you get to know her. Most of SHIELD calls her Medusa though. Don't tell her I said any of that," He said nervously. Something about him just seemed familiar, like someone I knew, or had known. I grabbed my bag and locked the car. Phil stopped for a second and winced, "May I?"

I held out the keys to him, and he went to pop the trunk, pulling out what looked like a large tarp.

"It's supposed to rain, and the Colonel likes to keep the car clean," He said, tossing the tarp over. As it fell over the car, I heard the snapping of magnets and realized it had formed around the bottom of the car. He locked the trunk, and handed me back the keys.

"She's very particular about her car. I'm the same," He said, "My '62 Corvette still has the original paint job."

"Lola, right?" I asked, remembering the brief history of her friendship with Phil that Elle has disclosed. She was always a little off whenever she spoke of him, and I knew she wasn't lying when she said there had been no one else since I put the plane down. But something here didn't quite add up to friendship.

"Yeah. I don't trust a lot of people with it. It's the only thing I have left... of my Dad's," He said, before brightening up, "But she's in perfect condition."

"Shall we?" He said, holding a hand out towards an aircraft parked on the airstrip. We walked in silence, and I observed from Agent Coulson's demeanor he was nervous. We walked into the back of the aircraft, and he gestured for me to take a seat. I didn't see the point of strapping in, as Coulson didn't sitting at a computer in the back, and putting a headset on.

"Have you looked over the packet?" He asked a little louder, and I said, "Briefly. Had to get the dog settled first."

"Has Zeus warmed to you?" He asked, and I nodded, "Took a week, but we're on good terms."

"He's very protective of her. Did she tell you his background?" He asked as the ramp at the back raised and the ship lifted off the ground. I was a little confused about the vertical flight, but I could marvel at that later as we shot forward, over the ocean from what I could see out the cockpit window.

"Yeah, I don't blame him. To be taken from a bad situation, you'd cling to the first person to show you kindness," I nodded, as I opened the tablet. He nodded, before looking back at his screen. I passed over the file about Tony, as I already knew more than enough about the punk that was my nephew, giving a brief glance over the two SHIELD agents. Clint was a familiar name, and I remembered that name was something Elle had mentioned. Moving past him, a woman named Natasha Romanoff. Elle had mentioned her a lot. And the last one was concerning.

"We're about 40 minutes from home base sir," One of the pilots said, making Agent Coulson get up.

"So this Doctor Banner was trying to replicate the serum they used on me?"
"A lot of people were. Kept demanding blood samples from the Colonel. You were the world's first super heroes. Banner thought Gamma radiation might hold the key to unlocking Erskine's original formula. The Colonel knew some, but would never disclose it as she had been sworn to secrecy."

"Didn't really go his way, did it?"

"Not so much. When he's not that thing though, guy is like a Stephen Hawking." He said, making me look up.

"He's like a smart person," He simplified. I looked down at the tablet before he spoke up again, "I've got to say it's a real honor to meet you, officially."

"I feel like I've met you, through the Colonel's stories. And I kind of met you, I mean, I watched you, while you were sleeping," He said, and I looked away, feeling uncomfortable.

"I mean, I was present while you were unconscious," He said as I got up, trying to backpedal, "From the ice. Really, it's just a huge honor to have you on board, I..."

I watched out the window as I said, "I hope I'm the man for the job."

"Oh you are, absolutely. We made a few modifications to the uniform. I had a little design input," He said proudly. I looked up and said, "Uniform? Aren't the stars and stripes a little... old fashioned?"

"Everything that's happening, everything that's about to come to light, people might need a little old fashioned," He said, and I nodded. I went to sit down again, and he went to his previous seat.

"So, before I came out of the ice," I said, trailing off. He didn't quite clue in, so I had to add, "You and the Colonel.""

"Oh god, no," He said, looking horrified. If I wasn't so relieved she hadn't been lying, I would think he didn't find her attractive. Elle was gorgeous, and I'd seen many men turn their heads at her as we past them in the store on on the street.

"I'm... I'm separated from my wife at the moment. She was always the one, you know? No one else was ever going to compare. And the Colonel took me under her wing. She was the best man at my wedding. The best mentor, really. She doesn't get close to a lot of people, so I wouldn't ever endanger that friendship. And I never thought of her that way," He said seriously.

"She said there wasn't anyone after... but she always talks about you with fondness. It's hard not to draw that conclusion after hearing the same in your voice. I'm sorry if I offended you," I said sincerely. He smiled, "I'm not offended Captain Rogers. Zeus isn't the only one protective of her, and it's easy to confuse protectiveness with other strong feelings."

"So, she got out there, and this Loki guy took her?" I asked, getting back to the mission. He nodded, "I was in charge of evacuation, so I didn't see it happen. But from what Director Fury and Deputy Director Hill say, she wasn't herself, or at least she was less like herself. Around SHIELD, she's known to be cold and distant, but I know she would have never attacked her own agents like that," He said, pulling up the footage to show me.

As we landed, the ramp was lowered and Agent Coulson exited. I followed him out to where a redhead stood waiting.

"Agent Romanoff, Captain Rogers," Agent Coulson said,
"Ma'am," I nodded to her.

"Hi. They need you on the Bridge, they are starting the Face Trace," She said, directing the last part at Agent Coulson.

"I'll see you there," He said, before leaving me with Agent Romanoff. A small tanker passed by as the pilots left with my bag and their own. Coulson had assured me it would be taken to a bunk.

"There was a quite the buzz around here, finding you in the ice. Thought Coulson was going to swoon," She said in a teasing manner.

"Did he ask you to sign his Captain America trading cards yet?"

"Trading cards?" I asked, kinda humbled that they had memorabilia about me after I put the plane down. Elle had told me about the Captain America radio show and how Peggy and her had hated it because it painted them as helpless women. I wouldn't have wanted that either.

"They're vintage, he's very proud. Has all the Lady Liberty ones as well. Hasn't quite decided to ask the Colonel for her signature since they've been working together for almost 25 years," She said wryly, as she looked ahead. I followed her gaze to see Dr. Banner, looking as he had in his SHIELD file, and not green.

"Dr. Banner," I called, holding out a hand to the man.

"Hi, they told me you'd be here," He said, shaking my hand as he glanced around.

"Word is you can find the cube. And by association, my wife," I said kindly.

"Is that the only word on me?" He asked, suspiciously.

"The only word I care about," I answered honestly. He looked around, gesturing as he did, "This must be strange for you, all of this."

"Actually, this is all kind of familiar," I said honestly, as a squad of men ran by in formation.

"Gentlemen, you may want to step inside in a minute. It's going to get a little hard to breathe," Agent Romanoff said, holding her arms in front of her. An alarm sounded and we heard the sound of metal shifting as someone called over a speaker to clear the deck.

"Is this a submarine?"

"Really? They want me in a submerged pressurized metal container?" Dr. Banner sassed. We walked over to the ledge to see a giant turbine starting up, causing wind to push against us slightly. The aircraft carrier lifted off the water, as I stepped back.

"No, no, this is much worse," Dr. Banner said, sounding tense. I nodded to Agent Romanoff and she led us inside. We went down a level and through a series of hallways before walking into a large room, with windows showing us getting further and further from the water below. There were banks of computers and people milling about, talking into comm units. Elle had showed me a few things that SHIELD used, but she never mentioned a flying aircraft carrier.

Unless this is what she meant by Helicarrier.

I looked up and smiled a bit, thinking about how much Bucky would love this. He was the nerd out of the two of us, loving Howard's tech and wanting to know how things worked. He always loved
the Expo, and seeing all the inventions that seemed impossible to us in the 40's. Now I was seeing it all, Elle had lived through it all and it was a bittersweet memory of the third of our trio.

"All engines operating. SHIELD protocol 196.3 in effect. We're at levels sir," A woman said to Fury.

"Good, let's vanish," Fury said, as I continued to look around.

"Engage retroreflection panels," A voice said.

"Retroreflection panels engaged," Another answered.

"Gentlemen," Fury said, turning around.

I dug a few bills out of my pocket, holding up a 10 dollar bill. Fury took it as I continued to look around. The view was great, but it reminded me a little of being in the Valkyrie before I had to put it down. I briefly heard Dr. Banner ask how long he was going to be here.

"Once we've got the Tesseract, you're in the wind," Fury said as I walked around the lower level to where Agent Coulson stood.

"And where are we on that?" Dr. Banner asked.

"We are sweeping every wirelessly accessible camera on the planet. Cellphones, laptops... If its connected to a satellite, it's eyes and ears for us," Agent Coulson said, as Agent Romanoff kneeled next to a screen.

"It's still not going to find them in time," She said, as I saw a picture of Elle. In it, she looked devoid of all emotion. It reminded me of the look she gave me when I first showed up at the apartment. What Agent Coulson said came to mind about her being cold and distant, and now I knew why her nickname was Medusa. If looks could kill, I'd be dead over a month ago. Another of Agent Barton was on another computer, and another of the scientist, Dr. Selvig.

"Colonel Rogers would know to avoid cameras if you're looking that way," I said, watching everyone look to me in shock. Even some of the agents at computers nearby.

"She's got me caught up on a lot. Google and wikipedia help," I shrugged, slightly offended about how they assumed I wouldn't know anything. Elle said that the serum gave us eidetic memories, and I knew more than enough to get by.

Agent Coulson smirked at me, almost pridefully, "Captain Rogers is right, she and Barton would know to go underground. Unless they want to be found, we won't find them by the usual means."

"Then what do you suggest?" Fury said, quirking an eyebrow, "How do we find them?"

"You've got to narrow your field. How many Spectrometers do you have access to?" Dr. Banner asked, rolling up his sleeves.

"How many are there?" Fury answered folding his arms.

"Call every lab you know. Tell them to put the Spectrometers on the roof and calibrate them for Gamma rays. I'll rough out a tracking algorithm, basic cluster recognition. At least we can rule out a few places," He said, "Do you have somewhere for me to work?"

"Agent Romanoff, can you show Dr. Banner to his laboratory please?"
"You're gonna love it Doc. We've got all the toys," She said as she led him out of the hallway.

"This isn't overwhelming, is it?" Agent Coulson said after Banner had left.

"This, well... It could be worse. I could not know what a computer was," I said, teasing myself.

"We're gonna find her," He said in a reassuring voice, "The two of you, there's no doubt in my mind that after all you've been through you'd only get a month together. She waited for 70 years, this will be like blinking."

"Thank you," I said sincerely. It had been weighing on my mind that if her conventional means of suicide didn't work, what could an Asgardian do against her?

"That was good insight you gave earlier. You know how she thinks. Director Fury will still want to try, but you were right. It's why we are at a Level 10. She knows everything that goes on in SHIELD. A paperclip doesn't go missing without her hearing about it," He said, and I nodded.

"She's a brilliant tactician. Whenever we'd lay out a play during the War, she'd come along and fix it so we didn't lose anyone. Taught me everything I know. I owe it all to her," I said, looking at her picture again and frowning, "But I feel like I don't know her now."

"That's understandable. You knew her before..."

"Before what?"

"Not here," He said, gesturing for me to follow, and I did, taking off my jacket. We walked back toward the conference table, away from the ears of other agents. He stood, as I put my jacket over a chair.

"The Colonel always said that war that changed her wasn't World War II, it was the Korean War. She had a mission that cost her 20 men, and in retaliation, she slaughtered over 50 North Korean troops."

"Were they in her way?" I asked, confused.

"Yes, and no. There isn't much in the official report, but she told me that one of the boys looked like you before the serum," He said lowly enough for my hearing.

"They had bad intel," He continued, "The men were like another Howling Commandos to her. She snapped and even after getting what she needed, she made sure there were no survivors. She walked back to their airlift, and refused to wash the blood off of herself until she submitted her report to Director Carter and Mr. Stark. They were horrified, which was the reaction she was going for. She had been trying to stop the bleeding of a few of her men, carried the bodies back herself one by one. I think there is a picture of her somewhere and you can see the difference in her eyes. Anyways M.. Colonel Rogers always said that she would never take another team if she could do it herself. It was there she got her new codename."
"You were about to call her Medusa," I said confused.

"I would never," He said, shaking his head, and answering quickly, "The Colonel allowed me to give her a nickname, but I refuse to use it at work. It's unprofessional. I forgot where I was for a moment. The reason she is called Medusa by many agents here, is because she once glared at someone and he had a heart attack out of terror. He lived, but so did the nickname."

I nodded, but thought, "What nickname starts with M that isn't Medusa?"

"I still don't know her like you do," I said, "Or anyone else here. Sometimes she feels like a stranger. Take her taste in music for example. She can switch between songs I remember and something called 'metal' to 'pop' all in 20 minutes. It's like whiplash hearing it."

"Music, as she's told me, is her escape. She's seen some horrors over the years, and hearing them second hand, I wanted to go to therapy myself. Her legacy is her ability to detach herself and get the job done. She is the spy, the one everyone here wishes they could be a tenth of. But no man is an island," He shrugged.

"I guess you're right," I sighed.

"It's been 70 years, people change. Things won't go back to normal, but you can get to know each other again. Since I met her, she carries more anger and pain that a thousand armies could ever bear. Believe me when I say she has already crossed hell. And the only time I saw peace in her eyes was when she showed up in Arizona those few days ago. The harsh edge was gone, and she seemed like a different person than the one the world knew. It's going to take some time, but I'm sure she is much more open with you than with anyone here, ever Director Fury," He said wisely.

"She has been. At least, from what you've told me she normally is like," I said, frowning.

"Recruits are lucky and then consequently unlucky to have her. She doesn't put up with anyones whining." He smirked, as if remembering something funny, "And she pushes everyone to be their absolute best, even the scientists that don't see much use of their physical training. But to those she cares about, you couldn't be more blessed to have her in your life."

"Thank you, Agent Coulson," I said seriously, "I've been a little cut off from people, so it's nice to talk to someone that isn't the Colonel about my problems."

"You are welcome," He said, smiling at me.
"I know this isn't a great time to ask, but I didn't know when I would get the chance afterwards. I have a set of trading cards, Captain America and Lady Liberty trading cards that is. I was wondering if you'd sign them," He said, but something about his enthusiasm sounded displaced.

"Agent Romanoff mentioned those. I had no idea they made something like that after the war."

"The Colonel doesn't really talk about it, but there were radio shows, comics, trading cards... Superheroes became real to every kid in the world after the war, after your... disappearance," He said, sounding off again.

"I mean, if it's not too much trouble," He asked, as he remembered the original of our conversation.

"Oh no, it's fine," I said, looking over the computers, anxious to find Elle. She was my rock since I woke up, being there to calm me, to help me with learning new technology, to give me a stronghold as I navigated the new century. I was hesitant to be without her when she had to leave the other day, and now I knew I should have trusted my gut and asked her to stay. I didn't want to depend on her, and I knew there was an almost unhealthy dependency there now. But she said that whatever I needed, she would be, while I got my bearings. And right now, I needed her in my arms and to know she was safe.

"It's a vintage set. Took me a couple of years to collect them all," He said, and I nodded as he continued, "Near mint, slight boxing around the edges-"

"Got a hit," Someone said, as Agent Coulson went to investigate, "67% match."

"Wait, cross match 79%," The technician said.

"Location?"

"Stuttgart, Germany. 28 Konigstrasse. He's not exactly hiding," The agent at the computer said sarcastically.

"Wait, Colonel Rogers is with him," The man said, and I saw Coulson sag in relief. I looked at her, wearing a slinky green gown with black lace, hair done up in some sort of updo. But her eyes were blue, and it unnerved me.

"Captain," Fury said, as I turned my head, "Gear up."
"He is quite the dramatic one," I heard Agent Romanoff say over my comm after she dropped me off. I chose to focus on the mission rather than respond, trying my best to sneak around the crowd, away from Elle's watchful eye. He had some sort of clones, watching the mass of people he had cornered. More than once, I had to duck behind something to avoid Elle's sweeping gaze. She looked lovely, even if the dress and golden jewelry was a bit gaudy on her.

"You were made to be ruled," The Asgardian said as he finished his speech, "In the end, you will always kneel."

I watched a single man stand up, as I snuck closer to the crowd, "Not to men like you."

"There are no men like me," Loki smirked.

"There are always men like you," The man said passionately.

"Look to your elder people. Let him be your example," Loki said, raising and charging his staff. I jumped, landing in time to deflect the blast, knocking Loki onto his face.

"You know, the last time I was in Germany and saw a man standing above all the rest, we ended up disagreeing," I said as I walked forward, hearing the Quinjet approaching.

"The Soldier, the man out of time," He said, getting up.

"I'm not the one that's out of time," I smirked.

"Loki, drop the weapon and stand down. Colonel, come quietly and I won't make this messy," Agent Romanoff’s voice said over the loudspeaker. Loki shot at the Quinjet and I threw my shield, and it barely fazed him as it hit his face. I came back to me, as I ran up to him, socking him across the jaw. He looked at me as if I had hit him with a pillow, before trying to hit me with the sceptre.

He landed a blow to my gut and I fell to one knee at the impact. Looking up, I switched the shield to my right arm, tossing it at him. He batted it away, and there was a few more blocks and punches before he hit me and I went flying. When I tried to get up, I felt something pressed against the back of my head.

"Kneel," He said lowly.

"Not today," I said, taking a hold of it and using it as leverage to stand, doing a roundhouse like Elle had taught me. Speaking of Elle, she was stalking towards us, a predatory look in her unearthly blue eyes. I wasn't prepared for the moves she used, punching me in all the right spots, making it harder to defend myself when I was hunched over like a turtle.

"Elle!" I yelled, blocking one hit. She didn't even flinch when her name was called.

"Elle, stop, it's me," I said again.

"Who, the man who loved me?" She said, venom dripping from her words, "The one who left me to grieve over our lost child and lover? The one who chose death over me?"

"She's mine now, Captain," Loki said, "A fitting queen for a god. She'll sire heirs for me. Like she had for you, but you threw her away."

"The day you showed up," She said, punching me across the jaw, "I was hoping if I slit my wrists just one more time, it would stick. So you could see my cold dead eyes staring back at you as you found me."
"And then you'd feel what I did," She said, giving me another savage kick to the chest. I heard music come over the speaker on the Quinjet, and looked up to see a streak of light heading towards us.

A blast hit Loki, sending him backwards, as I got up, ready to face Elle again. But as the red and gold suit landed next to me, Elle charged. I moved to grab my shield, prepared to defend myself if Tony was going to take Loki off my hands.

All I heard was the thunk of flesh meeting metal, and watched Elle drop like a sack of potatoes. I watched weapons emerge from Tony's suit as I ran up beside him.

"Make your move Reindeer Games," A from the suit voice said. The god's armour disappeared as he raised his hands, and I was suspicious of the way he surrendered so easily.

"Tony," I said, panting.

"...Steve," Tony's voice answered.

"You grab The Manchurian Candidate here, I'll grab Zoolander and we'll get going," He said, hauling Loki to his feet as Agent Romanoff touched the Quinjet down in an open spot of the plaza. I moved to pick up Elle, but Romanoff tossed me a large metal cuff.

"Put them on her. We don't know who she'll be when she comes to," She said, and I sighed. Slipping her hands in either side, it clamped down over her wrists on the inside. I noticed the odd angle of her neck, and looked up at Tony, "You broke her neck."

"Damn, I have to work on my touch. No wait, you're welcome because she was trying to kill you. Just straighten it out," Tony sassed, as I picked her up. Strapping her into a seat, I winced as I realigned her neck and let it rest against the back wall. She'd wake up soon. She told me this had happened a few times.
Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! Because I have no self control, I checked this one over and decided to post it before I had a chance to mess with it. Enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney or the Avengers.

Elle POV

When I woke up from my haze, I was in a Quinjet, sitting across from the deranged man that forced me to… wear a dress and act as his date… I was attacking Steve… taunting him, and then Tony appeared in his suit… Natasha's voice on loudspeaker… the Tesseract… Tony's armored hand hitting the side of my head.

I sucked in a sharp breath, screwing my eyes shut.

Ouch. He had definitely broken my neck. The pain was familiar.

"Elle, can you hear me?" A voice asked through the fog, "Show me it's you."

"What did you do to me? I am gonna tear you to pieces," I yelled as I made eye contact with the psychopath, feeling the weight of my restraints.

He didn't speak, just smirked.

"She's back," A sarcastic voice said, and I snapped the restraints off easily.

"Okay, that was way too easy for you," Tony said, and I was vaguely aware he was sporting a bit of a bruise on his right cheek. I looked at him, before seeing Steve's worried face in my peripheral vision.

"I'm okay," I said, moving to hug him.

As I pulled back I noticed the new suit, and smiled sadly.

"I like the original better," I smirked, not talking about his Howling Commandos suit. He gave a little smirk, "Yeah, I'm not wearing tights again. It's bad enough the running pants you got me are essentially tights."

"Where's Zeus?" I asked, worried that he might be starving.

"With the daycare and they are boarding him until we get back, however long it might be," He chuckled.

"Smart man. I need to check in with Fury," I said, before kissing his cheek and moving to go talk to Natasha.
"Welcome back," She smirked.

"Clint, did you get him back too?" I asked, shaking my head as everyone's voices sounded far away.

"No. This should bring you up to speed," Nat said, handing me her tablet. Footage from the Mojave base, footage from the Quinjet as I attacked my husband viciously while Loki watched, grinning like a Cheshire cat. I remembered what I had said to Steve and winced.

I'm sorry, I mouthed to him. He gave a small smile and I knew all was forgiven.

"Incoming," Natasha said as the console beeped. I opened up the transmission and said, "Fury."

"Colonel, back on the side of the light?"

"I am."

"Has he said anything?"

"Not a word," Natasha answered lowly.

"Just get him here, we're low on time," Nick said, "Good to have you back Colonel."

"I'll come see you for debrief after," I said, hanging up.

"I don't like it," I heard Steve say as I shut down the tablet.

"What, Rock of Ages giving up too easily?"

"No one ever beat that easily," Steve quietly, "This guys packs a wallop."

"Well you are pretty spry, for an older fellow," Tony snarked. Steve turned to him as I glared at the back of Tony's head.

"What's your thing? Pilates?"

"What?"

"It's like calisthenics. You missed a couple things, doing time as a Capsicle," Tony said.

"Fury didn't tell me he was calling you in," Steve said, as I walked over to Loki. He looked up at me and smirked, "Back for more…. Darling?"

"Yeah, there's a lot of things Fury doesn't tell you," Tony said, as I gave Loki a right hook.

"Elle," Steve said, holding me back from continuing.

"That was it," I promised, watching Loki laugh as he reeled his head back.

"Where is this weather coming from?" Natasha said, and Loki stopped laughing, as if knowing what was happening.

"What? Scared of a little lightning?" Steve asked, seeing his panicked face.

"I'm not overly fond of what follows," He answered. Thunder and then lightning… but what follows lightning?

"Oh shit, Thor," I said, before something landed on the top of the Quinjet.
Thor dropped in as Tony opened the ramp. He pushed Tony back into Steve and I stumbled out of the way in time or I would be crushed.

"Thor, wait!" I yelled, but it was too late. He had taken Loki by the collar and taken off out of the back of the Quinjet.

"And now there's that guy," Tony said through his faceplate.

"It was Thor," I said, grabbing a parachute.

"Another Asgardian?" Natasha asked, incredulously.

"That guy's a friendly?" Steve asked, getting his balance again.

"Doesn't matter. If he frees Loki or kills him, the Tesseract is lost," Tony said, moving to the end of the ramp.

"Stark, we need a plan of attack."

"I have a plan, attack," He said before jetting out, after Thor.

"See you down there, Captain," I smirked, as he grabbed a parachute.

"I'm coming back this time," He promised, with a small smile.

"I would sit this one out Cap," Nat said flipping a switch on the panel above her.

"I don't see how I can."

"These guys come from legends. They're basically gods."

"Funny, I've met someone who thought he was a god. He could still bleed," Steve said, and I gave him a kiss as I handed him his shield.

"Go get him."

"I promise," he said, taking a running leap out of the back.

"So, the sex still good?" She teased as she tossed me a bag. I opened it to find a spare suit. It was the halter top version, but it would do until I got back the original. Unless it was still buried with the Mojave base.

"Ooooh yeah. And how'd you know I'd need it?" I asked, moving to a corner where the second pilot couldn't see me change out of the dress I was in.

"We did a face trace for Loki, caught you too. Thought you might need a change out of that dress, if we got you back. That green is not your color by the way."

"I know. Definitely his though," I said, gesturing with my head behind us as I let the dress pool. Black and green? No, thank you. I had enough green in the Army.

"There's boots in there too," She said, turning her head to give me some privacy.

"I praise your quick thinking," I said, as I kicked the dress away.

I shimmied my feet into the tight leather pant legs and said, "Did I leave them in my bunk?"
"Yeah."

"I've been looking for these ones. The others weren't broken in yet," I hummed, pulling the suit up my legs, with a sense of nostalgia. The white and gold was Howard's idea. White leather hugged my curves and gold trimming gave it a Grecian look. It had changed a bit over the years, from carbon polymer like my Commandos uniform, to the leather. When I had to reiterate my point about being a walking target, he had said, "We want them to see you coming. We want them to know their doom is at hand. The Goddess of War has come for them and she is not afraid. Besides, you can't die, right?"

I let the melancholy wash over me as I braided my hair, knowing that I'd have to get started on my plans to rid SHIELD of Hydra after all this was over. For Howard, I thought, I will avenge you. As I was finished strapping the holsters onto my thighs and zipping up the collar, we hovered a moment. Flipping the shock sticks up in the air, they slid into their holsters, before I grabbed my guns, to check the magazines. Nat lowered the ramp as I holstered those too, and I hoisted Loki up by his collar, itching to wipe the smug look off his face.

"You do not want to say a word right now, or I will find the next sharp object and shove it in your eye," I snarled to him as I strapped him back into a seat.

When we arrived on the Helicarrier, I stayed far away from Loki and the Scepter, that Tony handed
it off to an agent to take to the lab. Steve guided me along the corridors, where I was still getting flashes of inverted color, and bits of my last few hours. He eased me down into a seat at the conference table in the control room, giving me a bottle of water, and taking my hand as he sat down beside me.

"I like your uniform," He said softly. I smiled as Bruce came in to stand next to the table awkwardly, "This is the fifth design since we began shield. I'd get bored with the look and change certain things. The last one didn't survive a firefight."

"Dr. Banner," I smiled, "Lovely to see you again."

"Colonel Rogers. You seem different," Bruce said, nodding to me.

"Well, the megalomaniac heading for the detention had me under some sort of spell. I'm trying to shake it off still," I said, taking a drink, as Steve squeezed my hand in comfort.

"No, not that. You seem… happier. I would assume that's from you Cap, coming back."

"I hope so," He said softly, squeezing my hand.

"Yeah, I am happier. Thanks for noticing. My recruits still think I'm a hard ass. If anything, now I am comparing them to Steve before the serum. Saying if a 90lbs asthmatic could complete my course with no complaining, they should be able to as well," I smiled, looking over at a slightly blushing Steve.

"He was the exception," He smiled, "Like you told me."

"Yes, he was," I smiled proudly at my husband.

"How did you two meet?" Steve asked.

"He wanted to ask me a few questions about the Super Soldier Serum, the one I got and the one you got, a first hand account," I said, "Anything about Dr. Erskine's formula, even though Abe swore me to secrecy for a reason. I was one of the last living members of the inner circle. I only wish I could have saved you from having to give yourself the formula you created for Ross's project."

"I made a choice and now I live with it," he said, looking anywhere but in my eyes.

"I know the feeling," I said as the feed from the detention center appeared on the table screen.

"Just so you don't get any ideas, you so much as scratch that glass," Fury said before opening the doors below the Cage, "30,000 feet straight down in a steel trap."

"You get how that works? Ant, boot."

"An impressive cage. Not built, I think, for me."

"Built for something a lot stronger than you."

"Oh I heard. The mindless beast who makes play he is still a man. Tell me, how desperate are you that you called on such lost creatures to defend you?"

"How desperate am I? You threaten my world with war, you steal a force you can't hope to contain, you talk about peace and you kill cause its fun. You have made me very desperate. And you might not be so glad that you did."
"Oooh, it burns you to have come so close. To have power, unlimited power, and for what? A warm light for all mankind to share, and then to be reminded what real power is."

"Yeah, well, let me know if ‘real power’ wants a magazine or something."

"He really grows on you?" Bruce said sarcastically as the feed cut out.

"Loki's gonna drag this out. So, Thor, what's his play?"

"He has an army, called the Chitauri. They're not of Asgard or any world known. He means to lead them against your people. They will win him the Earth. In return I suspect, for the Tesseract."

"An army? From outer space?"

"New and different... I'm game," I said, making Phil smirk. As I'd seen just about everything, this was like getting chocolate after years of eating vanilla. Repetition was not something I liked, just something I had grown used to.

"So he's building another portal," Banner enlightened. "That's what he needs Erik Selvig for."

"Selvig?" Thor asked.

"He's an astrophysicist," Banner explained.

"He's a friend," Thor countered as I said, "They know each other."

"He's under Loki's spell," Natasha told him, "Along with one of our own."

"I want to know why Loki let us take him. He's not leading any armies from here," Steve said, leaning forward.

"Don't look at me," I said, "I was kept in the dark. He only wanted me for information and something about a distraction."

"I don't think we should be focusing on Loki," Banner insisted. "That guy's brain is a bag full of cats. You could smell crazy on him."

"Have care how you speak!" Thor demanded. "Loki is beyond reason, but he is of Asgard. And he is my brother."

Natasha looked up from her seat. "He killed 80 people in two days."

A second passed before Thor said, "He's adopted," in a tone that clearly was unsure of the excuse himself.

"I think it's about the mechanics," Bruce said, steering the conversation back, "Iridium. What do they need the iridium for?"

"It's a stabilizing agent," Tony said before I could. He and Phil came in with Tony saying, "All I'm saying is pick a weekend. I'll fly you to Portland, keep the love alive."

I wanted to sigh, but I knew that Phil had a cover story with his cellist. It was not the smartest story, as I knew Melinda was hurt by it. Phil nodded, walking around the table to head back to his station.

"It means the portal won't collapse in on itself like it did at SHIELD. No hard feelings Point Break," Tony said moving up to Thor and giving his arm a light hit. "You've got a mean swing."
I caught Phil's eyes and gave him a slight nod as got back to his station. He gave a small smile and I would try to find him later.

"The anti-protons in the iridium would open the portal as wide and however long Loki would need it," I said, recalling what I knew of the element. I wasn't always clueless with science. Some of what Howard and Tony talked about stuck, but very rarely. At one point, I had to take a couple college courses just to keep up with Tony.

"Exactly," Tony said moving to what was generally Fury's spot, "By the way, sorry about the whole 'being a dick' thing."

"Tony, we will talk about this later," I replied, "Let's focus up."

"Of course," Tony agreed, "Raise the mizzenmast. Jib the topsails." The entire room turned to face him, questioning looks on their faces.

"That man is playing Galaga!" He declared, with an accusing finger at the agent in question, "Thought we wouldn't notice, but we did."

I bit back a smile as Steve looked over in confusion. I'd explain when we didn't have an audience. But I also made a note to glare that particular agent into submission. I knew the power I had over people.

"How does Fury even see these?" He asked sarcastically, covering one eye.

"He turns," I said, narrowing my eyes at him.

"Sounds exhausting. The rest of the raw materials, Agent Barton can get his hands on pretty easily. Only major component he needs is a power source, of high energy density. Something to," Tony said, snapping his fingers, "Kick start the cube."

"When did you become an expert in Thermonuclear astrophysics?" Maria asked, looking annoyed at my nephew. I shot her a look of apology, before glancing at my husband.

"Last night. The packet? Selvig's notes? The Extraction Theory papers? Am I the only one who did the reading?"

"I was a little busy," I replied sardonically.

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

"He would have to heat the cube to 120-million Kelvin just to break through the Coulomb barrier," Banner said.

Tony nodded. "Unless Selvig has figured out how to stabilize the quantum tunneling effect."

"Well if he could do that, he could achieve heavy ion fusion at any reactor on the planet," Banner replied.

"Finally! Someone who speaks English," Tony said moving over to Banner.

"Is that what just happened?" Steve asked aloud. Snorting, I covered my mouth as my nephew playfully narrowed his eyes at me. I felt the same way sometimes though, so I knew how Steve felt.

"It's good to meet you, Dr. Banner."

"Your work on antielectron collisions is unparalleled. And I'm a huge fan of the way you lose control and turn into an enormous green rage-"
"monster."

"Tony," I warned with narrowed eyes at the back of his head.

"Thanks," Banner answered unsure.

"Dr. Banner is only here to track the cube," Fury said walking in, "I was hoping you might join him."

"I would start with that stick of his," Steve suggested, "It may be magical, but it works an awful lot like a HYDRA weapon."

"I don't know about that," Fury answered, "But it is powered by the cube. And I would like to know how Loki used it to turn three of the sharpest people I know into his personal flying monkeys."

Thor questioned, "Monkeys?"

"I do!" Steve declared proudly, "I understood that reference."

I couldn't help but hide my smile behind my hand, even if I had been one of those monkeys. Steve took his victories over the modern world where he could.

"Shall we play Doctor?" Tony said, as I shared a look with Natasha and Fury.

"I have to go debrief," I said to Steve at a normal volume, "Go check in with Tony in a bit. He doesn't always play well with others."

"Understatement of the century," He said, smiling at me, giving me a wink, before I walked up to Fury.

"What do you know?" He asked lowly.

"Not much. I don't know where or when, but he's got all he wants. He kept me far from the Tesseract, but did stop long enough to pick my brain. He knows enough Nick, and that worries me. What worries me more, is that he stopped fighting, and let himself get captured. He would not have gone down easy, and yet one hit from Tony made him back off? No, he's right where he wants to be," I said.

"Then we are on the same page; Don't trust him. How's your head?"

"Clear enough."

"I trust you to know your own limits," He said, and I nodded once.

"Let's not get mushy Nick," I teased him. He smirked lightly, before saying, "Find Romanoff later."

Nodding, I locked eyes with Phil across the room, and Nick turned away as I started walking. Several agents nodded to me as I passed them, intent on speaking to my son.

"I assume you moved Dr. Foster and her assistant," I said, after Thor had left the area. I was making conversation, when in reality, I was checking in on him. Steve had told me he was worried, and I knew that was to be expected from him, but Phil was more realistic. He knew I would be okay, it was just a matter of finding me.

"As soon as we heard Loki took Selvig. Are you alright?"
"It's not a pleasant experience, but I'll live. The effects have worn off, now I'm angry."

"When aren't you?" He teased, and I saw a communication agent look up from her computer, probably in shock that he had said that to my face.

"Very funny. I know they call me Medusa behind my back, I don't care. As long as everyone works their hardest, I won't have a problem," I said, looking to the agent who had turned her head. She gave a quick nod, and focused back on her workstation.

"Can you grab a coffee?" I asked, motioning with my head.

"Yeah, maybe I can get you to convince Captain Rogers to sign my trading cards," He said, and I smirked as we began walking. We passed Hill who nodded once that she'd watch Phil's station, and Fury turned to watch us leave.

After grabbing my tea and Phil's coffee from the commissary, we found a quiet spot, and I played my bug jamming frequency. It hurt my ears, but I could push past it now.

"I need a nap," I said, leaning my head against the wall. The bench wasn't comfy, but it was in a secluded area away from cameras. Phil looked at his watch and smiled, "Considering it's 4am, I would think you'd be ready for a run."

"You know I'm a bear when I haven't slept," I said with a raised brow.

"Not a bear, but yeah. Instead of a Snickers, you need sleep," He teased, and I chuckled.

"Your father hasn't seen me without sleep. Ever. I was always very particular about silence after I put my head on my pillow."

"I think he's ready," I said to Phil softly, seeing his conflicted face. He sighed, "After this is all over, I'll request some time off."

"Hey," I said, "He's going to be confused and then very thrilled. He always wanted kids, and I know he'll be proud of you and love you just as much as I do."

"So you're over the worst of your anger then," He said, trying to change the subject.

"Putting a pin in that... yes, I am. Something your Uncle Tim said before he passed. Any chance we get to give and receive love and friendship is not a waste. It's a blessing. You were mine," I said, holding the back of his head like I did when he was little. He smiled at me, and said, "Okay, a week from today. If we aren't all subjects under King Loki's reign."

"It's like you have no faith in me," I smiled, pulling his hair a little, "We can meet at the LA house. We could finally tell Clint, Nat and Tony too."

"It's time for Clint and Nat, yes. I think Tony's gonna be harder to convince. We haven't always been on good terms," He said, looking into his coffee cup.

"Sweetheart," I said, putting a hand on his wrist, "Your Uncle and I always said your existence would be hard to keep a secret. But we never really thought about how hard it would be for you. You were cut off from your family to keep you safe, but it impacted you emotionally."

"No, you always said it was for the best. And it was. I had a great life Mom, and you gave me that. Uncle Howard, Uncle Tim, Ana and Grandpa Chester, you all worked to give me a normal upbringing, despite you still working. You gave me all the tools I needed to be a great spy and
soldier over the years. I wouldn't change it for the world, because I know my cousin, and now my father. And they'll know me soon enough."

"I love you," I said to him, feeling myself tear up.

"I love you too Mom."

"Phil, there's something I have been meaning to tell you," I said after a moment of silence.

"What is it?"

"It's..." I knew saying it out loud wasn't a curse or taboo, but I couldn't. So I tapped his arm in morse code, and watched as he slowly realized what I was saying.

"They're back?" He asked in a whisper.

"Paperclip," I said and I watched him pale.

"So, you found proof?"

"Yes, about a month ago. I have Rumlow on the inside. Four years it's taken him to get this close, and soon we'll be able to formulate some sort of defense plan and a way to cut them out like the tumor they are."

"Alright, I trust you Mom," He said, as I straightened up. Approaching footsteps made me take my hand away from Phil's arm as I turned. From around a corner, I saw Natasha appear, nodding to Phil and saying, "Can I borrow her? Need a little insight for this interrogation."

"Of course. We'll catch up later Colonel," Phil said standing as I did. I turned off the jamming frequency and said, "Coulson, don't let Tony talk you into flying to Portland. You are still married."

"I think you are right in this situation Colonel," He smirked, knowing I was pushing him to rekindle things with Mel. I snorted, "Aren't I always?"

"Ready to go?" I heard her say sweetly.

"Of course," I smiled wickedly, "Let's go break a god."
Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Notes

A/N: Because I have no self control, a fact I'm constantly reminding you of, I'm giving you two chapters tonight. I know, I just posted two yesterday, but I really wanted to share these with you!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney or the Avengers.

"I'll be out here if you need me," I said after Natasha and I had prepped her talking points. She'd lead the conversation for a bit, and just like she was trained to do, she'd let him reveal everything. A master manipulator my friend was, because she was always subconsciously working everyone she met. She let men think she was naive and they'd spill their guts to her. I saw right through it when she first came to us, telling her she could work me but I wasn't going to stop trying to help her become a better version of herself. It was two months after she defected that she dropped her guard around me, saying I made her want to be better, but that she forgot how to be human.

I had too, so we've been learning together.

"You know you can trust me Elizabeth," She said seriously, catching me off guard for a second. I saw the sincerity in her eyes, almost as if she knew my secrets, and nodded, "I know."

She studied me for a minute, before saying, "I would understand if you were keeping something from Clint and I."

I frowned. Had she heard Phil and I? My hearing wasn't great when the jamming frequency was running, so she could have been listening around the corner, and faked walking towards us. I gave her a small nod and said, "Later. Let's focus up."

As she snuck into the holding cell room, I saw Steve stalking down the hallway towards storage. He looked a little pissed, and knew that was never good. He must have been talking to Tony.

"There's not many people who can sneak up on me," Loki spoke up as I monitored Natasha remotely.

"But you figured I'd come," I heard Natasha say over her open comm.

"After. After whatever tortures Fury could concoct, you would appear as a friend, as a balm. And I would cooperate."

"I want to know what you've done to Agent Barton."

"I'd say I've expanded his mind."

"And once you've won, once you're king of the mountain, what happens to his mind?"

"Is this love Agent Romanoff?"

"Love is for children, I owe him a debt."
“Tell me,” He said, as I watched him backing up to sit, on the monitor.

"Before I worked for SHIELD, I made a name for myself. I have a very specific skill set. I didn't care who I used it for, or on. I got on SHIELD's radar in a bad way. Agent Barton was sent to kill me. He made a different call, and Colonel Rogers gave her word. They saved me from the block, and gave me a new life."

"And what will you do if I vow to spare them?" He asked, and I laughed a little, "He thinks he can kill me? You're gonna have to be very creative My Chemical Romance."

"Not let you out," She smirked.

"No, but I like this. Your world in the balance and you bargain for one man."

"Regimes fall everyday. I tend not to weep over that, I'm Russian. Or I was."

"And what are you now?"

"It's really not that complicated. I've got red in my ledger, and I'd like to wipe it out."

"Can you? Can you wipe out that much red? Drakov's daughter? Sao Paulo? The hospital fire? Barton told me everything. Rogers told me more. Your ledger is dripping, it's gushing red. And you think saving a man no more virtuous than yourself will change anything? This is basest sentimentality. This is child's prayer, pathetic. You lie and kill, in the service of liars and killers. You admire two fiercely. But have they told you everything every sin on their hands?" He taunted her, and I wanted to go in there and wipe the smug look off his face.

And a familiar face flashed across my mind, as I pushed Kaesong down, again.

"You pretend to be separatists, something that makes up for the horrors, but they are a part of you. And they will never go away," He said before, slamming a fist on the glass.

"I won't touch Barton, not until I make him kill you. Slowly, intimately, in every way he knows you fear. And then he'll wake long enough to see his good work, and when he screams, I'll split his skull. This is my bargain, you mewling quim," He snarled low, and I smiled as I heard Natasha's fake crying.

"You're a monster."

"No, you brought the monster."

"Bingo!" I said, moving towards the lab, "Beautiful job as always Natasha."

"So, Banner, that's your play," She said, fake voice gone.

"What?"

"Loki means to unleash the Hulk. Keep Banner in the lab, I'm on my way, send Thor as well," She said into her comm.

"On my way," I answered, hearing her finish addressing him with, "Thank you for your cooperation."

"What's up?" I asked, meeting Fury in the hallway.

"Trojan with your nephew's name on it," Fury sassed before walking in the door.
"What are you doing, Mr. Stark?" Fury asked.

"Uh, kind of been wondering the same thing about you. Aunt Liz," Tony sassed.

"You're supposed to be locating the Tesseract," Fury tried again, his patience still evident.

"Not breaking into our system Tony," I added.

"We are," Banner defended, "The models locked and we're sweeping for the signature now. When we get the hit, we'll have a signature within half a mile."

"Yeah, you'll get your cube back, no muss, no fuss," He stopped as the screen in front of him lit up, "What is Phase Two?"

A clank of metal on metal caught everyone's attention.

"Phase 2 is SHIELD uses the cube to make weapons," Steve enlightened, while my attention was on the old HYDRA weapons from the 40's. I thought I would never see one of those guns again. Other than the one encased in bulletproof glass on my living room wall.

"Sorry, the computer was moving a little slow for me. Did you know about this Elle?" He asked, betrayal in his voice.

"Rogers," Fury spoke up before I had the chance, "We gathered everything related to the Tesseract, this does not mean that we-"

"I'm sorry Nick, what were you lying?" Tony asked turning the monitor around to show the schematics of the weapons SHIELD was developing.

"I was wrong, Director," Steve said, hands resting on his utility belt, "The world hasn't changed a bit."

"I was only brought in on this two days ago Steve, and then I was brainwashed by a psychopath. Couldn't exactly put a stop to anything," I said, honestly. In truth, I was very confused why Fury didn't bring me on to begin with, but he knew how much I hated that stupid cube. Plus, I wasn't all that happy to hear about the Tesseract not being flung into the sun. The door hissed as Natasha and Thor came in, Banner instantly jumping on Natasha's back.

"Did you know about this?" he demanded.

"You want to think about removing yourself from this environment, Doctor?" Natasha asked, moving to him slowly.

"I was in Kolkata. I was pretty well removed," Banner pointed out.

"Loki is manipulating you--"

Banner scoffed, "And you've been doing what exactly?"

"You didn't come here because I bat my eyelashes at you," she reminded him.

"Yes, and I'm not leaving because you suddenly get a little twitchy," Banner moved over to the monitor pointing at it as he spoke, "I want to know why SHIELD is using the Tesseract to build weapons of mass destruction."

Fury waited half a beat before pointing at Thor, "Because of him."
Thor, who had his arms crossed, frowned, "Me?"

"Last year Earth had a visitor, who had a grudge match, that leveled a small town. We learned that not only are we not alone, but we are hopelessly, hilariously, outgunned."

"My people want nothing but peace with your planet," Thor explained.

"You're not the only threat," Fury spoke. "The world is filling up with people who can't be matched, that can't be controlled."

"Like you controlled the cube?" Steve asked.

"Your work with the Tesseract is what drew Loki to it, and his allies," Thor exclaimed, "It is a signal to all the realms that the Earth is ready for a higher form of war."

"'A higher form'?" Steve echoed.

"You forced our hand," Fury explained, "We had to come up with something."

"A nuclear deterrent," Tony interrupted, "Because that always calms everything right down."

"Remind me again how you made your fortune, Stark," Fury said sarcastically, and I cut him a dark look for that low blow. Howard started him on that train.

Steve took half a step forward, standing next to me, "I'm sure if he still made weapons, Stark would be neck-deep-"

"Wait, wait. Hold on," Tony interjected, "How is this now about me?"

"I'm sorry, isn't everything?" Steve asked with as much sass my husband could muster.

"I thought humans were more evolved than this," Thor opinionated.

"Excuse me!" Fury said, turning to the demi-god. "Did we come to your planet and blow stuff up?"

"You treat your champions with such mistrust," Thor defended.

"Are you boys really that naive?" Natasha joined. "SHIELD monitors potential threats."

"Captain America is on the threat watch?" Banner asked disbelieving, arms crossed.

"We all are," Natasha informed, "Even the Colonel."

"Wait, you're on that list?" Tony asked, pointing a finger to Steve as the room broke out into argument.

"Are you above or below angry bees?" Tony pushed.

"Stark, so help me God, if you make one more wisecrack-"Steve began, finally cracking.

"Threat!" Tony yelled. "Verbal threat! I feel threatened!"

"Show some respect," Steve demanded, "You certainly don't give your Aunt the respect she deserves."

"Respect what?" Tony asked, face showing that he was complete oblivious.
"Do you ever stop?" Steve spoke up, brow furrowed.

"Nope!" The billionaire declared.

"You speak of control, yet you court chaos!" Thor spoke loudly, drawing attention to solely him.

"That's his M.O, isn't it?" Banner added. "I mean, what are we, a team? No, no, no. We're a chemical mixture that makes chaos. We're ... we're a time bomb."

Fury stepped forward. "You. Need to step away."

"Why shouldn't the guy let off a little steam?" Tony asked, putting a hand on Steve's shoulder.

"You know damn well why!" Steve said, slapping his arm away, "Back off!"

"Oh, I'm starting to want you to make me," Tony expressed.

"Tony, you're not helping," I said, stepping between the two.

"Yeah?" Steve asked with a hint of a smile, taking on the challenge, "Big man in a suit of armor. Take that off, what are you?"

Tony took his stance, "Genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist."

"I know guys with none of that worth ten of you," Steve said, using his height as advantage, "I've seen the footage. The only thing you really fight for is yourself. You're not the guy to make the sacrifice play, to lay down on a wire and let the other guy crawl over you."

"I think I would just cut the wire," Tony answered simply.

Steve smirked, turning to the rest of the room for a moment, "Always a way out... You know, you may not be a threat, but you better stop pretending to be a hero."

"A hero? Like you? You're a laboratory experiment, Rogers. Everything special about you came out of a bottle!"

"Watch it Tony," I warned, trying to separate the two with my arms, "Or are you forgetting the reason I'm not in a grave?"

"Put on the suit. Let's go a few rounds," Steve said, not backing down.

"Captain Rogers," I snarled at him, and he looked down at me, before backing off a bit.

Thor's deep laughter erupted, "You people are so petty. And tiny."

"Yeah, this is a team," Banner muttered.

"Agent Romanoff," Fury distracted, "Would you escort Dr. Banner back to his-"

"Where?" Banner demanded, "You rented my room."

"The cell was built."

"In case you needed to kill me, but you can't! I know! I tried!" The room got really quiet, everyone's attention solely on him. My hand on Tony’s shoulder dropped, but I kept the other one on Steve's.

Bruce's confession was striking hard in me. I knew how he felt, how desperate you had to be to end
it, and then not get the satisfaction of death.

"I got low," Bruce continued, "I didn't see an end, so I put a bullet in my mouth and the other guy spit it out! So I moved on. I focused on helping other people. I was good, until you dragged me back-" he ranted to Natasha, slowly moving backwards to Loki's spear, his hand wrapping around the handle, "Into this freak show and put everyone here at risk!"

He faced Natasha, who clearly looked uneasy, "You wanna know my secret, Agent Romanoff? You wanna know how I stay calm?"

"Doctor Banner," Steve said with authority. "Put down the scepter."

Banner looked down, shocked to see that he was, in fact, holding the scepter. There was a brief moment of silence before the computer let out a beep, drawing everyone's attention.

"Got it," Tony announced.

Banner put down the scepter and made his way to the source of the beep, "Sorry, kids. You don't get to see my little party trick after all."

"You located the Tesseract?" Thor said with great interest.

"Get that thing off this planet," I told Thor, who nodded.

"I could get there fastest," Tony said, ignoring my suggestion all together.

"The Tesseract belongs on Asgard," Thor countered, "No human is a match for it."

Steve unwrapped his arm from my shoulder, grabbing Tony's arm to stop him, only to have it pushed away.

"You're not going alone!" Steve insisted.

"You're gonna stop me?" Tony questioned.

"Put on the suit, let's find out."

"Tony, Steve, stop this. You're behaving like children," I growled at them.

"I'm not afraid to hit an old man," Tony declared strongly, knowing this would be the breaking point.

"Put on the suit," Steve spat, jaw clenched tightly.

"Stop it!" I said, pushing my body in between them just before a loud explosion rocked the Helicarrier. My body hit a bench corner, making me groan out in pain as I dropped. Steve crawled over to me, checking me over.

"Go, I'm good," I smiled reassuringly, before groaning. Just because I healed, didn't mean my body handled pain well. I wasn't a masochist.

"Put on the suit," Steve said to Tony again, nodding and sitting me up against the bench.

"Yup," Tony groaned as he got up and ran from the room.

"Hill," Fury grunted out into his comm.
"External detonation, number 3 engine is down," She said, as I moved to the armory. I needed my gear.

"Stark, copy that?" Fury said into the comm's.

"I'm on it!" Tony said in reply.

"Coulson, initiate defensive lockdown. Head to the detention section, then get to the armory," I heard Fury say, as I opened my locker, pulling out a second pair of shock sticks, guns and the rest of my utility belt necessities. Exiting the armory and following a few agents that seemed out of place silently, I saw Barton. But before I could alert someone, they turned and started shooting at me.

Evasive maneuvering, I was able to duck behind a wall. I was held in a firefight, before I heard their guns click. I ran down the hall before they could reload, punching the first across the jaw, the second and third disarmed and knocked out. The fourth came at me with a knife, lightly grazing my bicep, before I pulled my arm around his neck and using my other hand to keep the knife away from me. He went limp and I dropped him, picking up the knife as a souvenir.

"Athena, get down here," I heard Phil say.

"Hostiles are in SHIELD gear," I said into my comm, reloading my guns and putting them back in their holsters, only to run towards the detention level.

All while I was fighting, Hulk and Thor were having it out, the control room was under siege and Tony and Steve were trying to fix the broken turbine. I felt another explosion rock the ship, and I growled, "Somebody take out Barton before he knocks us out of the sky."

"I'm on it," Natasha said, sounding slightly shaken.

"Just hit him really hard in the head," I said as I rounded a corner. Thor had just run into the room where we were keeping Loki and I knew this wouldn't be good. Running past that entrance as quick as I could, I saw my son coming up at the other entrance.

"You go in and distract him. Thor is our only chance against him on his own. Be careful," I said, quietly approaching the first door.

"Sure thing," He smiled, brandishing his new gun. I recognized it and smiled a little at my son, who was usually pretty good as a diplomat and didn't need weapons. But in this case, we could never be too careful. I heard Loki's voice say, "The humans think us immortal. Shall we test that theory?"

"Move away please," I heard after a body dropped in the room. Peeking around the corner, I noticed Loki holding his hands in surrender to my son, while Thor was trapped in his cell.

"Like this? We started working on the prototype after you sent the Destroyer. Even I don't know what it does. Shall we find out?" Phil asked nicely, powering up the weapon. Moving as quietly as I could, I tried to unlock the door for Thor, but before I had the chance I heard something I knew too well. The sound of metal piercing flesh, and a scream of shock.

"No!" Thor cried out as I looked up, and my heart dropped.

"NO!" I shouted as Loki withdrew his spear and Phil sagged against the wall, groaning in pain. Loki walked away from me, as I moved to help Phil, putting pressure on his wound. His blood seeped between my fingers, and I had to steady my nerves to focus on him.

"Stay with me. Phillip, look at me," I whispered tears springing to my eyes, as I watched Loki press
the button, allowing the cage to free-fall from the Helicarrier. Thor would get out of there, I knew he would. I looked back at Phil as he dramatically let the button go.

"I need a medic in the Detention center!" I shouted shakily into my comm, pushing down the familiar memory. Flashes of Kaesong came back to me, seeing Steve's blue eyes looking back at me from my son, and seeing blood covering my hands. I was shaking, in rage or shock, I couldn't tell.

"You're going to lose," I heard Phil say as I held pressure, and I sobbed. I couldn't lose my son. Not after everything, the universe wouldn't be that cruel to take him from me early.

"Ah, so you are the son she told me about. Am I now?" Loki chuckled.

"It's in your nature," Phil said. Glaring at Loki, I told him, "Phil, don't speak and don't listen to him. Every word out of his mouth is poison."

"Your heroes are scattered, your floating fortress falls from the sky, where is my disadvantage?"

"You lack conviction," Phil said as Loki drew closer.

"I don't think I-"

The sound of the weapon in Phil's lap sounded, and I jumped back slightly in shock. Loki flew through a wall, and was still, as I went back to holding pressure.

"So that's what it does," He joked, before wincing. I watched Loki get up and leave hastily, as I worried he may try to attack us again in retaliation.

"Phil, you are going to be okay," I said, feeling wetness fall down my cheeks as I called out on comms, "Medic to the Detention center, NOW!"

"Why are you crying?" He asked, confused.

"Because, Phil, your lungs are filling up with blood. You are supposed to live a long, happy life. Rekindle things with Melinda. Find my granddaughter," I teased, wiping my eyes with the back of my sleeve. I could care less in this moment if the cameras were operational in here, or it was transmitting to where Hydra could hear.

"She'd kick my ass for even trying. We... we kept fighting, gave up. Losing Daisy… Tell her yourself, please. Tell her to find our girl and that I always loved her… Loved them both," He smiled.

"Your father doesn't even know you exist, and he hasn't met you properly," I sobbed, "So you are not allowed to die, do you hear me?"

"Mom, I love you. This was my choice," He said, smiling as Fury knelt down beside us, me crying harder at his words. It was an echo of Steve's last words to me before the Valkyrie went down, and Phil knew that as he gave my hand a small squeeze.

"Sorry boss, the god rabbited."
"Just stay awake. Eyes on me," He said, narrowing his one good eye. This was not happening, not to my baby.

"I'm tapping out here," He said raggedly, as I shook my head in denial.

"Not an option," Fury said sternly.

"It's okay boss. We all knew this was never gonna work, if they didn't have something to… to…” And we both watched him stop breathing, as his hold on my hand fell slack. I was silent a moment, before I wailed in anguish, sobbing over Phil's body. Fury held me back as the medics came to look at him, calling time of death. All I could see was his lifeless eyes looking back at me.

"Agent Coulson is down," I heard him say into his comm.

"A medical team is on it's way to your location," Someone answered.

"They're here," Fury said as I sobbed, hearing the echo of my wails over my comm, piercing my ears like knives. I felt like my world was moving in slow motion as I watched them put his body on a stretcher.

"No, no, NO!" I screamed as they took my baby boy away.

Fury continued, "They called it."

I ripped myself from his hold, flying down the halls. I kept moving towards the engine he and Tony had been working on, and barreling into Steve's arms. He directed us as I sobbed into an empty room where I cried in his arms like a wounded animal. I didn't care if half of SHIELD saw me cry, after almost 70 years of silent pain and drawn emotional walls. The one thing that made me forget all of that, was the memory of Phil's bright smile when he took his first steps toward me, or when he hit his first home run. And now, the light fading from his eyes.

"I lost him," I said blankly, calming enough for him to pull away, to wipe my face free of stray tears.

"I know. But spoke so highly of you that I knew he got the Elizabeth I know and love. The one you give freely to those you love," He said, kissing the top of my head as I tucked myself back against his chest. I turned on the jamming frequency on my phone for any listening devices, making Steve send me a questioning glance as he heard the ear piercing sound.

"Steve, he wasn't just an Agent. He was our son," I sobbed quietly. Steve pulled me back slightly, to question me with his eyes.

"... How?" He asked, doing the math in his head.

"The samples we took after we gave you the Serum? They were still viable 20 years after your death, stuck in a freezer in Howard's storage building upstate. I used the sample of your sperm, and the result was Phil," I said, trying to stay calm.

"When... when were you going to tell me?" He said, tears collecting in his eyes. His son had been right in front of him, and he never knew it. And I had kept it from him.

"He asked me not to. He wanted you to acclimate to the world around you before we turned your world upside down again with a secret. But I knew, he was worried he would be a disappointment to you. Which I know was insane, but he loved you. I wanted a piece of you, even if I was so angry at you for leaving me. His real name was Phillip James Rogers, and he was the light of my life, during my darkest years."
I wasn't expecting comfort after the bomb I had just dropped on him, but he pulled me back to his chest as I felt my eyes well up again. Steve held me closer, stunned most likely that he had a child, let alone that child just died before he got to know him. We stood there, me crying and him in shock for almost half an hour, until I had calmed down. He looked like he wanted to say something, but a cracking on our comm units put us on alert.

"Colonel, Rogers, Stark, back to the control room," Fury's voice broke through on our comms. I sighed, looking up at Steve. He met my eyes, but looked conflicted. I turned off the jamming frequency, making sure my face was dry of tears and squared my shoulders.

We didn't say anything. We just walked out of the room and towards where we were called.
I sat down, seeing Tony walking in slowly. He took in the room, before sitting near the front, not looking at Steve or I. I heard a few agents whispering in the corner about how I looked colder, and how I had been wailing earlier over 'Coulson's' body. One of them even made a sick suggestion that we had been lovers before Steve came back. Of course they didn't know any better. I glared over at them and they dispersed quickly. Fury walked in, holding something in his hand. It was quiet for a couple seconds before he held up cards I instantly recognized, as Phil's Captain America and Lady Liberty trading cards. He had been so excited when Howard bought him those. It was almost matched by his excitement when he and Tim rebuilt the Corvette at 15. And then Howard went and made it a flying car... My idiot brother. God, I missed him.

"These were in Phil Coulson's jacket. I guess he never did get you to sign them."

The bloodstained cards were thrown across the table, and I picked one of them up and staring at it closely, knowing why Fury had taken them out of Phil's locker. I didn't need anymore reasons to rally together. Loki was going to pay, in blood.

Steve picked up another, as Fury continued, "We're dead in the air up here," Fury continued. "Our communications, the location of the cube. Banner, Thor... I got nothing for you. I lost my one good eye. Maybe I had that coming."

"Yes, we were going to build an arsenal with the Tesseract. I never put all my chips on that number though, because I was playing something even risker."

There was a brief pause, before Fury continued, "There was an idea- Stark and the Colonel know this- called the Avengers Initiative. The idea was to bring together a group of remarkable people to see if they could become something more. To see if they could work together when we needed them too, to fight the battles that we never could. Phil Coulson died still believing in that idea. In heroes."

Tony quickly stood up, as I squeezed my eyes shut to stop more tears, and left the bridge.

"Well," Fury broke the silence. "It's an old-fashioned notion."

"Romanoff?" I asked Fury.

"With Barton, in medical," He answered. At which point, I sighed and followed Tony's lead, went to leave the bridge with Steve right behind me.

"I don't have the energy to talk to Tony right now. I need to see Clint," I said, pausing in my pursuit of Tony.

"I'll talk to him, you go see about Barton," He said, kissing me softly, before whispering, "It wasn't SHIELD knowledge, right?"
"No, it wasn't. Fury and Hill are the only ones that know. Two others, but we can talk later. I'm sorry we kept it from you so long. But sorry isn't going to make anything right," I said lowly, before I had a glimmer of hope as I thought of something Phil had been working on before Project PEGASUS.

"Mom, he was trying to call you Mom earlier. I should have seen it," He breathed, cupping my cheek, "He's got your smile."

"No, he had yours," I said softly, squeezing my eyes shut to fight back the urge to cry again.

We separated wordlessly, and as I walked to the infirmary, I opened an Omega secure comm line to Fury.

"TAHITI," I said, and he understood.

"I was waiting for your permission."

"Really?"

"We both know the side effects."

"Damn them. Put Melinda on watch for them; wipe his memories of the procedure and triggers. Or the whole project entirely. It would be cruel if we didn't," I said, stopping in front of the medical pod.

"Understood. He's gonna be pissed if he ever finds out."

"He can be pissed all he wants, this is my choice. The world isn't done needing him yet. And he is an Avenger," I said, feeling the tightness in my throat, before ending the secure line. Opening the door, I saw Nat and Clint sitting on the bed. I walked in, taking the chair in front of them and said, "You good?"

"It hurt like a bitch," He said, and I nodded, "I at least have the serum working against the mind pain, but I don't remember much."

"Lucky," He chuckled, "How do we keep getting into these situations?"

"Ten years of friendship and I still don't know," I said smiling sadly.

"Clint, when's he gonna make his play?" I asked, "I was never told."

"I don't know where, but it's gonna be today. Nat and I are willing to fight, Colonel."

"Oh no, I'm not in charge here. We are a team, we make decisions as a team. And besides, Steve was more of the leader," I said, wiping another tear away.

"Colonel, what you told Loki..." He trailed off, and I remembered that Clint had been present when I spilt my secrets to the Asgardian.

"Later, I promise. Grief can wait until the job is done," I said, giving my two favourite spies a soft look.

"Yes ma'am," He nodded. Nat gave a soft look and I knew she was on the same page as Clint and I. Speak of Steve, and he shall appear... at least a few moments later.

"Time to go," He said, and I nodded. We must know where Loki is.
"Go where?" Natasha said, confused.

"To finish this. I'll tell you on the way," He said, before looking at me, "Can you fly one of those jets?"

"I can," Clint said behind me, wiping his hands on a towel. He looked at Nat and I, and we nodded that he was okay.

"You got a suit?" Steve asked, looking at Clint in question. He nodded, "Yup."

"Then suit up," Steve said, and I followed him out. It was quiet as we approached the weapons room, grabbing more clips for my guns and Steve grabbed his shield.

"Did he suffer?" Steve asked quietly, looking down at the floor in grief.

"Yes," I said, sniffing back my tears.

"Then Loki will as well," He said, taking me into his arms. I looked up at him, and saw the forgiveness in his eyes.

"I didn't want to keep it from you. You know that right? He…"

"When were you gonna tell me though?" He asked softly. I pressed a finger to my lips, once again playing the jamming frequency and shaking my head a bit as the noise pierced my ears.

"Phil was working up to it. He knew you were doing better, but it's not an exact science, telling someone they are a father," I said, "I wanted to scream it at you that first day. But I promised I would let him decide. It was a lot, to live up to a legend."

"I would have been proud to know him, whatever he did. I never wanted to be a symbol," He said, as we walked.

"But you became one Steve. He, as the world does, sees you as a hero, a role model. Howard built you up with Tony, comparing him to you, which was wrong. But I made sure Phil knew that you would love him and be proud of him, if he decided to become a fry cook. He wouldn't listen to me though," I said softly.

"Elle," Steve said, bringing me to his chest, "We'll get him for this."

"I know. Forgive me if I go a little dark, or blank. It's just how I cope," I said, and he nodded, "He told me about Korea, so I understand why. Always."

As we walked towards the hangar, Clint and Natasha fell into place behind us. We walked up into a Quinjet and someone from the flight crew said, "Hey, you guys can't be in here."

"Son, just don't," Steve said, showing his age a bit.

"Scram," I said lowly, and the technician bolted, not wanting to stick around to find out what I would do if he didn't.

Strapping in, Nat and Clint took the pilot's seats as Steve stood, holding onto a strap as we powered up and took off for New York. Tony had jetted off before us, and his suit went much faster than the Quinjet. He'd approach first and get JARVIS to cut the reactor.

"He's using Stark Tower as his power source," Steve explained.
"So, we shut it down," Nat said.

"And if not, we fight like hell," Steve said, making me smirk.

The rest of the ride was quiet, as we prepared for the fight. Natasha connected the Quinjet's comms to Tony saying, "Stark, we are on your 3, headed north east."

"What did you stop for drive-thru? Swing up Park, I'm gonna lay 'em out for you," Was Tony's sarcastic response. Clint maneuvered the Quinjet down the street as we waited for Tony to pass by the end of Park. Nat started firing on the passing Chitauri ships behind Tony, as Steve and I waited to be needed. The Quinjet swerved upwards, and I held on tight as I felt us hit by something. The left engine was failing, I could hear it, and we were losing altitude.

Clint dodged buildings as we went down, landing hard. Clint, Nat and I unbuckled as Steve ran out the opened ramp and surveyed the destruction of the city.

"We've got to get back up there," Steve said, taking off at a run, with us on his heels. We slowed as we heard a sound coming from the portal. I watched in horror as a massive creature flew through, smashing through a statue as it leveled out, and more Chitauri jumped from its side armor.

"Stark, are you seeing this?"

"Seeing, still working on believing. Where's Banner? Has he shown up yet?"

"Banner?" Steve questioned and I shrugged. I hadn't seen the Hulk's departure from the Helicarrier. Fire rained down, and we took cover beside some overturned taxi cabs.

"Just keep me posted!"

"We've got civilians trapped-"

Clint was cut off by the sound of Chitauri speeders overhead and Steve watched the first one fly by.

"Loki," Steve said lowly, and I knew he wanted to go after him for what he did to our son. I know I did as well. I wished I had reacted earlier, before Phil had been killed. I could have pumped him full of lead, or done my best to rip him apart.

"They are fish in a barrel down there," Steve said as Clint got a better vantage point as more Chitauri approached our location.

"We got this, it's good. Go," Nat said to Steve and I started running. I had just jumped off of the bus, to watch Steve jump onto it, with Chitauri firing at him as he caught up to me. I approached the police barricade saying, "Who's in charge?"

"I am," One of them screamed, still firing behind him. I turned and helped, taking headshots as I heard Steve drop onto the police car beside me, saying, "I need men in those buildings. There a people in there, and they are gonna run right into the line of fire. You take them through the basement and the subway. You keep them off the streets. I need a perimeter as far back as 39th."

"Why the hell should I listen to you?" The one I spoke to said to Steve, before we heard Chitauri fire coming closer. Steve and I worked together, passing the shield back and forth as I managed to disarm one, shooting it in the head with its own gun before Steve got the others.

"I think I like this better than the gun Morita handed me in '44," I smirked to Steve, using it to fire, "I've still got that in storage."
"Who's she?" Another cop asked the one in charge, as I blew up a Chitauri ship passing by.

"Colonel Elizabeth Rogers, SHIELD," I said, as the one in charge started relaying Steve's orders to his men over his radio.

"And this is Captain America," I smirked, taking Steve's stolen Chitauri gun, "Let's get them Cap."

"Colonel," He smiled as I started running back to Nat and Clint. Jumping back onto the bridge was easy with Steve boosting me up by his shield. I managed to take out one or two before Thor’s lightning fried five of them. He landed roughly, as if he was wounded somehow.

"What's the story upstairs?" Steve said, as he approached Thor.

"The power surrounding the cube is impenetrable," He responded.

"Thor's right, we've got to deal with these guys," Tony said

"How do we do this?" Natasha asked.

"As a team," Steve said, before Thor added, "I have unfinished business with Loki."

"Oh yeah? Get in line," Clint said, fiddling with his bow, and nodding at me.

"Save it! Loki's gonna keep this fight focused on us and that's what we need. Without him, these things could run wild," Steve said, in his Captain voice.

"We've got Stark up top. He's gonna need us to-" Steve stopped at the sound of a motorcycle approaching. I smiled as I recognized Bruce, a lot less green.

"Well this all seems, horrible." He said, approaching the group.

"I've seen worse," Natasha said.

"Sorry," He said sheepishly.

"No, we could use a little worse." She said smirking.

"Stark, we got him," Steve said into his comm.

"Banner?" Tony asked.

"Just like you said."

"Tell him to suit up, I'm bringing the party to you," Tony said, before he rounded a building about 9 blocks away.

"I don't see how that's a party," Natasha said, not quite getting my nephew's joke.

"Dr. Banner, now would be a really good time for you to get angry," Steve said, looking worried as Bruce approached the oncoming threat.

"That's my secret Cap," Banner said with a hint of a smirk. "I'm always angry."

With that, Banner's body grew into the Hulk's, his clothes ripping, skin turning green and muscles thickening. He reached full form as the slug reached him, where the Hulk smashed into it, the body building up and with the help of Tony's suit, exploding.
Steve used his shield to cover him and Natasha as I ducked behind a car and Thor protected his eyes from the light, but watching as the dust settled. Hulk roared loudly, ready for battle. The group circled together, Tony landing next to me and saying, "You better stay safe, we still need to talk."

"Tony, we will," I said, cocking my guns, and charging up the Chitauri gun.

"Guys," Natasha said, drawing their attention to the incoming Chitauri members from the portal.

"I have an idea."

"Thank goodness," I sighed, looking at Clint.

"It involves fire."

"Absolutely not!" I chastised him as the Chitauri lept off their space whale to land on the buildings on either side of us.

"On a scale of one to ten how bad."

"At least a twenty!" I yelled at him.

"Call it Captain," Tony instructed.

"Alright, listen up!" Steve began, falling into the leader role so easily, it was like old times, "Until we can close that portal, our priority is containment. Barton, I want you on that roof, eyes on everything; Call out patterns and strays. Stark, you got the perimeter. Anything get more than three blocks out, you turn it back or you turn it to ash."

"Give me a lift?" Clint asked.

"Better clench up, Legolas," Dad joked before the two soared into the sky.

*Legolas, why didn't I think of that?* I thought as Steve gave Thor his orders, the demi-god using his hammer to fly into the air.

"And now us," Steve said drawing Natasha's attention and mine.

"The three of us stay here on the ground. We keep the fighting here, and people off the perimeter. And Hulk," The green monster turned around at Steve's words, looking at him expectantly, "Smash."

The smile we received before he jumped high into the air, was both terrifying and adorable.

"Go get em big guy!" I yelled to him, and he roared back, tossing dead Chitauri around like rag dolls.

I let out a deep breath before running forward, jumping on a car and onto the back of one of the aliens, shooting at it with the stolen gun. The fighting seemed to never be near an end, with more appearing just as we took out the brunt of the forces on the ground.

"It's like fucking Hydra. Kill one, another two more crop up!" I yelled to Steve before Clint laughed slightly in my ear, "Nat said it was like Budapest."

"Nat, you had a partial concussion! Budapest was like a walk in the park compared to this," I argued to the redhead.
"If Clint hadn't been distracted by that fountain in the first place, I wouldn't have gotten the concussion," She pointed out, grabbing a spear from the Chitauri she was fighting.

"It was a book, Nat. The fountain looked like a page turning!" He grumbled, annoyed as we laughed.

"Meanwhile Captain, none of this isn't gonna mean a damn thing if we can't shut down that portal," Nat said, after dropping her last Chitauri.

"Our biggest guns couldn't touch it," Steve panted, looking up at Stark Tower.

"Maybe it's not about guns," She said, and I clued in. Selvig was up there and he might know how to disable it.

"If you want to get up there, you are gonna need a ride," He said, as I looked up.

"Give her a boost Steve," I said, pointing to the oncoming Chitauri speeders.

"You sure about this?" Steve asked, Nat as she backed up.

"Yeah, it's gonna be fun," She said nervously, before running to jump off the hood of the car next to Steve and onto his waiting shield. He boosted her up, and she caught onto a speeder, flying away. Another Chitauri came on me, jabbing his spear into my shoulder, not far enough to cause damage but enough to get stuck in bone. I gasped in pain as Steve threw his shield, pushing it back. I pulled the weapon from my skin, grinning despite the pain, "Was that supposed to hurt?"

"Steve," I said, turning his attention back to the onslaught of foot soldiers heading our way. Tony showed up as we started fighting them, as I hid behind Steve's back. Tony used a laser setting, bouncing it off Steve's shield, who directed it to take out the remaining offenders.

Tony jetted off again, while I caught my breath, "Man, I am out of shape."

"Really? I think you are in excellent shape," He smiled deviously from under his helmet. I laughed as his eyes went to my ass. Steve had been so shocked at clothes nowadays and how all pants (pants on women who aren't in the military?!) looked painted on. He loved my yoga pants, leggings, skinny jeans, and apparently now my spare catsuit.

"Really, right now?"

"Can't we just have a romantic moment for once?" He teased.

"Since our planet is under an alien invasion, I'd say not right now!"

I touched my comm for a moment and said, "Tony."

"Sup Aunt Liz?"

"You know our Trek vs. Wars argument?" I said, still panting.

"Yup. Where are you going with this?"

"You're making me a fucking lightsaber," I said, growling as I shot yet another Chitauri.

"Finally! I knew you'd see the light of day you Trekkie," He snickered, "What color?"

"Does it matter? Make it red!" I said sliding over the back of a taxi to take out another approaching
"You are not going to be a Sith, please."

"That double one that Darth Maul had, I want that."

"What if I made it white? Or gold?"

"Double sided though," I argued.

"Fine," Tony sassed, "If you lose a limb I'm not responsible."

"Literally stick it back on my body and it will heal. I've lost an arm before Tony."

"Can a lightsaber cut through Cap's shield?" Clint asked and I laughed, "I have no idea! Let's test it out!"

"Hey," Steve said, and I sighed, "This is us normally Steve. Get used to it."

"Not right now," He smirked and I smiled back, "Fine."

"Cap, there is a bank on 42nd, past Madison. They cornered a lot of civilians in there," Clint said, and I looked at Steve.

"We're on it," He responded, as I grabbed the spear weapon that Nat was using. We were booking it, past rubble and overturned cars. Steve used different things to jump in through the second floor window, while I ripped open the doors below and started directing people through a back alley with the help of some police officers. I heard an explosion, looking up as Steve sailed through the air, landing on top of a car.

"Captain," I said, moving to help him up. He groaned in pain, and I looked him over. He had lost his helmet but he wasn't worse for wear.

"Colonel, I'm fine."

"The name's Athena in the field Cap," I teased.

"Like from greek mythology?" He asked confused.

"Yeah. Lady Liberty kind of died when you did," I shrugged, "I'm the Goddess of War now."

"Hawkeye," I heard over comms, as we made our way back to our last position.

"Nat, what are you doing?" Clint asked.

"Uh, little help?" She asked, and I watched them approach overhead.

"I got him," Clint said. For a second I was wondering why the arrow didn't seem to do anything and then it blew up. Hulk tore past us, jumping up a building and off another to land on the outer walkway of Stark Tower, where Loki had fallen. As we got back to our previous position, Thor dropped from the sky and started helping us. I used the guns, pulling myself out of the line of fire, as I didn't have a shield like Steve.

I watched as Steve got hit in the gut, and I rounded on the soldier, firing more shots than was needed in retaliation.
"Are you okay?" I yelled over to him.

"I'm fine, dear," He said, as I was winged. I gritted my teeth against the pain and lifted the gun to shoot again, but Thor beat me to it, using his hammer to knock a car into a roll, crushing the one I was aiming for.

"Ready for another bout?" Thor asked, helping Steve up as I checked out my arm. I shrugged and knew it was already healing.

"What, you getting sleepy?" Steve said, trying to sound teasing as he panted.

"I can close it," Natasha said as myself, Steve and Thor stood, surveying the area, "Can anyone copy? I can shut the portal down."

"Do it!" Steve responded quickly.

"No, wait," Was my nephew's reply.

"Tony, look around!" I called out, "They keep coming."

"I got a nuke coming in," Tony explained, "It's gonna blow in less than a minute. And I know just where to put it."

"He wouldn't..." I said quietly, not wanting to believe it.

"Stark," Steve said, looking at me sadly, "You know that's a one-way trip."

"ANTHONY," I yelled, "NO!"

"Aunt Liz, I love you," Tony responded no waver in his voice, "But I have to."

"I love you too Tony," I cried. I watched him approach, the missile on his back, arching up the side of the Tower before he disappeared through the portal. I was losing yet another family member, another loved one. Was it bad enough I lost my son today, even temporarily, and now I was losing my nephew?

I could see the explosion in the other universe and all the Chitauri around us stopped and fell to the ground, as if they were connected by a collective power source. The group was looking up, waiting and hoping, none of us wanting to be the one to make the call, but knowing that the portal had to be closed before the after effects of the explosion travelled back through.

Steve wrapped an arm around my body, and I clutched onto him tightly as we waited a couple more seconds.

"Close it," Steve finally said. I couldn't watch it close, turning to cry into Steve's chest. I kept crying until Steve gasped, making me look up in hope.

"Son of a gun," Steve said, watching as Tony's armored body fell fast. I smiled in relief, wiping my tears away.

"He's not slowing down," Thor spoke, starting to swing his hammer to jump, when the Hulk jumped from nowhere and caught Tony before he hit the ground. The three of us quickly ran to where the Hulk and Tony were laying on the ground. We all gathered around him, kneeling to assess his condition.

"Is he breathing?" Steve asked.
"Tony?" I asked, ripping his faceplate off with my bare hands.

His eyes were closed peacefully, as if he was sleeping. Steve leaned down to listen to him breathe, only sitting back up and placing a comforting hand on my back.

"Tony, no," I said quietly, as my tears continued to fall, "Don't do this to me. I can't lose you too."

A loud roar from the Hulk made me jump, but also brought my nephew back to the land of the living.

"What the hell?" He demanded, his eyes wide. "What just happened? Please tell me nobody kissed me."

"Tony," I said, crying happily. He lifted an arm to gently pat mine.

"I'm okay Aunt Liz," He said softly, as he caught his breath.

"We won," Steve told him, a small pant in his tone.


"Yeah, why not," I shrugged, getting up and dusting myself off.

"We still have one more," Steve said, looking up at Stark Tower.

"You guys can wrap this up. SHIELD should be here in a matter of minutes to help clean up. I'll head home to get food started," I said, lifting the bike Banner used to a stand and straddling it, "I've had enough of what comes out of his mouth."
I had made it five blocks, when I realized I needed more meat than I had at home. And potatoes. Damn, I wasn't prepared for company at all.

I popped into a supermarket that wasn't too badly damaged, grabbing an armload of chicken and lamb, and a bag of potatoes. I realized I had no way to carry anything home on the bike, so I grabbed a backpack from a bag display at the front. I moved to the checkout counter, where a lady was sweeping up glass from the shattered window, looking up at me horrified. I was covered in caked on dirt, ash and blood, and I'm pretty sure my hair was falling out of my braid. I was annoyed at my braid but my hair was probably not what she was most horrified about.

"Hi," I smiled, "I would leave cash, but I only have my cards on me."

"Of course," she said, wiping the dust from her hands and going behind the counter, to ring up my items.

"Do you own this store," I asked, looking around at the damage.

"Yes. I thought people might need food, and things to stock up, so I stayed behind. We're fortunate that there wasn't much more destruction past 39th. But something raced past us here and blew out all the windows on the block."

"That's very brave of you. Wait, I do have some cash," I replied, as I pulled a wad of bills from my back utility pocket, "This should cover the damage."

"I don't think I have that much change. This is too much for the bill anyways," She said, startled by the wad of 100's.

"I meant that damage as well," I said, gesturing with my head to the windows, stuffing the backpack with my purchases.

"I can't take this," She said, eyes wide with shock, trying to hand me back the money.

"Take it knowing you helped seven, very hungry and exhausted people, by providing the food that would warm their bellies after a long day of work." I winked at her. She looked confused for a moment, until she looked up at the TV, seeing footage of my uniform and dark hair along with Steve's shield on shaky cell phone camera footage.

I held a finger to my lips as she turned back to me. She gave me a watery smile and whispered, "Thank you."

"Thank me by fixing your windows. And get a good security system," I suggested, "You deserve to
feel safe."

And with that I walked out, swinging the backpack over my shoulder and mounting the bike again. I made it back to my building, happy there was less and less destruction past Chelsea. I let the bike drop in the garage, as I found my hidden key for the garage door. I walked into the apartment, intent on starting the meat, when I got a text from Steve that they were dropping Loki off with SHIELD and he would bring everyone by in an hour. Bruce was trying to shrink back to himself again, and I knew he would be ravenous and exhausted.

I threw on an full apron to protect the food from my dirty suit, wishing I could take it off to cook. But cooking in just my underwear and an apron wasn't foodsafe, and who knew when the others were getting here. *I'd do that for Steve though another time,* I chuckled to myself. I washed my hands really well, and went up to my elbows to be safe, cringing a bit as I realized Phil's blood was still under my fingernails. I scrubbed them raw with a nail brush, a feeling of grief washing over me before starting the meat.

"He was dead, but he will be alive again soon," I had to repeat to myself. I lost myself in cooking, enjoying the mundane after the insanity of the last few days. Brainwashed, neck broken, Helicarrier attacked, son being murdered, revealing to husband he had a secret son, alien invasion, son being revived, and now cooking food for my team because we're dead on our feet after fending off said alien invasion.

I had dough from the other night leftover in the fridge for pita and extra tzatziki as well, so I formed them on a pan and threw them in the oven. Potatoes were roasting and by the time everything was cooking or in the warming drawer, I was ready to drop. I padded upstairs, music blaring throughout the house, stripping as I got to the bathroom.

I quickly turned on the shower, stepping under the cold water and sighed. It got warmer, and then the events of the day hit my muscles. All I wanted to do was slump against the wall and let the water pour over me for hours, but I had to get out. I washed my hair quickly, stripping the grime from my body, soaking for a few minutes. I wrapped a towel around me after I turned the water off, ringing my hair out. I padded into the closet, grabbing my favorite jogging capris and a black tank top and a dark blue lace underwear set. I toweled off my hair after I changed, feeling human for the first time in days as I caught sight of my safe.

I knew that I had all of my photo albums hidden in there from Steve. Most of them Phil's, one Daisy's, and another that held a secret known to only a few. I wouldn't be able to keep most of them from Steve, now that he knew about his son. I thought about my beautiful boy, remembering a bittersweet moment from his childhood.

"Mom! Look at me!" He said, peddling around Dugan's backyard. He had a garbage can lid that he had painted to look like his Dad's shield, and the brightest smile as he whipped around on his bicycle.

"I see you Sweetheart," I said, holding back my tears, "You look so brave!"

"What do you think? Does it look safe enough?" Howard asked at my side. He had brought a brand new bicycle with him to visit, and Phil had figured out how to pull his wagon along with it.

"It does. Thank you Howie," I smiled at my brother fondly. He smirked, "Where is he next week?"

"He'll be with me. I hate that we always have to move him."

"He's safe with us, you know that right Lilabit?" Howard said. Tim sighed, "He isn't safe if anyone
finds out who he is Howard."

"I know that. All I'm saying is, he has more than enough people that would stand up to the government if they tried to take him from you," Howard pressed, "This is hard on a kid, being passed around like this."

"Howard, Steve would want him safe," Tim argued.

"You don't think I know that? He'd also argue that he should get a normal childhood."

"Do not bring him into this," I said lowly to both of them, "He is my son, and I will decide how to keep him safe."

"Alright," Howard said, backing down. Tim nodded, "I'm sorry Colonel."

"He knows why we have to use a fake name. He knows why he can't bring friends over, and he knows why he is passed around. He wants to be safe, and if I have to keep him a secret until the day... until the day I lose him forever, I will," I said, giving my son a smile as he passed by.

"What's the estimate at now?" Tim asked quietly.

"According to my cells, I will live another 347 years before I die of old age," I said softly.

"You'll outlive your great great grandchildren," Howard sighed.

"I get to see generations of my family live full lives and do great things. And I will be around to protect them."

"Lizzie," Howard said, making me glare at him, "I want you to remember something."

"What?"

"We aren't the only family you will have. You'll make new friends over the years, and one day you'll want to tell someone, someone you trust with him."

"Doubt it," I said softly.

I ignored him for a moment to smile at my son, who was charging headfirst with his wagon full of toys behind him. It was his wagon of Howling Commandos, he had said, and at the front was the teddy bear that he had named Bucky Bear. I pulled out my camera, snapping a picture as Howard said, "You just may, because you're going to be an aunt."

"WHAT?" I almost screamed, making Phil stop suddenly.

"Elle?" I heard Steve from downstairs, pulling me from the memory.

"Be right down," I yelled back. I quickly dried my hair and pulled it up into a messy bun, checking out the healing wound on my arm and shoulder.

I hopped down the stairs, seeing everyone lounging in the living room. I spotted my fur baby and whistled to get his attention.

"Baby boy, how are you? Did you like your time at daycare with Tammy and Jen? Mommy missed you," I baby talked as Zeus came bounding toward me. I crouched to let him lick my chin and rubbed his head.
"I grabbed him on the way here. Not exactly anonymous now," He said, gesturing to his suit and lack of helmet. I chuckled, "Did Tammy swoon?"

"Almost," He smiled, "And then she realized who you were and fainted."

"Good grief, that will be interesting next time I bring Zeus in. Go clean up guys. Steve, can you find stuff for Thor and Bruce? They're closer to your size. Clint, Nat, you still have stuff in your rooms," I said, making Steve look at me from my place on the floor, Zeus still jumping all over me.

"They stay here after missions sometimes. A furlough, but without leaving the city, and then whenever Nat drags me to clubs," I said, and he nodded in understanding as I stood up.

"It's only dragging if you are complaining the whole time," She smirked and I nodded, "Fair enough. I like the sleepovers after, and I like dancing."

"Sleepovers?" Thor asked, and Clint chuckled, "They braid each others hair and drink copious amounts of vodka while watching romantic comedies."

"Actually, we watch horror and actions movies while drinking bourbon and complaining about you, thank you very much," Natasha said, smacking Clint to get him to stop snickering.

"Lot's of hot water to go around. No one is eating until you are clean," I said laying down the law, knowing everyone would feel better after a shower.

"Yes Colonel!" Clint said, excitedly running towards for the stairs. Steve kissed my cheek sweetly before gesturing to Thor and Bruce to follow him.

"I'm clean, I'll just wash my face," Tony said, moving to leave for the powder room across the hall. I grabbed plates, glasses, cutlery and beer from the fridge, before I turned the music up as I moved to set the table.

"Linkin Park? Your usually more of a Pop person."

"Do you not remember who introduced you to Metallica and AC/DC? Who took you to your first concert? Or who taught you how to play the electric guitar? I was around when it was invented," I teased, "Steve isn't a huge fan yet, but I will convert him. We're starting out slow in rock and roll, with Elvis. I still have days when I need something a little more substantial than The King."

"I'm sorry about the other night," He said, leaning against the table.

"What, for punching me in the head to get the deranged God's spell to wear off? Or for what you said about me and Bucky?"

"You. I shouldn't have used Barnes," He said, as I handed him the plates. He grimaced and begrudgingly set the table, as I said, "The only reason you did was to hurt Steve, not me. You knew he could hear us from the living room and after despising him your whole life, you hated that he was back and making me happy. You would rather hurt people and push them away before they can hurt you, than deal with your own feelings."

"Can you blame me?" He said jokingly.

"No, I blame Howard and the unrealistic expectations he set for you. I loved him, but he had some major faults. He pushed you because he saw how great you could be, and it backfired on him. Howard... your father loved you, but never showed you properly, in the way you deserved," I explained, "But that wasn't Steve's fault, you do see that, right?"
"Let's just say it's not. How do I live up to him in your eyes?"

"That's what this is about? Tony, you are my family. You are one of the most important people to me on this planet. I know you have your faults, Steve does too. But I would never and will never compare you to him. You are two different people, and that's a good thing. Our differences and experiences give us different outlooks on things, and understanding someone else's... it's what helps us see the whole picture together, not just a piece of the puzzle individually. I love you Tony, never doubt that. Even when you were a little shit and didn't want anything to do with me, I loved you. Got it?" I said, taking his shoulders.

"Got it," He smiled.

"Do that more often, you hear?" I warned.

"What? Open up?" He remarked sarcastically. There's my Tony. Using sarcasm to mask his real emotions.

"That, and smile. Why don't you call Pepper?" I asked, and his eyes went wide, "Shit."

I laughed to myself as he grabbed his phone and walked out to the patio quickly. My phone buzzed in my pocket and I quickly answered it seeing the Caller ID, "Hi buddy."

"Aunt Liz! WAS THAT YOU FIGHTING THE ALIENS?" The little voice asked excitedly.

"Yes, it was buddy. I'm with people from work right now. Can I come see you tomorrow?"

"Of course! See you then!"

"See you Bud," I smiled, hearing Natasha's door open, and someone padding down the stairs. I hung up, promising myself to find a way to tell Steve when no one was around. After checking the time, I noticed the date on the phone and chuckled. Our anniversary was tomorrow, and Steve probably wouldn't remember. Would that be our 68th or 1st anniversary?

I started gathering the food and fixings, setting them down on the dining room table as Nat and Clint came back, looking refreshed. I stopped what I was doing to check out the gash on her head, as she said, "It's nothing."

"Alright. Grab a beer, or wine. You know where the vodka is," I smiled, hearing the timer go off on the oven. Nat dropped to greet Zeus with a belly rub and his tail wagged a mile a minute in happiness. As I walked into the kitchen, Steve did as well, pulling me into his arms for a hug. I relished the feeling of his warmth and the scent of his shampoo and body wash.

"Last time we did something like that, you didn't come back," I said softly.

"I don't remember fighting aliens during the war. Was I out for that?" He said jokingly, before pulling back from the hug to kiss me.

"Yes, and according to Tony, circa. 1975, we also rode dinosaurs into battle," I joked as he pulled away.

"Help me?" I said, gesturing to the oven. He winked, "Lead the way Colonel."

"Gross, old people foreplay," Clint said jumping up onto the island counter, and snagging a pear from the fruit bowl. I rolled my eyes at him, before kissing Steve once more.
"Thor and Banner almost done?" I asked, listening for them.

"Almost," Steve said, using an oven mitt with a pointed look, pulling out the potatoes.

I laughed at him, grabbing some serving dishes and putting the food into them. Clint snagged a piece of pita as I passed him, before following me into the dining room.

"Dish up!" I yelled, hoping to encourage Thor and Bruce to hurry up. Bruce came in as I finished yelling and said, "Smells delicious."

"Oh, you guys are in for a treat," Tony said, coming back in to the dining room, sitting at the table.

"Food is ready?" Thor's voice sounded behind me.

"Yup," I said turning, "Find a seat and dig in. More is in the oven."

"God, yes!" Clint said, dumping a load of potatoes and meat on his plate. Tony grabbed it next, popping one in his mouth before loading his plate up. I was vaguely reminded of *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, with the way everyone was digging in heartily. But I didn't care about manners after a day like today. Steve moved his chair closer to mine, letting me lean against him. My body was stretched to its limits for the first time in years, and now I could relax.

As everyone stuffed themselves, I wondered where Phil was. I took a chance and texted Fury, wondering if he would respond during clean up efforts. I replenished the food twice, as Banner, Thor and Steve had massive appetites. I did as well, but made it priority to feed the team first.

"*On his way to T.A.H.I.T.I. Had him headed there as soon as you gave the OK,*" He responded right away. I sobbed as I replied, "Thank you."

"What's wrong Elle?" Steve questioned me. The table had been quiet, except for the sounds of cutlery on plates and satisfied groans. And Clint occasionally feeding Zeus bits of food under the table.

"I need to tell them about Phil," I whispered, knowing he could hear me. He nodded, rubbing my back in comfort, as I took a deep breath.

"What about Son of Coul?" Thor asked concerned. I forgot he had god-like hearing.

"That's part of what I need to tell you. He isn't Phil Coulson. He is Phillip Rogers," And I heard one set of cutlery drop suddenly. I looked up and saw Tony looking confused.

"What?" He asked, a deadly calm to his tone.

"Back after Steve received the Super Soldier serum, there were samples taken of his sperm during his physical," I said, seeing Steve blush as I talked about his genetic material so flippantly.

"Abe- Dr. Erskine thought that his fertility might be affected by the serum, or by the radiation we used on him. The sample was still viable after being in a freezer for almost 20 years in Howard's upstate storage, which surprised me. I had an outside of SHIELD doctor give me the sample and follow me through my pregnancy, after having him swear to never tell a soul. I wanted a piece of Steve. If the only thing I could have was that child, I would be content with the rest of my eternity. He was born July 8th, 1964, and named after the first man to take a chance on me. Because if Chester Phillips hadn't let me in the Army, I would have never met Steve, and I wouldn't have my son. Howard, Timothy Dugan and I agreed that Phil shouldn't be known to the world as the son of the world's only super soldiers."
"So we didn't tell you Tony. Phil was already 6 years old when you were born, and he watched you grow up from afar. We hid him under a fake name; Phillip James Coulson. He was passed around through the various families, and we kept him under the radar well until he started college. He joined SHIELD in 1984, wanting to do something good with his life. But he told Peggy he didn't want to be known under my name, to earn his place in SHIELD. He had to give the impression of a giant fan of Captain America to make it believable that I would get close to a recruit of mine, and then befriend them. It's another way I could keep an eye on him. He didn't want special treatment though."

"The other people that knew were Maria, Fury, Peggy, Colonel Phillips and Melinda May. He asked me not to tell Steve, because he wanted him to acclimate to the world around him first. He wanted so badly to meet you, officially, but the timing was wrong. We talked about meeting in LA next week, to tell you. And then Nat, Clint and Tony. I guess I still can introduce you officially," I laughed to myself.

Everyone looked uncomfortable at my laugh, glancing at each other nervously before I said, "Phil had been working on a project for Fury, resigning at the time Steve came out of the ice. It was a drug that would bring the person back from the dead. It would only be used on a fallen Avenger. It works and I gave Fury permission to administer it to Phil."

"Did you know about that Cap?" Clint asked, as I looked up at Steve.

"She told me on the Helicarrier about Phil being my son. But this is the first I've heard of this drug. So, he'll live?" He asked, sounding relieved.

"Yes. It will be a few hours before he wakes up. But there are some unwanted side effects of the drug. And since he knows this, I told Fury to wipe and alter his memories so he doesn't trigger anything. I didn't make this decision lightly, but the test subjects had their memories wiped and they are living normal lives now. With that invasive of a procedure, he's going to be out for a few months. But within a week or two, we should be able to visit him for an official meeting of father and son."

"Congratulations, it's a boy!" Clint joked, making everyone chuckle in relief. I looked up at Tony whose face was still blank.

"What is it Tony?" I asked gently.

"How could you keep this from me?" It was the words I had expected to hear from him twice in my lifetime. And this was only the first.

"It wasn't easy. Your father and I agreed that he shouldn't grow up in the spotlight. It was bad enough I was a freak show for the world to know about, but Phil deserved a quiet life, away from people that may want to study him. He was the child of two super soldiers, and everyone wanted to replicate Erskine's serum. He has a slightly faster healing rate than the average human, but not like us. I wasn't going to let anyone experiment on him. The government could claim Steve's sample was property of Project Rebirth and they could have taken him from me. We never even told your mother."

"Rogers, does this sound insane to you?" Tony said, looking at Steve.

"No, it doesn't," Steve answered honestly.

"I have a cousin I haven't known about, since before I was born. He threatened to Taser me, and he knew we were related!" Tony said, and I smirked. Phil had been pretty proud to see his cousin's look of fear, as he realized he was serious about that one.
"And I have a son I never knew about until four hours ago. He didn't want to disappoint me, so he kept pretending to be someone else. He died trying to stop Loki. As far as I'm concerned, he is an Avenger. And we avenged him. Doesn't matter if he will live again, that's what we were brought together to do, to do the jobs no one else can. It was too big for SHIELD on their own, so they called us. My son believed in us. And I'm willing to bet that it wasn't just the fear of world domination that fueled your fight either," Steve said, looking around the table. Tony was silent again before he looked contemplative.

"Tony, you understand why I had to keep it from you, don't you?"

"I do. I just wish I had known him better," He said honestly. *Oh please let him be this calm next time,* I begged anyone that could hear my prayer.

"Well, now you get the chance. Don't freak Pepper out by telling her he died. I know they are friends," I said, before his eyes went wide.

"You told her?" I said exasperated.

"I thought she deserved to know!"

"When you see her next, tell her he was revived after we left the carrier," I sighed, "But get ready, because I have another two doozies for you."

"What else are you keeping secret?" Tony said, confused.

"Phil had been married to Melinda May in a secret ceremony in 1987, where they told me I was going to be a Grandma. They had a baby girl and named her Daisy," I said, remembering the cutest little cheeks I had ever seen, "I was very touched."

"You really are a Grandma Elizabeth," Natasha joked, making everyone chuckle. I smiled sadly, and Nat picked up on that immediately, dropping her own smile.

"Yes, but that little girl is missing. She was kidnapped when she was 5 months old. That was almost 24 years ago," I said, hearing everyone go silent again.

"I haven't given up hope though. I know she's alive, I feel it. Mel and Phil... are separated right now. Losing Daisy was hard on their marriage, so they decided to put it on the back burner until they found her," I said, before looking at Steve. He looked so heartbroken. To find out you had all this family, and they were scattered or currently dead, soon to be revived.

"We shouldn't have secrets from each other, that's how we are gonna be able to work together in the future. Howard always told me that there might be someone I trust one day to tell about Phil, but what I want to tell you is a whole different ball game. Something from mine and Steve's past has been a massive secret for so long, that I can't hold it back anymore. You all need to know, because I won't keep secrets from you."

"Go on," Steve spoke softly, as I looked at him. He nodded, taking my hand in support.

"You weren't far off the other night Tony."  

"I'm sorry about that. I went too far Liz-"

"No, I need to get this out. You were almost right about Bucky and I, but you were missing facts. A total of five people knew about this. Peggy Carter, Tim Dugan a few days prior to his death, my brother about a year before he died, and Phil and Mel. Before I met Steve, I had met Bucky. I was
his superior officer in basic training for six weeks. He was so charming, flirting with me, but just enough to be respectable. He never pushed, letting me fall for him the old fashioned way, a flower in between exercises, a soft glance across the Mess Hall. But all the while, he was still in love with someone else, while he was falling for me,“ I said, before looking at Steve. He gave my hand a quick squeeze, before he cleared his throat to speak.

"Bucky saved me from a bully when I was young. And over our friendship, something else grew. It was extremely immoral back in our day, so it was always a secret, never more than a stolen kiss. And when we moved in together, it just seemed like two friends sharing an apartment. But it was more. It was a chance for us to be together without having to sneak around. But Bucky still put on the front of being a womanizer. I wasn't pulling them in the dames like flies to honey like Buck was, but I knew his was more for appearances sake. And when he got drafted, we knew it had to end,” He said looking up at me to continue.

"I met Steve when I bumped into Bucky at the World of Tomorrow Expo, after leaving Howard to his hilarious failure of a flying car. And Steve was with him, being so respectful of my rank. He was polite and handsome."

"I was still skinny,” He said, smiling at me.

"I still thought you were handsome. And then I overheard them at the Enlistment pavilion, with my excellent hearing, saying how badly they wanted to be together. But the army wouldn't take either of them knowing they were gay, even bisexual, so they decided to try and be happy with girls of their own, or people might talk. And Abe picked Steve, for something he said to Bucky at first, but then later because, "I don't want to kill anyone. I don't like bullies, I don't care where they're from." Steve was the most dedicated soldier I had ever trained. He pushed himself on my training course-"

"Ugh, don't ever believe her when she says it's easy. She's enhanced, she cheats," Clint said to the guys as Nat snickered.

"Anyways… He was as smart as a whip, used his head, and would never disrespect anyone, no matter if they deserved to get their head kicked in for being a dick. Hodge," I coughed, making Steve smile a bit.

"And I fell for that little guy from Brooklyn. We were separated by war, but going steady through our correspondence. He was performing in Italy, when I was there by coincidence. Bucky's unit had come under attack by Hydra in Azzano, and had been MIA for over a month. When I found out Bucky was on that list, I knew I had to tell Steve, but I wanted to do it in person. I was so nervous that his feelings had changed, but he picked me up and held me close. Peggy interrupted before I could break the news to him. And from then on out, he was charging head first; Into Colonel Phillips tent, trying to steal a jeep to head out to the front lines, parachuting into enemy territory, sneaking into the factory on an unsanctioned rescue op. The list continues."

"You were with me on that 'unsanctioned rescue op', and you jumped out of the plane first," Steve defended himself, "I wasn't the only one."

"Well, I had the sense to look at the map of Hydra bases," I teased, "And after we rescued the men, we were given leave in London. The men could rest and we could plan. But I felt I had to give Steve back. Bucky was the one he loved, and I loved him enough to let him be happy. I would have pretended to be with Steve, so they could be together."

"I loved you both. I wouldn't choose," Steve said. I looked over at Tony, who was listening intently for once in his life, speechless. Nat gave me a look that said, "Go on. This is getting juicy."
"When we approached Bucky initially, he was a little gun shy. But then everything worked out. We could all have each other. And a little over 6 months into our Hydra raids, Bucky told me to marry Steve when he asked. They had both picked out the diamonds and Howard had a little Vibranium left from the shield, and it was the perfect piece of both of them," I said, using my thumb to twirl my ring absentmindedly. "It wasn't just Steve I was marrying that day. Even as Bucky stood up as the best man, it was like the three of us were pledging our love and commitment to each other. The audience just didn't know it."

"And about a week and a half before Steve went into the ice, I learned I was pregnant. I was terrified, because if the baby looked more like Bucky, people would talk. We wanted to at least wait until we were back home and out of the spotlight of the war. We could disappear and raise our little brood. But they were so excited, overjoyed even. And it was good, our little bubble of happiness."

"And then Bucky fell, and it devastated us. I was locked in my office with Peggy, crying my eyes out for hours. I was cramping and before I knew it, I was waking up in a hospital bed learning I had miscarried. They told Steve over the radio as soon as I was admitted, and I found him later in the same bar where we concocted our brilliant plan for the three of us to be together. We couldn't get drunk and we couldn't forget, even for a moment, the pain we shared. And then this knucklehead put the plane in the ice, and I was alone again. I had Bucky's family, whom he told about our unconventional relationship in a letter for if he passed. They accepted me right away. It was more than I deserved," I said, looking at my hands.

"Howard found out a year before he died, Peggy learning a week later, and Tim was on his deathbed when he finally said he had a feeling. I didn't tell any of the other Commandos out of fear of losing their respect and friendship. But there has to be trust between us. We are meant to look out for one another, keep each other safe," I said, before looking up, "You don't have to agree with our life choices. God knows I'm not a saint."

"Such relations on Asgard were considered normal. It meant that our souls could be split in three. It was revered if you were part of a trio, or triad. It was counted as a double blessing," Thor remarked after a moment of silence, giving us a sad smile, "Your third sounded like a brave warrior."

"Like Plato's theory of soulmates. He theorized we were born with four legs, four arms, and two heads. The gods were jealous so they split the humans in two, destined to walk the earth in search of their other half. But in your case, that would be six arm, six legs, and three heads. He is your third, like Thor said," Bruce explained, and I raised my eyebrows in astonishment.

"I completely forgot about that theory."

"It's a miracle to find even one person you'd want to be with forever. To find two would be something of a higher powers doing," Nat said, and I smiled at her. I knew she wanted to believe in love, and she'd get there one day.

"Thought you weren't one for religion or love, Nat?" Clint asked, giving her a small teasing smile.

"Doesn't mean that others can't," She shrugged.

"If Barnes made you happy too, I'd have been okay with him," Tony shrugged after a moment of silence, and that was huge for me.

"I'm sorry you guys lost him," Clint said, "Like Natasha said, finding love is rare, but two people that love you unconditionally? That's something special."

Clint gave me a look when the others had turned away and I knew he understood why I kept it from...
them. Because he had a family of his own to protect, and keeping the secret from this team was still needed. He'd be even more wary after learning about Hydra. Tony would be less pleased of the myriad of things I was keeping from him.

Our conversation turned to different subjects, as we still ate, picking at the food for another hour at least. It was a good time to bond, after the stress of a battle like we'd been through earlier.

"You guys can stay here tonight. Though, you are gonna have to arm wrestle for the third room. Nat, you've got your room here on the bottom floor," I said and she nodded, as Clint said, "I'll take the couch. I was having a surprisingly good catnap on it. Better than SHIELD bunks."

"Okay, Thor and Bruce, you've got either of the rooms upstairs," I said and Tony looked offended I hadn't offered him one.

"Oh wait," He said, shaking his head slightly, "I have my own place."

"Yeah, duh," I smiled, "And I only have three spare rooms."

"That's kind of you Colonel," Bruce smiled, "I don't really want to be under SHIELD's thumb more than I've had to be."

"No more 'Colonel' here for anyone, My name is Elizabeth, to all of you. Nicknames are a sore spot for me though, so ask first," I said, clearing the plates. Nat got up to help me stack them, saying teasingly, "The Goddess of War is not someone you want to piss off."

"Do you know I got that name in the 50's and couldn't shake it? Howard started it to keep the rookies from getting any ideas about asking me out. It worked, still works," I said, shrugging, "Kitchen is open all night if you are hungry, just help yourself. Oh, and don't sneak around in the middle of the night if you get up. Three of us are spies. You may find yourself being attacked if you try."

"Got it, walk heavy," Bruce laughed nervously. I knew he wouldn't want to turn into the Hulk again if threatened by one of us in the middle of the night.

"I'll make breakfast in the morning," I said, and Clint looked up excitedly, "Waffles and bacon?"

"I guess," I laughed, knowing he was really inquiring about something else, "And yes, spiced peaches as well."

Nat made a moan of appreciation, "Absolutely sinful. Have you had them yet Steve?"

"No, can't say I have."

"She gets into canning phases, like a Grandma. Kept sending me jam and pickles every fall, even though I wasn't talking to her. But no one got to touch the peaches," Tony said, making Clint chuckle. I taught Laura, but with the kids she had her hands full and couldn't always do it. So I made a point to send them a large box every September.

"I'll have you know I started that habit during the Cold War. It was more of an 'in case of nuclear fallout' kind of thing, but sometimes I was contracted out by the military and couldn't be home in the summer to stock up for the next year. Not that I imagine radiation would slow me down," I sighed.

I left the team to their conversation, taking a couple dishes with me to the kitchen, as Zeus followed. I was washing up when I got a text from Maria saying Selvig was working to make a device that would send Thor and Loki back to Asgard with the help of the Tesseract. I sighed and asked if there was a timeline on when Phil would wake up.
"Elle," Steve said, coming up behind me to hold me tightly. I sighed and relaxed into his touch.

"I'm a nervous mess. I'm worried about Phil," I whispered after a moment of silence.

"I know. I'm worried too," He said, as I turned in his hold.

"He looks up to you, he loves you. Don't be angry with him for wanting to wait," I said, "Blame me for allowing it."

"Never. Honestly, the thought that I have a child is a miracle to me. After we lost the baby," He said, looking down to my stomach, "I didn't know what to feel. But knowing I have a child now? All I want to do is get to know everything. What his childhood was like, if he was an awkward kid like I was, what he and Melinda were like together, our granddaughter... Everything."

"And I will tell you. I will break out the photo albums after starting the dishwasher," I smiled, leaning up to kiss him sweetly. He responded, smiling into the kiss.

"I love you Elle," He said, pulling me close again, "Thank you for giving me a second chance."

"You're my husband, my family. You're a knucklehead and a punk, but it's part of why I love you. I will give you as many second chances as you need, as long as you come home to me," I said warningly, winking at him to show I was teasing.

"Always," He promised.
Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Summary

A/N: Hello faithful readers. Your second chapter for today. Has anyone guessed what the little secret could be? Leave me a review/comment with your guesses.

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney or the Avengers.

Song used in this chapter is 'From Where You Are' by Lifehouse and I do not own the rights. Obvious but have to say it.

I had four albums with memories of Phil's formative years, getting sparser as he got through his teens and early twenties, and then they stopped after he joined SHIELD. Two were completely full of pictures, and another was report cards and exceptional pieces of art for a child, that I knew Steve would appreciate seeing. But Steve was so emotional as we looked through the pictures, seeing himself in Phil and seeing our friends as they aged. There wasn't much I didn't remember of the years I had Phil. I told him how he had a wicked batting average during little league, and how Phil had loved working with Uncle Tim on his red Corvette. Then how Howard turned it into a flying car, and I refused to let Phil drive it until he was 20 and had gotten his pilot's license. The way he had practically glowed when he spoke about meeting Melinda at the Academy

"I snapped this just as Howard told me I was going to be an aunt," I smirked, letting the memory wash over me like earlier.

"He looks so happy," Steve said softly.

"He had just gotten the bike as a gift from Howard. He had his wagon hooked up to it so fast, racing around the yard with his handmade shield."

"Is that a garbage can lid?" Steve snickered, scrutinizing the photo.

"Yes. He got me to help him paint it. He wanted it to be exactly like yours. And in the wagon are his Howling Commandos," I smiled. I pointed to the bear and said, "When I told him he had two Dads, and that he was named after him as well, he decided that his teddy should be Bucky Bear. Like his Daddy was watching over him and protecting him."

I sniffled a bit as I finished, and Steve's eyes met mine in a watery stare.

"You told him about Bucky?"

"And his would-have-been, older sibling. Our son was very inquisitive when he was young. Always wondered why Mama spent every February 1st crying her eyes out," I said softly, "And then again on the 5th."

Steve took my hand, kissing it before saying, "He is intuitive. Knew just what to say to me when I was worried about you."

"He knew it was a secret, even from Uncle Howard. I hated telling him it was another thing he had to hide form the world, but he never blinked. He wanted to protect your memory and Bucky's. It was
our little secret and he loved that we could talk about Bucky. It was just for the two of us."

And then we flipped through Daisy's small album, crying as we did so.

"She's beautiful," He said, smiling at the photo he held. I kept every picture of her, afraid to get rid of anything. The one he held was a picture of me beaming at the camera, tears in my eyes as I held her at only 2 hours old.

"She is," I said, feeling bittersweet, "We've been searching so long. We've missed so much."

"I feel the same way, looking at these pictures of you through the years. But you, you tried to give our son a normal life. I can't begrudge you being happy. The smile on your face," He said, pointing at the picture, "That's what I wanted for you when I put the plane down. I wanted you to be happy, like Bucky wanted for you as well."

"I was, at times. Phil was my blessing. More than I deserved," I said, my smile dropping.

"Elle, he told me about the mission you had, in Korea. Sounds like the cases of PTSD you witnessed were your own," Steve said softly. I shuddered a moment before I shook my head clear.

"It was... gruesome. I snapped and I'm ashamed. Most of those North Korean troops, were young kids following orders. And I went into a blind rage after my men were killed. Of course I would survive, only to be rebranded as a killer."

"He said one of them look liked me, before the serum."

"It was like you died all over again," I said softly, "And that blind rage ended with those soldiers in... pieces. And when I came back to myself, I pulled my men's bodies out to the airlift site. I wasn't leaving without them."

"I understand," Steve said, and I shook my head, "I turned into a monster after that. Howard rebranded me the Goddess of War, and from then on, I had to detach myself from every kill I made in the name of SHIELD and world security. I didn't deserve a child with the blood I've spilt, but I was selfish. Natasha doesn't even have that choice."

"She can't?" He asked, and I shook my head, "And she wants them now. The Red Room, the people that turned her into the Black Widow have a Graduation ceremony. They sterilize the girls so they can't get pregnant on assignment. Or ever."

"That's awful," He said appalled, and I snorted, "That's the tip of the iceberg. The world is full of horrors, but we try to make it better. Taking out one monster at a time."

"I think you did deserve him, after what I did to you. You deserved someone to put you first and love you," He said after a few moments of silence.

"Darling, we've been over this-"

"Yes, but like I said, I will be making it up to you for the rest of my life. You raised our son, alone. You went through some awful things, alone. I made vows to you, not just our private vows to Bucky and each other. I forgot those promises when I made the choice to put the plane down. You were right, I thought I couldn't live without Bucky. I made you live without both of us though. And you had Phil, who loved you so much. I could hear it in his voice as he spoke of you, but I couldn't place the emotion then. Now I know, it was pride and love for the woman who raised him and raised SHIELD. Because I am proud of you, and Bucky would be too."
"I love you," I said, cupping his cheek softly. He kissed my palm and pulled me closer to kiss my lips sweetly.

"You are strong Elle, stronger than I've ever believed, to have raised him in the midst of your trauma..."

I cuddled into his embrace and said, "It was so hard, without you and Bucky. But you're here now."

"I am. Till the end of the line," He said softly, kissing my head. I smiled as I closed my eyes.

"I am yours and you are mine," I whispered, hearing his steady heartbeat in my ear.

A knock sounded on the wall and I looked up to see Nat, standing there in a terry cloth robe, cinched tight.

"Can I borrow her for a bit? I need a dip after the day we've had," She smirked.

"God yes," I moaned thinking of the hot tub, "Go join the boys."

"Alright, have some girl time," He teased, kissing me once and getting up. Natasha smiled at him and warned, "They're drinking, so be prepared."

"Thank you for the heads up," He smirked, walking down to the living room.

"You grab the wine," I winked at her, before running up the stairs. Zeus stayed with Nat, following her happily to the kitchen.

I pulled my swimsuit out from a drawer, putting it on quickly and we snuck outside through the library. Nat and I jumped into the hottub, sighing in relief after our long day.

"So, I had been spying around the corner," She started with as she poured me a glass of wine.

"Ah, that's why you gave those cryptic messages before you went in to talk to Loki," I nodded knowingly, "My hearing isn't great when I have a jamming frequency going. It's so high pitched and only I can hear it, ugh."

"I understand why you kept it from Clint and I."

"No, there was another reason," I said softly. I could barely hear the men, so I knew that Steve wouldn't hear me as I whispered, "Hydra is within SHIELD."

"What?" She said lowly.

"Rumlow, I put him in their path to play a triple for me. He gave me a dead drop the day Steve came back. I suspected for years, but I never had proof of the little rat..." I said, and she paled.

"Paperclip," She whispered, "Zola?"

"Yes."

"So what's the play?" She asked, and I sighed, "Right now, we wait until we know more. Rumlow knows that they want to bring about a New World Order, claiming that they've been slowly getting the world ready to hand their freedom over to Hydra. Same shit, different century. I have no idea how everything that went on today moves their timetable up or not. I'll need to service the dead drops tomorrow, make sure he knows I'm back and I've got his back."
"What can I do?" She asked, and I smiled softly.

"Keep working, and keep Rumlow's cover. But I'll let him know you've got his back. Tell Clint when you get a chance free of bugs," I said, and she knew what I meant. Tell him at the farm so he didn't do something stupid.

"Does Steve know?" She asked and I shook my head, "After everything we've gone through the last month, I need him to have a clear head. I will tell him soon though."

"How do you think he'll take it?"

"How would you? He put a plane down thinking it would end them and was frozen alive for 70 years. It's bound to be loud or he'll be quietly enraged. Either way, mad as hell. I am too. They had my brother killed and covered it up," I said, swirling the red liquid around a little, "I'll kill every last one of them myself if I have to."

"Well, you've got me. And Clint," She said, "We have your back Liz."

"I will let that one slide," I teased, taking a drink of my wine.

"You always 'let it slide'," She teased back, "Five years, you've been letting it 'slide'."

"Yeah well, you're... you're one of my best friends. It's something I've had a short supply of in my lifetime. I had Mary for a short time... she didn't like nicknames, but that's because she couldn't shorten her own. Bucky called me Beth, Steve calls me Elle, and Peggy calls me Eliza. Howard would call me Lizzie, and Tony only got away with Liz when he was young and couldn't unlearn it. Refuses to actually. It's hard for me to let people in, because either they might be Hydra or I will outlive them."

"I love you too Liz," She said, and I smiled, "I thought love-

"You know I was playing him, right? It's... getting easier to imagine a life with someone. When I had to kill Anatoly, I had to tell myself that I was doing it to survive. They would have disposed of me if I couldn't do it, and then killed him anyways."

"It's amazing what we will do to survive. We just have to learn to forgive ourselves, eventually," I said and she looked at me.

"Have you?" She asked curiously.

"I have and I haven't. Kaesong was my defining moment. Now, I can say that I knew the reason I snapped so badly. Because I knew that that was what would happen eventually. All my friends, people I loved, they'd all die and I would be alone. I held a kid that looked like Steve before the serum, as he choked on his own blood, and I couldn't do anything about it. I consider them the first on my ledger," I said, downing the rest of my glass. She poured me another before speaking.

"You aren't making me very optimistic about ever feeling better."

"You don't ever feel better, you just learn to be better that who you were before. And you're there Nat. You helped yourself by coming in out of the cold," I argued, "You were never a monster."

"I think knowing what you just told me about SHIELD, I can forgive myself. I didn't know better. Now I just have to be careful to know who's orders I'm taking," She said, and I winked, "Mine. And Fury's obviously."
"Always," She smirked back.

We snuck back in, giggling as the boys peered at us from down the hallway. I took a quick shower to wash the chemicals off, and dressed in soft pyjamas. I couldn't wear my usual nightgown around the guys, especially my nephew. Steve came back up a few minutes later and we cuddled in bed as he fell asleep easily. As soon as I heard his steady breathing, I looked over to my nightstand to check my phone. Maria texted that Phil was already revived by the GH 325, and the process for memory replacement had begun. Padding downstairs with a large hoodie on, I passed Nat's door as I headed into the kitchen, before pouring myself a large glass of wine and picking up my guitar from the stand in the library. I heard Clint from his place sleeping in the living room, snoring like a chainsaw, before opening the patio door in the library and closing it behind me.

Sitting down on a lounger, I sighed, looking up at the stars.

"Am I doing the right thing or the selfish thing?" I said to myself, taking a large sip and leaning back. I quickly sent Fury an encrypted message, saying I had told them about Phil and Project TAHITI, and that I would be bringing Steve for when Phil woke up. I began playing at a low volume, not wanting to disturb the peace of the evening, but just enough to fill the quiet.

The stars were my silent companion as I unwound after a long day. That was an understatement, but I had no other words for it. Insane, mind-blowing, earth shatteringly cruel, and then relieving, justified, and peaceful. The rollercoaster had been wild, but the end was serene. I curled up with the spare blanket I had out here, laying my head back as I continued playing. I was thinking about Bucky, about my new team, and about Phil. All I wanted was to see him right now. My son's body was slowly healing, even while his memory was being erased of the evidence. He would surely hate me if he found out.

So far away from where you are
These miles have torn us worlds apart
And I miss you, yeah I miss you

So far away from where you are
I'm standing underneath the stars
And I wish you were here

I miss the years that were erased
I miss the way the sunshine would light up your face
I miss all the little things
I never thought that they'd mean everything to me
Yeah I miss you
And I wish you were here

I feel the beating of your heart
I see the shadows of your face
Just know that wherever you are
Yeah I miss you
And I wish you were here

I heard the patio door opening but I was still singing to the stars.

I miss the years that were erased
I miss the way the sunshine would light up your face
I miss all the little things
I never thought that they'd mean everything to me
Yeah I miss you
And I wish you were here

So far away from where you are
These miles have torn us worlds apart
And I miss you, yeah I miss you
And I wish you were here

As I stopped playing, I just stared up to the stars.

"What's got you so deep in thought?" Steve's voice said, coming up behind me.

"Bucky, Phil..." I said softly as he came to sit beside me, and I gently laid the guitar on another chair, "Grief, sorrow and conflicting joy. Does that make sense?"

"I know exactly what you mean. It's not a normal situation, to have someone come back from the dead," He replied teasingly, and I smirked as I realized he was also talking about him.

"I just want to be with Phil right now. Everything in me is screaming to go, but he won't 'wake up' for another day or two," I said sniffling and drying my cheeks.

"He'd want you to take a moment, to sleep. He'd be so proud of you, and what we accomplished today. He will be," He said, handing me something. As I looked at the card closer, I realized it was one of Phil's Captain America trading cards. There was still a bit of blood on them, but I could clearly see Steve and myself, in full uniform, looking into the middle distance on the cards face.

"Nick is a manipulative sonuvabitch," I smirked, "These were in Phil's locker. He would never have them out like this. They were in protective sleeves."

"So Fury ruined something of Phil's, just to push us to working together?" Steve said, pissed.

"Nick in a nutshell. I'm still pissed at him, because he kept you waking from the ice a secret from me. You know, until you walked in and I attacked you," I smiled, taking another sip of wine.

"Yeah, don't think that one went the way he wanted," Steve laughed, before sidling up to me on the lounger, and tucking himself under the blanket. I leaned back against his chest, smiling, "Well, I have another set for Phil. I kept them after the war, mainly as a memory of you, but now I want to give them to him."

"Should I sign them, or is that tacky? Having your father sign cards that have his face on them?" Steve asked seriously, and I laughed aloud, "I have no idea."

"I think you should give them to him," I said after a moment of silence. I felt him nod, before he sighed, "What should I say to him?"

"I know you'll think of something. You always do. Your speeches were always at the drop of a hat and, I kid you not, always made me want to ride into battle waving our flag shouting, "For America!"

"That's a touch dramatic," He chuckled.

"But seriously, you are the best person to talk to him. Give him the Steve Rogers I know and love, who stood up to bullies and Nazi's without a lick of self preservation. Damn, that's where Phil got it," I said, making Steve laugh again.
"But he got your smile," Steve said.

"Nope, I still think he got yours," I said, pulling the locket out from under my sweater, and opening it. I had slipped it out when I grabbed my hoodie, wanting to see Bucky's bright smile.

"I'm glad you got that," He said, holding it gently between his fingers.

"I could keep you two close to my heart this way. Melinda understood why I couldn't give it up on their wedding day. And then they had a girl and it didn't matter. They never gave themselves the chance to have more, scared it would happen again."

"I know this is out of the blue, especially with me just finding out Phil is our son. But since I woke up, I thought how nice it would be to start over, pick up where we left off. I… I wanted a baby with you. Honestly, with all we've been doing... I thought you'd be pregnant already," he blushed.

"Oh. I had my tubes tied after Phil was born. I didn't think I would get another chance, so it didn't seem like a big deal, and seemed like the perfect form of birth control for me," I said shrugging. It was also because I didn't want to tempt myself with another child at any point over the next 300 years. If it couldn't be Steve or Bucky's, it wasn't worth it. And it would be hard enough going on living when I had outlived my first.

"Oh," He said, and I looked up to see him frowning in disappointment.

"Steve, I can have them untied. But my issue is still the same. While you aren't healing, your cells are aging. You are aging. Even when I'm not healing, I'm not aging. I'm going to live another 300 years with how slow I'm aging," I pointed out, "And this is a big step, especially so soon after waking up in a new time."

"Elle, you just told me that a drug can bring someone back from the dead. Isn't there someone that could reverse that side effect of the serum in you, so you can age?" He asked after a moment.

"I hadn't thought about that," I said honestly, "Back during the war, no one but Erskine knew how the serum worked, so I gave up on the idea of ever being able to age."

"So, it's possible."

"I'll talk to Bruce tomorrow. He may need a biochemist to help…" I stopped and smiled. Hope welled within me, but I made myself think rationally about it. It may not work, or I may have to give up being a Super Soldier. But anything that gave me a long life with Steve, raising kids with him, growing old with him would be more than worth the sacrifice.

"What?"

"Nothing, I just know the perfect person to talk to," I said, before bringing up my other argument again, "But are you ready for something like that? Steve, babies are a lot of work. It's a big step after being introduced to the 21st century only a month ago."

"I know. But remember what Bucky's letter said? He wanted us to have a long happy life together, name a kid after him-"

"Technically I did," I teased, and he raised an eyebrow at me.

"Okay, fair enough. But I still think we could have a family. A large one, like we had always planned."
"I'd be retiring from SHIELD then. I raised Phil in the midst of still working. It was brutal," I sighed.

"Whatever you want Elle. I just think we aren't done yet," He said, raising my knuckles to his lips, kissing them softly.

"Another baby," I hummed, thinking how much I had wanted a brood of Bucky and Steve's children back in the 40's. But there was the lingering issue of Hydra inside of SHIELD that caused me some anxiety about having children. I didn't have any argument that would allow us to put the idea on pause while I figure out how to weed them out, so I was gonna have to tell him somehow. But not after today's events.

"We've got time," He said, lifting my chin up, so I was looking him in the eyes, "Let's live our life."
Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello my faithful readers! I'm so excited that I'm posting four chapters today, and I hope you enjoy them. This one drops a big hint at the end. Let me know what you think.

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

I was back in Phil's childhood bedroom, as he grabbed Bucky Bear and pulled back his covers.

"Mom, I don't want you to go," He said in a small voice.

"I've turned on the nightlight, and the door will be open. I'm just down the hall sweetheart. No monsters in the closet, I triple checked," I smiled to him, "But going to bed is something you'll have to do on your own one day."

"What if something bad happens while you're gone? What if you aren't there to protect me?" Phil asked as he got into bed.

"I will always protect you," I heard myself say, as I tucked Phil in for the night.

"Mom," Phil's young voice said, eyes scared as he looked up at me. I looked down to see him bleeding profusely from his little chest. I immediately applied pressure, calling out for help.

"Mom, you said you would protect me," Phil's adult voice said, looking as he did when I saw him last. Growing pale as blood poured from his wound.

"No, Phil, please. Don't leave me," I said, trying and failing to stop the blood flowing from his wound, "I'm not ready to be alone! Not my baby boy!"

"You didn't trust me, you still don't. Not even with my own child," Tony's voice said, making me look up in shock. My new team was there, looking on me with hard eyes, none of them moving as I called for help again. When I looked back at Phil, all I saw was Corporal Jameson, from my Kaesong team.

"Colonel?" He asked me as he choked on the blood in his lungs.

"Jameson, stay with me," I said, trying to find the bleedings source, "You're going to be fine, just stay awake soldier!"

"Elle," Steve's voice sounded, making me look back to the person beneath my hands. He mirrored Phil, that last I saw of him before the battle, blood coming from his chest and the side of his mouth. And yet, he was smaller, as if I was seeing him back at Camp Lehigh being swallowed by his uniform. The man I fell in love with looked back at me, face pale and jaunt, eyes staring into my very soul.

"You are still keeping secrets from me," He choked out, before I watched his eyes go dim, and his hand fell limp at over mine.
“You didn't think I was the only monster in the universe?” Loki's voice whispered into my ear, as I stared horrified at Steve's body. "There are beings far worse than me. And you are one of them, my dear."

Loki's laugh sounded as I screamed.

I woke up in a panic. I couldn't control my breathing, panicking when Steve wasn't beside me. My eyes found him sitting in a chair with his sketchbook, with him looking up as I curled into a ball on the bed, hyperventilating. What Loki said in my dream, came back to me as something he had said in my memory. Something he told me while I was under his control.

"You are a true monster," He had smiled sinisternly after I told him about Kaesong.

"Hey, hey, Elle," Steve's voice said gently, getting my attention, sitting beside me on the bed and pulling me close as I started sobbing quietly.

"Was it Phil?" He asked after I got my breathing under control, wiping my eyes of their tears.

"It was like it happened all over again," I breathed, shuddering as I remembered the feeling of his blood spilling through my fingers. Seeing Jameson's face again, after so long, truly made the nightmare real to me.

"Hey, he's alive. He's healing, and he's okay now," Steve said softly. I nodded against his shoulder, listening to his heartbeat. It grounded me, allowing me to focus on something other than the memory that plagued my dreams. When I was calm enough, I lifted my head and looked outside.

"Couldn't sleep either?" I asked, looking back at the sketchbook he had laid beside us.

"Woke up about an hour ago, didn't think I could fall back asleep. But you looked so peaceful... Well, you did," He said, as I picked it up.

"May I see what you were drawing?" I asked. I had given Steve a new sketchbook, and made sure he knew he didn't have to share the things he drew with me unless he wanted to. It was his private thoughts in a strange new world, and he deserved an outlet for his frustrations. Right now, I needed a distraction from thinking about my dreams.

"Yeah," He smiled. He flipped it open to the page he had been working on, turning it for me to see what he had been drawing. It was me, curled up on the bed, a serene expression on my face as I slept.

"It's beautiful Steve," I smiled up at him, kissing his lips softly in thanks. He smiled bashfully and flipped the page to show me another. It was a sketch of Phil and I, a picture that had been captured at his 10th birthday party. He was hugging my middle tightly, as I laughed at the camera. That had been 1974, so I was wearing high-waisted flare jeans and a white top, a red scarf wrapped like a headband in my big hair. Phil was dressed nicely in brown slacks, a yellow dress shirt and a sweater vest over top, hair combed like his Dad's.

"It's like you were there, and you took the picture," I smiled at him. He silently flipped to another, and I had to hold my breath. It was us, hovering over a little bundle in my arms. I looked up at him, seeing him already watching my face for a reaction.

"Let's just... wait a few months," I said, smiling to show him the idea did please me, "You said we have time, and we do. I just want us to be more steady. We've hardly been reunited a month, and we still have some things to deal with."
I just knew when he heard about Hydra, he may want to put a child on the back-burner until they were dealt with. But after our conversation last night and everything that happened yesterday, I realized life was too short to put off something like this. I’d lived cautiously for so long, it was all I knew. And I knew that a child with Steve would never be a bad decision.

"Really?" He asked, smiling in joy, clearly only hearing what he wanted from my explanation. I sighed, giving him a small smile.

"Really."

He tossed the sketchbook back onto the chair, pinning me to the bed with a heated kiss. I felt him grind himself into my mound, and I groaned softly as his kisses left my mouth and traveled down my jaw to my collarbone. Zeus whined once at our door and I chuckled into my hand softly as Steve groaned in frustration.

"He's a buzz kill," he sighed against my skin. I knew he was teasing by his tone, because he really loved Zeus. They were best buds now.

"You can have me later, after all our guests have left," I said, pushing him back slightly. He pouted for a moment and sighed, "Good, because I plan on making love to you for hours anyways. They wouldn't be able to look us in the eye, especially with the sounds you make."

"Ah, damn them. I have no shame when it comes to you, and what you do to me," I said with a teasing smile, "But I need to make breakfast and someone needs to take Zeus out."

"I'll do that," He groaned teasingly, kissing me once and walking towards our door. Zeus greeted him by circling his legs and following him silently. I realized he had already gotten dressed whenever he had woken up, so I zipped into the closet to grab a change of clothes and quickly put on some makeup for the day. I had just finished pinning the last of my messy bun when I heard the elevator running. Everyone in the apartment was still sleeping soundly. I would have been too if it weren't for my damn internal clock. Sometimes, I hated my army habits.

Steve forewent a run today, wanting to help me cook. And after what we did yesterday, we need a day of rest or two to reset our brains. I was playing some music, humming along when Steve brought the coveted peaches from out of the pantry cupboard.

"Don't open them yet. Clint is like a bloodhound and he'll wake up when you do," I said softly, putting on the coffee pot.

"Really?" He said, and I chuckled, "Clint could sleep through a freight train crash, but the second you open that jar, he'll be on you faster than you can say Jack Robinson."

"Alright," He laughed, leaving them alone on the counter and grabbing plates from the dishwasher. I had the waffles in the warming drawer, and I was starting the bacon when Steve returned, pulling me away from the oven as soon as the tray was in.

"Steve, I have to start the eggs," I smiled, and he shook his head, "Dance with me. The eggs can wait."

I bit my lip as I wrapped my arms around his neck and said, "Alright, one song."

He brought me close, swaying us softly as the soothing vocals of Bing came over the speakers.

_Kiss me once, then kiss me twice_  
_Then kiss me once again._
It's been a long, long time.
Haven't felt like this, my dear
Since I can't remember when.
It's been a long, long time

You'll never know how many dreams
I've dreamed about you.
Or just how empty they all seemed without you.
So kiss me once, then kiss me twice
Then kiss me once again.
It's been a long, long time.

I closed my eyes, squeezing him tighter. He rubbed my back gently as the instrumental played, "I love you."

"I love you too Darling, always."

"Always."

"I hear the elevator," I groaned. Tony was coming up.

"Shh, just relax," He said.

Ah, kiss me once, then kiss me twice
Then kiss me once again.
It's been a long time.
Haven't felt like this my dear
Since I can't remember when
It's been a long, long time.

You'll never know how many dreams
I've dreamed about you.
Or just how empty they all seemed without you.
So kiss me once, then kiss me twice
Then kiss me once again.
It's been a long, long time.

Long, long time.

As I heard a key turning and the front door opened, I looked up to the kitchen doorway to see Nat leaning against the opening. Bruce and Thor came to stand behind her, smiling at us.

"Ugh, we've been caught," I teased Steve, pressing my face into his shoulder in fake humiliation. He laughed, kissing the top of my head, "Coffee is ready."

"Barton's still passed out on the couch," Tony's voice floated in as he followed the mass towards the dining room, "What did I miss?"

"Just something cute," Natasha teased me with a soft smile.

"Romanoff, you be very careful about how you use that word around me," I teased back, pointing my spatula at her as she left the doorway. In my heart, I was seeing Tony and remembering my dream. He couldn't know what I was keeping from him. It wasn't just my suspicions of Hydra's hit on his parents that I'd kept from him. For years after his parents died, he'd stopped speaking to me. I knew if I told him then, he wouldn't believe me. And he wasn't ready for it now either.
After scrambling the eggs, because I was feeling lazy, I brought everything to the table. Everyone had a mug of coffee, and dug into the food quickly.

"I was sure the smell of coffee would wake him... oh well. Steve, watch this," I smiled at my husband. I made sure it was quiet as I noisily unscrewed the ring on the jar of peaches. I waited a moment only for a suction arrow to hit the side of the jar I was holding, thankful I hadn't taken off the sealing ring.

"Mine," Clint said, a crazed look in his eyes that matched his bed head.

"That jar is yours then. I've got another six I'm willing to open today. You're all going to want a jar to yourselves anyways" I snickered, seeing Steve taking a sniff of another he opened when Clint appeared. Nat quickly grabbed her own jar and Tony did as well. Thor and Bruce were a bit more hesitant, Bruce politely asking for a jar from Steve. Much like last night, it was less conversation as everyone woke up. Steve moaned at the taste of his first peach slice and I gave a little chuckle at him. He blushed a bit before Bruce and Thor gave moans of appreciation as well.

"These are amazing," Bruce commented, devouring another slice. Thor was shovelling food into his mouth and nodded, "They truly are divine Elizabeth."

"Thank you Thor," I said, getting up and excusing myself to the kitchen.

"We're going to California in August," I sighed to Steve when he came in, as I grabbed another pot of coffee, "All my canning stuff is there anyways. It's about a week or two I'll need to get it all done for the next year."

"Do the Commandos families get them as well?" He teased and I said, "If they put in an order early enough. But I taught most of the daughters and granddaughters. My peaches are a family secret though. I was gonna teach Daisy."

"We'll find her," He said, taking my hand. I nodded, "We will."

Steve and I took Thor, Nat and Clint in the Range Rover, Bruce catching a ride with Tony who had driven to our apartment. We gathered in Central Park, meeting a SHIELD team that sealed off the area from prying eyes, while Loki was unloaded from the back of a truck. Erik came out, having finished the device to harness the Tesseract's power, and send the brothers back to Asgard. Steve watched Loki with hard eyes, and I could see the god smirk behind his muzzle.

"Hey asshole, it didn't stick," I said, watching Loki's eyes register what I meant.

"Yeah, you failed miserably," Clint said, having my back as Selvig put the Tesseract inside the new housing. Thor took it, nodding goodbye to Selvig. Before they left, Thor gave me a smile and said, "I look forward to your cooking next time I am on Earth. I will be singing praises on Asgard of your peaches."

"Drop by whenever you'd like big guy," I smiled back, as Steve's arm wrapped around my waist, "I'll tell Dr. Foster why you couldn't stay."

"Thank you," He said sincerely, before giving us all a wave goodbye with Mjolnir. They twisted the device and suddenly enveloped by light, they were sucked up. I sighed heavily as they left, relieved that Loki was off our planet. His words in my dreamed echoed in my head.

There are beings far worse than me in the universe.
Was that a warning?

The rest of us said goodbye, parting ways for now. Tony was taking some time to redesign the tower, saying it was odd that only the A remained of STARK. I called it kismet and he scoffed. Clint and Tasha were taking a week or two, and I knew where they were headed. I asked Nat in Russian, to give the kids and Laura my love. She winked at me, and said, "Hug him for me when he wakes up. I want to yell at him too."

"Will do, but get in line," I smiled, hugging her and as Steve and Clint shook hands, talking about what we planned on doing next.

"Tony, I might be over soon. Like today soon. Bruce, you okay to hang around with Tony, seeing some of the R and D floors? I have someone I want you to meet."

"Sure, I've got nothing else to do," He smirked.

"Well, let's go get her," I said to Steve, cocking my head in the direction of the car. Both the Camaro and the bike were still at the SHIELD airfield, and we'd be going there after to grab them. Steve was amazed that I could put the bike in the back of the Range Rover. It was a tight fit, but I'd had to do it a couple times. It was a short trip in to the clean up efforts of our mess. I felt bad leaving yesterday, but after fighting those aliens, I had no energy to clean up their tech for hours. We had SHIELD lackeys for that.

And I found the one I was looking for within minutes of being on the scene. She was gushing to her partner, about the alien tech they were picking up and cataloguing, excited by the prospect of studying the alien DNA.

"Dr. Simmons?" I asked, approaching her. She dropped the gun she was holding when she turned to see me, wide eyed as her partner caught it.

"Jemma, careful!" Her partner scolded her, as she stood frozen still.

"My name is-"

"Med- I mean, Colonel Rogers, ma'am, it is an honor to meet you," She said, suddenly remembering herself, ripping off her glove and thrusting her hand toward me. I smiled as I shook her hand, knowing she had been close to calling me by my SHIELD nickname, and said, "I have heard great things about you Dr. Simmons. And you as well Dr. Fitz."

"Me? Ma'am, that's- me?" He asked, pointing to himself confused, as I held out my hand to him as well.

"You two are the youngest graduates of the SciTech Academy. You already had your PhD's. You're rock stars within the Science division," I said, watching Dr. Fitz flush slightly as he shook my hand.

"That's kind of you to say, ma'am," He said, ducking his head, releasing my hand.

"It's also true. Would you mind coming with me for a moment Dr. Simmons? I have a few questions for you," I smiled, to which she smiled, "Of course. Lead the way ma'am."

"Steve, will you join us?" I said, and he nodded, "Of course."

"Captain Rogers, all of SHIELD was so happy to hear about your return. I'm glad the serum worked so well against the ice," She said to Steve who nodded, "I am too. I was reunited with my best girl."
"Oh stop, you," I smiled at him, as I led Jemma over to a small café table. It had been righted and I grabbed a chair for her, and then Steve grabbed two more. I sat down, motioning for Dr. Simmons to as well. I started my jamming frequency, unsure if there were agents listening in close by. Steve pulled on his ear and I gave him a sad smile in apology.

"It's well known to SHIELD and the world that I'm not aging. But Captain Rogers is. While he was in the ice, his body was constantly healing itself from hypothermia that it halted his aging. I would very much like to grow old one day, and not 300 years in the future like I've estimated will happen."

"What I would like to ask of you, is to find some way of allowing my cells to age, without changing the serum in my blood. Or if it can't be done that way, then I can be okay with no longer being a super soldier," I said and Steve looked over at me suddenly.

"So you want me to take samples and run different suppressants through them until something begins to allow your cells to age you?" The young agent said, confused.

"Yes. Something…," I stopped for a moment, before powering through, "Something safe for taking during pregnancy?"

"Are you expecting Ma'am?" She smiled, sneaking a look at Steve.

"No, not yet. I need to get my tubes untied first," I smirked, as Steve's hold on my hand loosened and them squeezed again in comfort. He understood why I could be okay with not being a super soldier. Because if it meant I could have kids with him, and grow old, I would in a heartbeat.

"Ah yes, that should be simple enough. But may I ask, why me?"

"Because you come very highly recommended by a lot of the higher ups. And because I feel I can trust you not to replay this information to anyone. Including SHIELD. I am entrusting you with my future mortality Dr. Simmons, and "

"Understood Colonel- Ma'am," She smiled nervously, "Everything would be under a Jane Doe file then. Hard copies only, under lock and key. And I would be honored to help you. Would this be your first pregnancy?"

"No. I had a miscarriage back during WWII. Only 6 weeks along," I said, feeling Steve's thumb gently trace along my own in support. I wanted to trust her with Phil, but he had to decide for himself if he trusted her with our secret.

She nodded, "Of course, how silly of me. I had read that in your file once. Did you have any trouble getting pregnant?"

"No, it was unplanned."

"So, I would suggest we be very careful, probably have you on bed rest at the beginning, and light duties around SHIELD in the second trimester," She said.

"I don't want it going around SHIELD, so maybe when I start showing, I will use up my vacation days. Fury would throw a party," I smiled, and Steve chuckled.

"Do you have many vacation days? I assume this is why you wanted to meet away from SHIELD."

"Yes, this must remain a secret. And I have 387, last I checked."

"Well, that would cover it," she laughed, "Well, how would you like to give samples? I can bring a
kit by- Of course I would have to sign it out, so a paper trail… or-"

"If you come with us to Stark Tower now, we can use my nephews labs. And you can meet the man you'll be working with, Bruce Banner," I said, and she smiled excitedly.

"Oh I can't wait to tell Fitz… about meeting Dr. Banner, not the reason though," She said quickly.

"I think we can allow that. But no more Jemma. It's hard enough keeping a secret from someone, it's another thing when it regards someone else's happiness," I said, and Steve gave me a comforting hand squeeze.

"Of course," She said, "May I tell him that I won't be back right away? Otherwise he will worry when he looks up and realizes I'm not back yet."

"Sure. You can text him on the way there," I said, gesturing to my car down the road, "Have you ever thought of field work? I think you'd be quite good at it."

"That's so nice of you to say. I was actually thinking of it, wanting more adventure. I just have to convince Fitz."

Jemma was silent in her excitement, as we drove to Stark Tower. I explained to her that the levels were kind of trashed, but not to hold that against Tony. She understood, asking me questions about my healing and what it was like to age so slowly.

"Here we are," I said, as the doors opened. I stepped through to see DUMMY cleaning up some debris.

"DUMMY! Here boy!" I said excitedly, slapping my knees to the robot. He dropped the broom and came over to me, opening his claw with an excited sound.

"I missed you too bud," I smiled, patting his little claw.

"Liz? That you? Jarvis is being buggy right now, so I turned him off to reboot," I heard from farther in the lab.

"Yes, Bruce with you?" I asked, as we walked in, stepping over rubble and dirt piles. DUMMY wasn't the smartest, hence his name. He was just making piles instead of cleaning up the dirt.

"Come on in, he's here."

As I walked further into the lab, Steve and Jemma behind me, I saw Bruce hunched over a workbench. He turned to me, smiling, before looking right past me. He looked a little dazed, so I looked back and saw Jemma smiling at him.

"Hello," She waved a little. I shared a look with Steve and said, "Bruce, this is Dr. Jemma Simmons, biochemist extraordinaire."

"Nice to meet you. Dr. Simmons," He said, giving her a little half smile as she walked up to him and held out her hand.

"It's wonderful to meet you Dr. Banner. My partner Fitz, would just die on the spot if he were here. We are avid readers of your work, and I have so many questions, but Elizabeth should maybe take it from here."

"Right. So I enlisted Dr. Simmons help in creating a formula for me to age. And I would like your
"Age? Well I guess we would have to see how your cells age first, and then break down the binding of the formula to your DNA-"

"-before seeing if that would be permanent, versus simply allowing your cells to age normally," Jemma said, finishing for Bruce.

"If it is permanent, the unbinding of the serum, we'd have to figure out a way to work around the serum," Bruce added.

"Or create an anti serum with just enough potency to allow aging over loss of cellular regeneration altogether."

"It will be trial and error for awhile."

"We'll have to take a fair amount of samples so we can test different versions over a prolonged period of time." Jemma said, before Bruce cut her off.

"Versus a single dose. It will be an interesting project," Bruce smiled.

"The Colonel does have one stipulation, that we make it friendly to fetal gestation. If we can," Jemma said, and Tony's head whipped up at that.

"REALLY? He's been back a month and you're already knocked up?" He said, though the smile on his face told me he was teasing.

"No Tony, I'm not knocked up. Tubes. Tied," I said, pointing to my abdomen dramatically. He rolled his eyes and muttered, "I didn't care anyway."

"Yes you did!" I said, sticking my tongue out at him.

"Wow, usually it's Fitz and I finishing each other sentences. Neat!" Jemma said, smiling at Bruce who looked a little bashful.

I laughed at Jemma, "Just take what you need. I'll okay it with Fury for you to sneak away a few days a week to come work with Bruce. I hope you don't mind me dumping this on you."

"Not at all. I think sticking close to Tony might be for the best. Tech and a lab, more than I had in Kolkata," He said, "I'll go get you some tubes and a blood sample kit."

"Perfect," Jemma said to Bruce, smiling brightly. He looked a little dazed again before saying, "Gloves?"

"Yes please, medium."

"Dainty hands you've got there Jemma," I smiled, sitting down as she washed her hands. Bruce had turned to grab the kit as she laughed and said, "Fitz tends to ask me for help a lot, when he can't get his hand in somewhere. It's like being asked to reach the top shelf sometimes when you're tall."

Bruce came back, putting the tray on a table beside my chair so Jemma could work. They chatted about different science things that flew right over my head. Steve and I left them to chat some more, me smirking at the chemistry between them, no pun intended.

"Where are we going now?" Steve asked, when I didn't make the usual turn to go home.
"Queens," I said softly.
Chapter Twenty

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! Did anyone guess? Well, never fear, because I will tell you anyways with this chapter.

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

Previously

"Where are we going now?" Steve asked, when I didn't make the usual turn to go home.

"Queens," I said softly.

Steve's face scrunched up in disgust for a moment before smoothing out. Brooklyn boy, I sighed in my head.

"What's in Queens?" He asked confused.

"More family," I said, taking a quick glance at him.

"Family?"

"I haven't told anyone this, except Phil and Nick of course. Back in 2000, I had a very dear friend in SHIELD named Mary Fitzpatrick. She was engaged to another SHIELD agent named Richard Parker. They had a fight, Mary went out and got drunk, like blackout drunk. Instead of calling me, she went home with someone. Someone who had a penchant for one night stands and copious amounts of alcohol."

"Let me guess," Steve said, noting my tense posture. I nodded, "Tony."

"She found out she was pregnant five weeks later on a mission, and when we retraced her steps, she was horrified that she had slept with my nephew. She wouldn't tell him, because he wasn't ready to be a father, and I knew he'd dismiss it even if I came forward with the proof. He still wasn't talking to me at that point," I said as we hit the bridge.

"He still doesn't know?"

"No, because he's still a reckless idiot. He's not ready, and Peter has a normal life. Like Phil, he deserves that instead of the media circus that surrounds Tony. I will tell him, but not just yet. I know Tony. After the Ten Rings holding him captive, he built a suit out of weapons and blew the place up. He caused an arms race and the disaster of the Stark Expo was the result. Aliens descend on New York? He's going to be panicking about another invasion, I bet you anything. He'll build a who legion of suits thinking that will save us next time. He takes the weight of the world on his shoulders. Like father, like son. Which is exactly what I will not be dragging Peter into."

"His names Peter?" Steve asked, and I nodded, "Richard named him. He loved Mary so much, he forgave her for a drunken mistake without even batting an eye at the fact he was taking on another
man's kid. He said, even if he wasn't his son, he wanted to give him a strong name and his last name. A name is the first gift a parent gives their child. He loved Peter as if he were his own."

"I think you picked the perfect name for our son," He said softly, and I took his hand tightly, "I always worried what you might think."

"You were mad at me, so I can understand why you didn't name him after me," He teased.

"It wasn't just that. Growing up, Phil looked so much like you. He had your last name, he had Bucky's name and Chester's... sort of. But I wanted to make sure he knew that having your name didn't mean living up to your memory. It would hold a weight and it's not always healthy to hold a child to that standard. Tony for example."

"I wouldn't want that for him either."

"He's not just named after Bucky. I had a friend that was on my Kaesong team. His last name was Jameson," I said, seeing his dead eyes looking back at me.

"Was that the man that looked like me?"

"Yes, there were a lot of similarities to how you looked before the serum. He was kind, and sweet. Had a wife back home who was pregnant with their child. Always made sure I ate. I usually waited until everyone else had eaten, because I knew I could survive on less. I wanted the men to have more. He made sure no one mentioned you... More so that I wouldn't be sad. I named Phil after him to remember those men."

I was quiet a moment still holding his hand. We had made it into Brooklyn before he said, "I'm glad you had friends. Not just the Commandos but Natasha, Nick, Clint... And this Mary."

"I had her," I smiled sadly.

"I picked up on that past tense. What happened?"

"She and Richard were on assignment. The plane crashed, but according to the coroner's report, they were already dead. The Black Box was missing from the wreckage, as well as a parachute. But everyone on the flight manifest was accounted for, so Fury and I knew someone had been left off the manifest. That was 2008."

"Who's Peter living with now?"

"Mary's sister-in-law, May. Her husband Ben, Richard's brother, died during the attack on the Stark Expo two years ago. Peter later told me how Iron Man saved him, but when he went to go find and tell his Uncle Ben, the officers at the scene found him instead. He tried to stop some looters amid the chaos and was shot. May was crushed. It was an awful coincidence they were at the Expo. They were supposed to be at the movies, but Ben surprised Peter instead."

"So, do you... take care of them like Rebecca's kids?"

"Yes. Peter loves physics and engineering, even at 11 years old. Kids a genius, so I've already paid for his education, college tuition set aside. May has a good job as a nurse and I help when bills get heavy. She wants to provide for him on her own, but I'm helping her keep her head above water. She knows he's not related to her, but she loves him like her own son. Peter knows Richard wasn't his Dad. He loves his aunt, blood or not, and wants to stay with her. I couldn't take him on anyways with my job, it's not a stable life for a kid, especially if I have missions."
"And, we're here," I said, pulling into a street spot. Parking the car, I locked eyes with a kid on the stoop.

"Aren't you supposed to be in school young man," I asked with sass, as I got out of the car, and coming around the front.

"Colonel!" Tevan smiled, "Welcome back."

"Tevan," I said, eyeing him seriously.

"Schools were shut down for the week. People mourning after what happened yesterday," The teenager said, hands in his jacket pockets.

"You staying out of trouble?" I said, narrowing my eyes at him.

"I'm keeping my head down, yeah. Who's the Grandpa?" He asked, as Steve approached. Steve briefly looked down at his clothes and shuffled.

"That is Captain Rogers," I said, smacking Tevan upside the head.

"Colonel, that hurts. Nice to meet you Captain," Tevan said, nodding to Steve, "Names Tevan."

"Nice to meet you."

"So what's the word?" I asked, cutting to the chase.

"Not much. Gang activity has kinda plateaued since yesterday's events. Word is some bad dope hit the streets last week though, laced with something deadly. Fent or something worse. A couple are claiming they plan on lifting some alien tech from the clean up efforts, but not much."

"They won't get close enough to try. You're clean, right?"

"Course, I won't touch the stuff. You know that," He said sadly, and I sighed "How's your Mom?"

"We're okay. She's at the doctor right now. She's in remission, finally."

"That's wonderful. Tell her I say hi. You know the drill."

"Yeah, yeah, make a ruckus if someone gets near the car," He smirked.

"I'll send something by soon, okay?" I said, and he knew it was a care package.

"Hopefully it's those chocolate chip cookies from heaven," He smirked, and I chuckled, "If you're good."

I waved goodbye to Tevan before Steve and I walked up the apartment building steps. Steve looked at me and asked, "How do you know him?"

"I used to pay him ten bucks to watch my car. It's not a rough neighbourhood, but every once and awhile someone would try to lift the Camaro. He's made some good money off of me over the last few years. I upped the wage to $100 a visit when his Mom was diagnosed. They lost Tevan's Dad in a drug deal, and she's bringing in all the money now. Tried my best to help out. Sent food, paid rent a few times. The building manager doesn't bat an eye anymore. Tevan was always nice to Peter, and Peter knows if he's ever in trouble, Tevan can get him to me. Kid isn't in a gang, but they know not to mess with him. I already messed up a few of the ones that tried to recruit him. He's my ears on the ground."
"Sounds like a good kid," Steve smiled as we climbed stairs.

"He is. I'm keeping a spot open for him at SHIELD. It's only with the promise that he goes to college first. He graduates next year, so I planned on attending," I said as we got up to the fifth floor. Walking down a hallway, I walked with a purpose towards the end of it, knocking sharply three times.

"Oh thank god," May said upon opening the door, hugging me tightly, "I saw you at the beginning but not at the end and I thought the worst."

"I'm alright," I teased, "How about you?"

"We're fine. A few parents at Peter's school were killed in the attack, so they shut it down for the week out of respect."

"Tevan told me," I said, as May's eyes looked beside me to see Steve. "Captain Rogers," She said, a little stunned by the man from my pictures in the hallway, "Hi."

"Ma'am."

"Ah, nope. Just call me May. I'm so glad they found you," She said, pulling him in for a hug, "I was beginning to worry about Liz here."

"Oh stop," I said moving into the living room, "I'm fine. But you are right, life is better with him home."

"Come in, come in," She said, pulling Steve in, "Coffee, tea, soda?"

"Uh, water?" Steve asked unsure, and I snorted, "Make that two."

"AUNT LIZ!" Was screamed, as something flew at me in my peripheral vision. I faked being startled as Peter glued himself to my side, hugging me tightly.

"Sup Buddy?" I smiled down at him, hugging him back.

"Oh my gosh, I was so worried about you yesterday. But you were kicking alien butt and you looked so cool Aunt Liz! You were on the news at school, and they had us all huddled in the gym. They wanted to evacuate us, but we'd have had to go to New Jersey," Peter said making a face. I smirked, "Kid, you don't remember what I told you about dissing New Jersey? It's where I trained Captain America."

"Right, but who was that guy with Captain America's suit yesterday? His shield looked the same too," He said, before I smiled and pointed to Steve. Peter looked over, eyes wide as he recognized Steve immediately.

"Hi Peter, Steve Rogers," Steve said holding out his hand. Yeah, Steve was always a little formal around kids. Peter was frozen with wide eyes and I chuckled to myself a bit, "I knew this would happen. He's a bit like Phil."

"Ah," Steve said in understanding, retracting his hand and getting down on one knee for Peter, "Well, I was very excited to meet you. Your Aunt Liz tells me your a whiz kid."

Peter was still shocked, but said, "Well, I am good at math."

"Peter, brag a little. Your Uncle Steve wants to know how smart you are," I said giving his shoulder
a little pat for confidence.

"Uncle?" He asked me, looking up shocked.

"Well, I'm your Aunt, and he's my husband. So he's your Uncle too," I smiled at him, ruffling his hair.

"If you want me to be," Steve added, smiling at Peter softly, who was frozen in shock again.

"That would be... so cool!" Peter said, excitedly hugging Steve.

"Sorry," He said, pulling back as he registered Steve's surprise at the sudden hug.

"Don't be sorry Peter," I said, patting his shoulder, "Steve likes hugs."

"I do," Steve smiled. Peter smiled right back, "I do too."

"So, how's the last month of school so far?" I asked Peter

"Boring. They don't teach enough physics," He grumbled.

"Kid, you're in grade six. Two more years at this school and you'll be swimming in physics classes at Midtown. You've got time before your Nobel Prize to enjoy being a kid," I teased him.

"As long as he keeps his grades up," May reminded Peter and I, bringing Steve and I glasses of water.

"Thank you," Steve smiled at her, "So is Midtown a science school?"

"It's the Midtown School of Science and Technology! It's one of the greatest science schools in the country. Aunt Liz has an in with the principal, and I'm starting there in fall 2015!"

"It's Jim's grandson, Michael," I smirked at Steve's questioning glance. Ah, nepotism, my dear friend.

"Sounds like you'll enjoy it," Steve replied to Peter, seeing Peter's joy. As Peter started going on about the school, May motioned with her head in the direction of the kitchen. I snuck away while Peter was distracted, touching Steve's shoulder gently as I passed him.

"So, what's up?" I asked May.

"You know I hate to ask you, but he's wanting to go to a physics camp this summer. And I just can't-"

"I get it. I'd be happy to pay. He doesn't have to know," I said quietly, "It was part of my duties as Godmother, all things education. And then some fun. You know my offer is still open about the Brooklyn Brownstone. I won't charge rent, and you know it's vacant anyways."

"My job is closeby, and I couldn't pull him away from the neighbourhood. It would crush him after he just started feeling settled," She argued softly. They'd moved after Ben died, unable to keep the house, even after I said that I would help them. May had a stubborn streak that even I could not rival with, so I gave in to her pride. At least in that instance.

"I know. Just, don't think you couldn't except this only because of Peter and your job. You are family to me too May, and I take care of family, no matter what."

"You haven't told him, have you?" May asked, looking at Steve worried.
"I did. But he knows that Tony doesn't know about Peter, and he will keep it secret until we all decide Tony is ready. No one is taking him from you May. He's invested in protecting Peter now, and it's not something he takes lightly. The Brooklyn in that boy is strong," I teased, and Steve shot me a look from where he and Peter were talking.

"As long as we are on the same page," She sighed in relief. I looked at her seriously, studying her face. It was grief drawn. I thought about what day it was, and frowned, "Friday would be-"

"Two years," She said, sniffling a bit. I pulled her in for a hug and said, "I'm sorry May."

"I just feel so lost without Ben," She said, clinging to me, "And I can't show Peter. He needs me to be strong. He's all I have left, and I couldn't live anymore if I lost him too."

"You can, but you won't need to, I promise you. I can say from experience that the hurt of losing your husband doesn't go away, it just lessens over time. Take it from a woman who spent 70 years putting on a front. It gets exhausting. Peter needs to see that it's okay to grieve, and it's okay to miss people. It's healthy for you to cry and release emotion," I said, pulling away to look at her.

"It's sometimes concerning when you say things like '70 years' or 'back in my day'," She teased, glossing over what I said about grief, raising a brow at me. I shrugged, "Sometimes I show my age. But I'm serious, don't hold it in."

I barely overheard Peter asking, "Isn't it so cool how you can fight bad guys, and Hydra! Aunt Liz has so many stories about how you'd punched the Red Skull square in the jaw without thinking. I'd like to be able to be able to punch someone so hard they'd lose teeth. I think it would be so cool to be a super soldier."

"Peter," Steve started seriously, making Peter somber, "With great power, comes great responsibility. I can't be abusing what I was given by picking fights just to hurt someone. The man that made me this way, made your Aunt Liz this way... He said something to me that stuck with me to this day."

"What's that?" Peter asked in a small voice.

"A strong man, who has known power all his life, will lose respect for that power. But a weak man, knows the value of strength, and knows compassion. Do you understand what I'm trying to say? I don't fight just to hurt the bad guys. I do it to protect people. It's why I put the Valkyrie down during WWII. Because it was protecting my country. I had to choose between my life and millions of lives. Mine alone wasn't worth risking millions of others who deserved to live."

"I understand," He said, as May and I sat down on the couch, "Thank you for coming back though. I didn't want Aunt Liz to be alone."

"Well, Zeus and I will make sure she is never alone again," He smiled at me, taking my hand.

"I have one question though," Peter said, nervously.

"What's that buddy?" I asked.

"When I grow up, can I be an Avenger?" He said. Steve and I both looked at each other and smiled, before I answered him, "We'll talk about it when you've graduated."

We stayed for another hour, making sure Peter got a chance to know Steve and vice versa. Peter hugged him tightly and said, "It's so cool that Captain America is my Uncle! Can I tell Ned? Pleasease?"
"You can tell him that you got a new Uncle named Steve, but that's it, young man. It's bad enough we were plastered all over the news, I don't need gossip at schools over Queens that Peter Parker knows Captain America and Athena," I teased, hugging him tightly. Giving him a kiss on the head I whispered in his ear, "Hug your Aunt May extra today. She needs lots to get through Friday as well."

"I know. I promise," He said.

"You're my brave man," I smiled, "Don't you ever change, buddy."

"You're my protector," He smiled back, "Don't you ever leave me behind."

"Never," We said together, before I hugged him tightly again. Peter smiled, despite the watery tears in his eyes as Steve knelt down and said, "Will you promise me something?"

"Anything." He smiled, excited.

"No matter what happens, no matter where your Aunts and I are in the world, you will stay who you are. Not a perfect soldier, but a good man," Steve said, pointing to Peter's heart, and I couldn't help but let my lip tremble as a tear rolled down my cheek. Oh Abe, you would be so proud of him.

"I promise," He smiled, hugging Steve tightly. I knew Steve's mind was probably picturing himself with his own child and I knew he would make such a great father, that I couldn't deny him the chance, even if Hydra was hanging over our heads like a guillotine blade. If I never aged normally again, if Steve died of old age before I even looked 40, knowing I'd given him his dream would be enough to last me the next 300 years. I'd just have to convince him of my outlook when I finally revealed my last secret.

As we left the building, I handed Tevan a couple of bills, and said, "Buy her some flowers for me, please."

"I will, thank you Colonel. Good to meet you Cap," Tevan said, holding out his hand to Steve, who took it saying, "You as well Tevan. Stay safe."

"I will, or the Colonel will whoop my ass," He teased me as I got in the car.

"Damn straight," I called at him while Steve got in. We left with a wave, as I got us turned around to head home. Steve smirked over at me and I narrowed my eyes, "What?"

"Just thinking about today. Loki is gone, our son is alive and healing, you're on the road to aging again, I met our nephew's secret son... and it's our anniversary."

I looked over at him in surprise, "Wow, usually the guy forgets the first one."

"Well considering I've missed the last 67 of them, I figured I should remember this one," He sassed. I laughed, "Alright, brownie points for remembering. Do you consider this our 68th or the 1st?"

"Well, technically it is our first together, but we got married in '44."

"So, what would you like it to be though?" I asked softly. He took my hand and answered, "Because I was only missing and not dead, we were married for those years apart, and still are. But this is the first anniversary we will be together. So, either way, it's special to me. What about you?"

"It's perfect for me, either way," I smiled, "Just having you home."
"So, what's the gift for 68 years?" He asked cheekily. I rolled my eyes and said, "I think... platinum? I don't keep up to date on everything you know. Some things weren't relevant."

"Well, since I remembered yesterday, I didn't get a chance to go shopping," He explained, "But I was hoping I could just take you."

"I don't see why not. We're not traditional by any means," I teased him. He leaned forward to type in an address on the GPS, and I looked at him confused, "Had that off the top of your head?"

"May have memorized it this morning," He replied bashfully, blushing slightly. I kissed his knuckles and said, "I love you."

We stopped at the GPS's prompting that we had reached our destination and I felt my jaw go slack as I noticed the mint banner of the storefront. I turned to him with raised brows and said, "Really?"

"Well, it is our anniversary. And we do have the money," He cheeked. I rolled my eyes at him, smiling wide as we got out. I met him on the sidewalk, taking his hand and buzzing with excitement. I didn't treat myself like this, ever. But Steve wanted to make a statement obviously.

"Welcome to Tiffany's. May I help you find something today?" A blonde haired woman, with a warm smile, greeted us.

"We're looking for a anniversary necklace for my wife," He smiled down at me. I shrugged, "I'm not arguing with that."

"Any particular metals you may be interested in?"

"Platinum," Steve answered in his Captain's voice. I did love it when his Captain persona outshone in some situations. She led us over and I gazed into the display case, longingly sweeping over the selection.

"Anything you want," He whispered in my ear.

"Considering I'm your Sugar Mama," I teased back under my breath. He snickered, "That's a shared account, wife."

"Alright," I said, biting my lip and seeing what caught my eye. There were many different designs of keys, Fleur de Lis, and small pendants. I looked down and right under my thumb was the perfect one. I looked up at Steve and he chuckled, "I was thinking that one too."

"That one," He said, pointing to it, "Four in from your right."

"A beautiful choice," The woman smiled, carefully pulling the necklace from the case. She laid it on a suede tray and said, "Will you be wanting it wrapped?"

"No, I think she'd like to wear it out."

I nodded, "I would."

I was admiring the necklace while Steve went to pay, using a mirror on the counter to hold it up to see how it would look against my skin. The scroll design was the closest thing to an infinity symbol, and it would remind me of our promise. *Till the end of the line, I am yours and you are mine. Always.* Another employee was smiling at me, "That looks absolutely stunning with your skin tone."

"I was thinking the same thing. I usually wear gold, but I may switch," I said, seeing Steve come up
behind me in the mirror. He had a little bag with him and when I gave him a questioning glance he said, "It's the warranty and authentication certificate. They insisted."

"Okay. Thank you husband," I smiled at him, wrapping my arms around his neck and reaching up to kiss him softly.

"Happy anniversary," Our saleswoman smiled at us as I released Steve's lips.

"Thank you. Have a good day," He said to her, taking my hand.

"You as well," I waved as we started walking.

"I'll call Tom tomorrow and explain our large purchase," Steve teased as we got in the car. I laughed heartily when I thought of the mini heart attack our accountant would have, seeing such a large purchase.

"Oh, he won't be too mad. Our stocks soared over the last week, so I wanted to buy you a bike with some of the interest. I know mine is a bit too modern for you."

"It's is... but it was something I was thinking off though. I may be a bit too stuck in the past. The clothes and the haircut," He said sadly.

"Do you really want to cut it?" I sighed. It was a sense of nostalgia for me, but I could tell it bugged him.

"Would you hate it if I did?" He asked, a little self conscious.

"Of course not, I'm sorry I'm being so obstinate about it. I guess for me, it reminds me of our time together. It's selfish of me to ask you stay to adapt to the times but hold you back on this. I just want you to feel comfortable in your own skin. If a haircut does, I want you to do it. Don't keep it because I want it, but don't cut it if you think you need to conform to society. Some of the old looks are coming back."

"I want it. It would be nice to not have to do too much work in the morning. You take less time than I do," He chuckled.

"Because I mastered framing the face and simply fluffing my curls. Five minutes, tops. I had 70 years to learn though," I shrugged, "There is a barber close by our building. You could walk there tomorrow if you wanted."

"Or, I'll go later. It's bugging me," He said, running his fingers through the coif. I smiled, "Whatever you want Darling. Just don't do a buzzcut. It really wouldn't suit you."

As we got into the apartment, Zeus needed to go out, so Steve volunteered while I admired my new necklace in just about every reflective surface. It was just after lunch, so I pulled out some meat and cheese to make sandwiches for us, shrugging when I noticed we had a little leftover salad from yesterday. I was waiting for Steve to get back as I stared into the fridge in contemplation for what to make for dinner. He chuckled as the door opened. Zeus went straight for the water dish, slurping greedily.

"What's on your mind?" Steve asked taking his plate from the counter behind me.

"Not sure what to make for dinner. After this," I said, gently fingering the necklace, "I want to do something special."
"Ah, well," he said, putting the plate down and wrapping his arms around my waist from behind, "I can help you feel better about that. I have a surprise for you for dinner."

"Another? Steve," I sighed as I turned to smile at him, "The necklace was more than enough."

"Nope. Because I haven't taken you out on a date. Ever. I can't believe you agreed to marry such a cad," he teased.

Rolling my eyes I said, "We were in the middle of a war."

"You deserve a date. It's something I want to do for you, as well as for me. It's something normal after everything we've gone through."

"Well, if you insist."

"I really do. Please, indulge me," he smiled. I shrugged dramatically, "I guess I have no choice. I can never say no to you."

"Good. So around 4pm, I'll go get a haircut, and when I come back, I'll run you a hot, bubble bath. You can get ready in our room, and I'll use the next bedroom."

"Why Captain Rogers, you want me to doll myself up too?" I chuckled.

"Please. I have reservations for us," he said, a husky edge to his voice, "Dinner and dancing."

"Any specific dress code?" I breathed.

"Up to you. It's a cocktail lounge as well," he said, tracing his nose along my neck.

I shivered, biting my lip, "Any plans after that?"

"A few," he smirked, taking his sandwich and going to the den. Did he just... He did. He got me horny and left the room. The little shit.

Two can play at this game, I thought, taking my plate and going upstairs to plan my outfit.
Chapter Twenty One

A/N: Hello faithful readers. We've got a steamy scene in this chapter. I put some bold text before and after it to help if you'd rather skip it.

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

Song used in this chapter is I Won't Give Up by Jason Mraz.

Steve returned after his haircut, looking totally dapper and hip. He blushed a little as I wiggled my eyebrows at him. I did at least tell him he looked handsome with the new look, before sending him out of the bathroom. He grabbed a suit out of the closet on the way, and I promised him I would be ready by 6pm. I took my time, painting my nails and toenails in the bath, making sure my skin was smooth. I helped my curls, combing them out with my fingers, before stepping into my lingerie. White lace hugged my curves, strapless due to off the shoulder dress. Lightly applying makeup, I knew Steve didn't love the make-up trends of today quite yet. But I kept it natural, browns with a purple undertone to make my eyes pop.

The dress was also purple, a high low that showcased my legs, accented by black strappy heels. I had long ago decided that I didn't like feeling short, and heels, even at SHIELD, were an essential part of my outfits. Booted heels mostly, but it gave me a bit more of a commanding presence when I wasn't shorter than my recruits. These were easier to dance in. I grabbed my clutch, popping my lipgloss and cellphone inside. I took the staircase into the living room, watching Steve's eyes practically fall out of his head as I descended.

Zeus got up to greet me, and I patted his head as Steve found his voice.

"Wow. You... are stunning," He said, taking my head. He gave me a little twirl and I giggled, "We need to save some dancing for later."

"Of course Mrs. Rogers. May I escort you to the car?"

"Ah!" I cried out suddenly, smacking my forehead.

"What?" He asked, concerned.

"Forgot to go pick up the Camaro and the bike," I sighed, frustrated with myself.

"Oh. Well, we can go tomorrow before you go to work."

"Alright," I smiled, as he offered his elbow to me. I pulled my wrap around my shoulders and linked my arm with his, before he led us out to the elevator, locking the door behind us. I was pleasantly surprised when he pulled up to a well known supper club a few neighbourhoods over. The valet took the car as we came to stand on the curb. Steve gave our name at the maitre d's desk and we were shown to a table.

My wrap was pulled from my shoulders before Steve pulled my chair out for me. We were close to the dancefloor, where a few couples were already dancing. I was excited because I hadn't been
dancing since the War, and while Steve and I danced at home a few times since he got back, he knew how much I loved it before and during the War. He ordered us champagne, and I smirked at his knowing smile. The bubbly drink wouldn't affect us, but it was a special occasion.

I felt my smile dip a little as I thought about Phil.

"Elle," He said offering his hand. I gave mine without hesitation and said, "I'm sorry."

"I'm worried too."

"He'd want me to enjoy this though. He's in good hands, and he's alive," I whispered, knowing he would be the only one to hear me over the conversations around us.

"Champagne on ice. Shall I open the bottle?" Our waiter asked.

"Please," I smiled. He popped the cork, and poured two glasses, before taking our orders for appetizers. I saw a few couples around us give us a second glance and I whispered, "I'm waiting for someone to clue in."

"Hopefully they will respect our privacy," Steve said and I grimaced, "Unlikely after yesterday."

Our waiter returned a few minutes later, but instead of what we had ordered, he placed a small platter of assorted tapas down and said, "An amuse-bouche variety plate, compliments of the Chef."

"Oh, thank you," Steve said, smiling at the man.

"I will be back in a moment to take your order, enjoy," The waiter said before disappearing. I shrugged and dug in, moaning lightly at the flavors, with Steve following my lead cautiously.

"These are delicious," I complimented, grabbing another. Steve and I polished off the plate easily, before I felt hungry again.

"Damn serum. I hate that I have to eat as often as we do. I spend more time eating than someone ever should," I sighed.

"Nothing compared to Thor's."

"Thor told me he has a friend, and he eats all the time. Like, whenever they aren't in the middle of a battle, Volstagg is scarfing down an entire banquet table. I can't even imagine..." I smiled, before Steve took my hand again.

"I have something for you," He said, digging into his suit pocket.

"Steve," I chuckled, "This is too much."

"Please," He said softly, sliding another Tiffany box across the table. I smiled, biting my lip as I opened the flat box. A silver charm bracelet glimmered in the soft lighting, gently reflecting light off of the jewels on certain charms. I smiled as I noticed there was a little replica of his shield, a little dog that looked like Zeus, an olive wreath and a single wing. My lip trembled as my eyes began to water.

"Bucky's patch," I whispered, fingerling the charm lightly.

"I thought it was appropriate. Like it was from him," He said softly. I nodded, raising his knuckles to kiss over the table, "It's perfect."

He gently took the bracelet from me, clasping it around my wrist. I took my glass of champagne and
held it up, "To absent loved ones, to our future,"

"To our love, and our absent soulmate," He whispered and I smiled as we clinked glasses.

"Happy anniversary Darling," I said softly.

"Happy anniversary Doll," He replied, smiling sadly.

"He's still with us."

"I know. It's just still fresh," He said, as I offered my hand.

"It doesn't quite get better," I warned him, "But it gets easier to breathe, to laugh, to get up in the morning."

Our waiter returned as our hands came back to rest on the table, asking, "Have we decided our entrees?"

"I'll get the 16 oz aged steak, medium rare, and the Sweet Potato and Roasted Apple Tortellini."

"Grilled Salmon and the 16 oz steak as well, medium rare," Steve said, closing his menu and passing both to the waiter.

"Shall I bring all four out at the same time, or would you like them staggered?" He asked, intuitively.

"Staggered please," I smiled.

"Absolutely," Before he left us again, taking our appetizer dishes with him. Music was still playing, and I noticed Steve giving me a small smile. We conversed quietly, me still wary of the stares and whispers around us. After so long of being out in the open, at least as a super soldier who didn't age normally, it still made me uncomfortable to be in public where people could recognize me. Being a spy, my face being splattered all over the TV yesterday didn't help. But again, the world didn't know I was involved in SHIELD, they just thought the army contracted me to train men every now and then. I used a veil for most undercover work anyways, and those missions were few and far between these days. I was usually just brought in when they needed muscle and STRIKE wasn't enough.

Our first entrees came out, hot and delicious. Steve and I both polished off our steaks and sides, ready for the next by the time our waiter cleared our plates and another presented the second course to us. I was surprised when a small chocolate cake was brought out, coupled with blueberries and strawberries, fresh whipped cream on the side, again compliments of the chef. Steve and I shared it, feeding each other bits and laughing freely.

"You planned this," I teased, after our waiter cleared our last plates.

"I did plan this evening, yes."

"No, that's not what I meant. You said you remembered yesterday. We had some other things on our plate yesterday, and I only remembered after everyone showed up for dinner. You made this reservation at least two weeks ago. And Tiffany's just happened to have a replica charm of Captain America's shield?" I asked, disbelievingly. He smiled having been caught, "Okay, so when I came out of the ice, I noticed the date, and thought, "I've got time to plan something." I just didn't know if you'd have wanted to celebrate, so I was nervous to bring up the idea of dinner."

"You thought I would still be mad at you."
"Not mad, just closed off. We didn't get this the first year, because I put the plane down," He said as we listened to the music.

"It creeps up on me every year. But I spend it thinking of all our happy memories, going over pictures... It was one of the greatest days of my life. And having you here, makes today even better."

"May I have this dance," He asked after a moment, standing and offering a hand. I slipped mine into his and said, "I'd be delighted."

"Well, I hope you still think that when I ask you to stay here a moment," He said, kissing me softly as he brought me to stand next to our table. I was so confused as he looked over at someone and nodded. I followed his line of sight, not seeing who he was looking at.

"Ladies and gentlemen, if you would please clear the dancefloor. We have a few special patrons tonight, celebrating their 68th wedding anniversary. They were in the middle of World War II when they got married, and didn't have their first dance as husband and wife, and we'd like to help rectify that. The husband has picked a song for the occasion, and would like all the couples to join them on the dancefloor for the next song. We ask that you please respect their privacy and not use social media until they have left the restaurant," Someone said over a microphone.

"You didn't," I said looking at him.

"No privacy tonight, but I want to show off my gorgeous wife. The love of my life," He said, leading me out to the dancefloor. I heard a few confused whispers as the song started, but everything faded away. My eyes watered as I recognized the opening notes.

When I look into your eyes  
It's like watching the night sky  
Or a beautiful sunrise  
Well, there's so much they hold  
And just like them old stars  
I see that you've come so far  
To be right where you are  
How old is your soul?

I snorted against Steve's shoulder and he gave a little laugh as well at the humor of it, before kissing the side of my head.

Well, I won't give up on us  
Even if the skies get rough  
I'm giving you all my love  
I'm still looking up

And when you're needing your space  
To do some navigating  
I'll be here patiently waiting  
To see what you find

'Cause even the stars they burn  
Some even fall to the earth  
We've got a lot to learn  
God knows we're worth it  
No, I won't give up
I don't wanna be someone who walks away so easily
I'm here to stay and make the difference that I can make
Our differences they do a lot to teach us how to use
The tools and gifts we got, yeah, we got a lot at stake
And in the end, you're still my friend at least we did intend
For us to work we didn't break, we didn't burn
We had to learn how to bend without the world caving in
I had to learn what I've got, and what I'm not, and who I am

I won't give up on us
Even if the skies get rough
I'm giving you all my love
I'm still looking up, I'm still looking up.

Well, I won't give up on us (no I'm not giving up)
God knows I'm tough enough (I am tough, I am loved)
We've got a lot to learn (we're alive, we are loved)
God knows we're worth it (and we're worth it)

I won't give up on us
Even if the skies get rough
I'm giving you all my love

I'm still looking up

I had laid my head to his shoulder as he swayed us to the music. And when it ended, I looked up at him, and he leaned down for a soft kiss. I heard clapping around us as we parted, and we smiled at each other. Another song started, prompting couples to come join us on the dancefloor.

"Thank you," I said to Steve, "This was perfect."

"I didn't think I could plan a date this well," He teased himself.

"You had little practice. But for our first official date, I'd say you set the bar very high. Now, how about we pay? I'd like you to take me home Captain," I whispered in his ear. He straightened up and flagged down our waiter.

"We'll take the cheque, please."

Steve managed to control himself long enough for us to get through the front door, before pinning me up against a wall. I laughed as Zeus stood up, concern in his growl.

"Stand down Zeus," I said to the dog as Steve attacked my clavicle with hot open mouth kisses, rendering me incapable of logical thought. I whimpered as I felt him grinding up against my center, the suit material barely constricting him. I pawed at his jacket, trying to pull it off as he rutted against me.

"Bedroom?" Steve suggested as he put me down so I could strip him of his jacket. I pulled at either side of his dress shirt, sending buttons flying across the floor when it ripped under my fingers. Steve didn't get an answer from me, as I kissed and nipped at his chest, flicking my tongue over one of his nipples. He moaned, before picking me up and tossing me over his shoulder. I giggled the whole way up the stairs, especially when he dumped me onto the bed.

"How do I get this off?" Steve asked, not seeing a zipper on my dress.
I sat up, tossing my hair over one shoulder, and pointing to the invisible zipper under my arm, and saying, "I'd like to keep the dress, please."

"But you got to tear my dress shirt," He teased, gently easing it down. I let him pull it down my body when finally unzipped, and I watched his eyes darken when he noticed my lingerie.

*******BEGINNING OF SMUT*******

"You are gorgeous," He said, unbuckling his pants. I smiled as his pants dropped, "So are you."

He eased my heels off, toeing off his own shoes and socks. I laid myself back on the bed a moment, taking in his physique. He crawled over my body, still in his boxer briefs, and a hungry look in his eyes. He caught my lips in a soul searing kiss, rubbing up my side with one hand to caress my breast over the lace. He tugged gently at the zipper between my breasts and undid the garment. He pulled away from the kiss to take one breast into his mouth, lavishing it with his tongue. He flicked my nipple and I cried out, "Steve!"

"Anything you'd like?" He teased, moving to the other breast. I clawed at his shoulder, making him look up.

"Get inside me," I said firmly. He smirked as he slunk further down the bed, "Not just yet Doll."

"You frustrating ma-ahh!" I said as he pulled my underwear aside with a single finger, to lick a line up my slit. He chuckled as he tongued at my center, sending vibrations that drove my nerves wild. Using another finger, he exposed the hood, before gently flicking over it. I clutched the bedsheets in an attempt to not rip his hair out in pleasure, lost in the sensations he was giving me. He quickened his pace, inserting a finger and groaning himself.

"You're drenched Doll."

"I've been thinking about what I wanted you to do to me all day," I sighed, able to think clearly while he had taken his tongue off of me.

"And what's that?" He said adding another finger, curling them inside of me. I moaned at the sensation, before catching my breath and saying, "I want you to fuck me."

"Really?" He asked, sounding unsure. I looked at him annoyed as he stopped, "What?"

"I don't want to hurt you." He whispered, his expression reminiscent of our first time when he said, "I don't know how."

"Darling," I said, sitting up on my elbows and continuing, "You've been so gentle and loving when we make love. And it's what I needed this past month. But now I'm asking you to let go, to get rough. I can handle it, trust me."

"You... want me to hurt you?"

"Not like choke me or slap my face. Nothing like that. But I want you to grip my hips harder, give it to me harder. I want you to be rough enough I'll remember it tomorrow when I wake up. Then again with how fast I heal, I may not have the physical reminder. Let your animalistic side out Steve. But if you feel you can't, I'd understand," He was still knuckle deep inside of me, so it was an awkward conversation. I really hoped what I asked for didn't kill the mood, but I watched him contemplate it for a moment before his eyes darkened.

Oh yes.
He started moving his fingers again, faster. He lowered his mouth to my clit again, as I thrashed wildly, sucking the bundle of nerves into his mouth. I screamed as he pulled me over the edge with a third finger. I felt myself leave my body for a moment, reeling from the aftershocks. I felt my panties pulled down my legs before I was flipped over onto my stomach.

"On your knees," Steve commanded and I didn't hesitate to present myself to him. He groaned low in his throat, before I felt the tip of his erection trace up my sensitive clit. I shuddered as it triggered an aftershock, before he plunged into me. I cried out in shock, gripping the headboard and keening as his fingers wrapped around my hips, impaling me over and over again.

"Oh god, Steve," I said, as his hands reached up to gather my hair over one shoulder. He pulled me closer to his chest, his hand on my hip guiding me down with bruising intensity.

"Do you like it like this?" He breathed in my ear. I nodded, "Yes, oh god yes."

"Will you touch yourself for me?" He asked, and I sobbed in need, taking one hand and began rubbing my clit in time with his thrusts. I felt the stirrings of a second, and he barely stopped me as I crashed over the cliff. He held me up, still pistonning in and out of me as I came down. His fingers roughly twisted my nipples, sending shocks through my body. I yelped as he withdrew from me, to flip me over onto my back. I was grateful for the breather, before he plunged deep into me again. He pulled my legs up to hook his arms behind my knees, pulling my hips off the bed.

"Please, please, Steve," I sobbed.

"What do you need?" He panted.

"More, more," I begged, pulling my legs up further to rest them on his shoulders. He pressed us closer together, to the point I was almost folded in half. I moaned as his movements began to get frantic.

"Fuck," He swore under his breath, tilting his hips. His member hit my g-spot once, twice and then I shuddered as my body went through a third orgasm. Steve grunted, speeding up in erratic movements, before one last thrust. His body went taut before the rest of his weight settled on top of me. I was panting for breath, tensing from aftershocks as steve pulled his head up to kiss me thoroughly.

"Alright, we can do that again," He breathed hard, pulling himself off of me and collapsing beside me. I groaned as my hips were straightened and then laughed, "Just give me a minute here. That was... amazing."

"I didn't... I didn't think..."

"I didn't want you thinking," I teased, and he shot me a look before saying, "I didn't think I would like that as much as I did."

"Sometimes, spicing things up in the bedroom is a good thing. There are many, many positions and different things we can try."

"Really?" He asked, turning to look at me, excited.

"Yes," I said, turning on my side to face him, "But, if you don't like something, tell me. Communication is key, and if something didn't work for you, we don't do it again. Honestly, I'm up for anything after my 70 year dry spell."

"Alright, I need to get my head out of the past," He conceded, running his eyes down my body.
"What?" I blushed.

"I wonder if a hickey would keep on your skin until tomorrow," He smirked, pulling me close. I shuddered as I realized he was ready to go again.

"Steve, my recruits will never stop talking if I showed up to work with a hickey-Ohhh!" I couldn't finish my thought, because he had already attacked my neck and plunged back inside of me.

"Now, I'm gonna take my time making love to you for the rest of the night. My wife, love of my life, mother of my child, and future children," He said, but I was already lost to the bliss.

******END OF SMUT******

Fury had Maria take Steve and I out to the Guest House a week later, where I promptly sat down in the chair beside Phil's bed and didn't move for two hours. Steve paced slightly, anxious for Phil to wake up and unsure of what to say to him at the same time. They had kept him sedated so he didn't move too much post-surgery, especially one involving exposing your brain.

The monitor suddenly showed brain activity, and Steve stepped up behind me, squeezing my shoulder as I held my breath. The activity indicated he was waking up, so I whispered, "Phillip?"

"Mom?" He answered groggily, struggling to open his eyes.

"Take your time sweetheart," I said softly, crying as I took his hand. He opened his eyes slowly, re-adjusting to the light in the room. As he turned, he found me, smiling softly.

"Phillip, I brought someone to meet you," I said. His eyes furrowed, before he looked up at Steve.

"Dad?" Phil said, confused.

"Hi son," Steve said softly, and I heard the tears in his voice.

"Wait… Mom you said you'd let me… decide," Phil said, groggily.

"I know. But when you got injured, I couldn't keep it from him," I said, watching him wake up further, "He deserved to know the hero his son was."

"I would never be disappointed having you for a son. You are a good soldier," Steve said, smirking at Phil, "You made a choice and you stuck to it, no matter the cost."

"I learned from the best examples," Phil said, giving Steve a smile.

"Next time, avoid the God with the pointy stick," I said as Phil tried to shift, hissing in pain.

"Don't move," I said, in a deathly tone.

"Yes Mom," Phil sassed.

"Oh, he got that from you. Or maybe it was for me," I joked to Steve, who chuckled, "Don't make him laugh."

"Right. Phil, don't you ever do that to me again," I said, feeling the tears building, "I don't think I could handle losing you."
"I'll try not to. But you know, it's in my DNA to be reckless…" He said, drifting off again. Steve looked panicked for a moment, but I watched him breathing easily and said, "It's the anesthesia and the drugs. He's gonna be in and out for a bit."

The next time he woke was about 30 minutes later, delirious again.

"Mom, do you remember those ice cream sundaes we made, the night I asked you why you weren't looking any older, like the other moms?"

"Yes. You had a stomach ache and threw up on my back as I took you to bed," I smiled.

"I could go for one of those right now," He said, "Dad, stop pacing. I'm getting dizzy."

"Sorry," Steve said, freezing at the foot of the bed, unsure of where to be.

I motioned with my head for him to sit in the chair on the other side of the bed, and he got the message, sitting quickly.

"You know, I watched you while you were sleeping. I mean, I was present while you were unconscious," Steve said in a teasing voice. I looked at him confused, until Phil smiled at him sarcastically, "You are hilarious."

"Well, at least you got my sense of humor," Steve said, rubbing his hands together nervously.

"I'm missing something," I thought to myself, but chose not to ask. It was their own little joke, their first with each other, and I was more than happy to be kept in the dark.

"You got a haircut," Phil noticed after a moment.

"He got them all cut," I said, and then groaned, "I 'Dad joked' myself!"

Steve and Phil laughed at me a little, before looking back at each other.

"Is it weird, I have had so many questions for you my whole life, and now I don't know what to say?" Phil remarked. Steve let out a breath, "I was thinking the same thing."

"You both were so worried about how to talk to the other, and yet, you are the same person. Oh boy, I have two of them now," I said to myself, horrified.

"Ha ha," Phil said, narrowing his eyes at me. The door behind me opened and I locked eyes with the doctor for a brief moment.

"How's our patient?" Dr. Streiten said, coming in, playing the part well.

"He's wanting ice cream," I smiled.

"Well, maybe in a few days. We need to get you healed up a bit more."

"How long was I out for Doc?" Phil asked, and I looked at the Streiten as well, hoping he would play along with Fury's story.

"About 45 seconds. We were able to revive you and stabilize you, but we kept you sedated for about 10 days," He said, as Steve caught my eye. He hadn't liked the idea of lying to his son, but it would save Phil the trauma of knowing how he was revived and how long he actually was dead.

"What happened with Loki?" He asked, confused.
"We won. Did you ever doubt we would?" I said, looking at Steve again. We would make sure to keep the truth from him, for now at least. From what Streiten had told us, Phil had been begging for death on the table. It hurt to hear, but I made the decision to revive him and it was on my conscious, from now until the day I died.
Chapter Twenty Two

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! This is the last chapter for this week and I hope you liked them. I am moving events forward faster than they happen in the MCU. For instance, MCU Brock Rumlow is in his 40's in CA:TWS. Here, he is about 32. So things might seem rushed but it will even out in the end.

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

Phil was recovering nicely, being monitored for signs of the drug's normal effects and while that was happening, Alexander Pierce proposed Project Insight. Three next generation Helicarriers that would eliminate threats before they happened. The whole thing stunk of Hydra, and I knew this was what Rumlow said was cooking. The problem was that those Helicarriers had already been started, before they got government approval. Typically an aircraft carrier took five years to build and a Helicarrier was around the same. I knew we had commissioned new Helicarriers, because one wasn't enough. That had been in 2008, back when Tony came out as Iron Man. But Pierce had taken over planning, even so far as getting Tony to redesign their propulsion systems after New York.

SHIELD was contacted about Steve doing a series of videos for the public high school systems. Being the symbol for truth and justice, he'd don the New York version of the Captain America suit and film them. Detention, gym classes, peer pressure and his stance on drugs, I found them all very hilarious. The company asked if I would also do them, but I only wanted to do one; self defense for young girls. Mainly how to disarm someone from multiple scenarios so you could get to help.

My favourite line was, "Women aren't some delicate thing that need to be protected all the time. We need the tools to protect ourselves and others from those who would hurt us. We are not damsels. If you want to be that delicate thing, that's alright too. But you need to know how to defend yourself and your fellow women. The best thing you can do, is to tell an adult you trust if someone is doing something you feel is inappropriate. Shining a light on bad behaviour is your best weapon, but use it wisely."

The control group loved it so much that Steve and I did a joint video about respecting each other, and how there was no excuse for touching someone without their permission. The school boards loved them so much they were going to use them for the next school year. I even got to wear my old Commandos uniform, which was nostalgic.

Tony challenged a terrorist in June. I wanted to shake my head at how reckless he was being. I had covertly asked JARVIS how he was doing, and the AI replied that my nephew was experiencing nightmares and panic attacks. I tried talking to him but he just kept making suits. And finally it all came to a head when the terrorist known as the Mandarin blew up his Malibu mansion. Then he went off the reservation for a bit, and resurfaced in Miami, only to blow up his arsenal of suits after saving Pepper and the President.

It was a long week. And it solidified the reason I hadn't told him about Peter.

Fury had made it clear that the Mandarin wasn't our priority and that Tony had it handled. I argued
back that he almost died and Pepper was given Extremis, a highly volatile substance that may make her explode. He agreed to have a few biochemists look into it, hopefully to find a cure. Meanwhile, Tony was back in New York, relocating with Pepper officially and had the arc reactor taken out, along with the shrapnel from his abduction.

It had been three months since the Battle of New York as it was dubbed, and I knew Steve was getting restless. We had spent the whole month of July touring the states in the Camaro, with Zeus happy to come along for the ride. We visited Gabe, Jim and Timothy's kids, grandkids and great grandkids, as I did most every July. The Sawyer's and the Juniper's were thrilled to meet the man that started it all, and Steve could tell why popping over to Europe to visit Falsworth's, Jacques's and Pinky's families. Steve got to meet the families and the kids loved him, for all the stories he could tell them about their (great) Grandpa's. Some nights we camped, others we were at nice hotels, but my favorite night was his birthday, where we made love under the stars, listening to the fireworks in the distance. Our time over the pond went by quickly, but Steve enjoyed every moment with the next two-three generations of our friends. And then we got back to New York and Steve felt he had got caught up on enough that he wanted to head into the world, and work.

"What's up?" I said as I invited him inside the apartment. I was glad I had told him to come over to talk, because I knew Nick wouldn't have asked for a meeting outside of SHIELD like this, if it wasn't something he didn't want overheard.

"Director," Steve said coming from the living room with Zeus by his side. Zeus gave Nick a nod as Nick said, "Cap, Zeus."

"Can you stay for coffee?" I asked him, noting his tense shoulders.

"Please," He said, before I led him to the kitchen table. I pulled out a mug for him, pouring from the coffee pot I had just made Steve. I handed it to Nick who gave a genuine, "Thank you Colonel."

"How would you two be up for a change of scenery?" He asked, as I sat down.

"Like from what to what?" I asked confused as my hands wrapped around my mug.

"Like from New York to DC. I need you at the Triskelion," He said, looking around before he spoke.

"I have signal jammers around the perimeter. No one can hear us in here Nick, speak freely," I said softly. He breathed out, knowing that if I could let my guard down at home, then he could here as well.

"What aren't you saying?" Steve clued in. I knew Nick was sometimes a little paranoid, but I knew him since he came to SHIELD. He was worried.

"Someone in SHIELD has another agenda. I need the two of you to help weed them out. Colonel, you've known some of the careers longer than I have. Anyone shady that comes to mind?"

"Pierce," I answered without hesitation.

"Really?" Nick said as Steve gave me a questioning glance.

"Alexander Pierce is the Secretary for the World Security Council. The ones that gave the order to almost nuke New York during our battle," I explained, before turning to Fury, "He was bucking to shut down looking for Steve, but wanted to reopen Project Rebirth, as soon as Howard died. He released known Hydra heads from the Rat as soon as Peggy retired, claiming medical parole. He proposed Project Insight, which started before government approval. Other than him… Mitchell
Carson, Gideon Malick, and the rest of STRIKE. Except Rumlow. He's the one that confirmed for me that Hydra has been inside SHIELD since Project Paperclip."

"Hydra is still active?" Steve asked, horrified.

"Yes, but then again, Zola got a slap on the wrist and got his chance to poison SHIELD from the beginning. I know, I'm pissed as all hell that Zola got to live after what happened on that train, but Peggy and Howard thought he would be useful. Rumlow says they have something cooking and it's big. Insight big," I said as Steve says, "Who is Rumlow?"

"Man who was talking to the Colonel, before when we walked into that gym together, your first day back," Nick said, before raising an eyebrow at me, "Insight? You didn't think to tell me?"

"He's my eye on the inside. I know how you feel about trust Nick, but you are the Director and no one is going to tell you something to could possibly put you in their crosshairs. Me? I scare them because they can't take me out, but I wasn't going to risk you Nick. But all the STRIKE guys really creep me out. I know mercenaries that are more compassionate then them."

"How long have you been sitting on this Colonel?" Fury asked concerned.

"Since Howard died," I answered honestly, "And Director Carter's retirement. But I only found out it was Hydra the day you walked Steve into my training session."

"So what do we do now?" He said leaning back in his chair.

"We need to be careful of who we tell these suspicions to. Anyone could be working with them. We keep the circle small. Maria, Natasha, Clint, Brock, you, me, Steve, Phil and May."

"Natasha?" Steve questioned, "Clint?"

"If there is anyone I trust more to play the part of an agent, while gathering intel from within, it's Nat and Clint. Rumlow has access to them, but Nat can see through acts, so does Clint. They can identify people Rumlow maybe can't. From what I've heard, Hydra is compartmentalized more than SHIELD, considering they are a secret organization within a secret organization. Nat and Clint are both loyal to Nick and I, and I know neither are Hydra. Gamma as well," I said and Nick nodded.

"Morse and Hartley are trustworthy," Nick nodded, "So when can I expect you out there?"

"Well, we can pack up and be out there in a week. I can't promise I'll be in the thick of it when this goes down though," I said, and Nick looked confused, "Why ever not?"

"We might be pregnant by then. And I can't be in the agency's eye at all this time," I answered honestly, "The world was different when I was pregnant with Phil, less surveillance tech."

"Elle, I think we can put that off for now," Steve said and I cut him a look, "No we aren't, and we can talk about it later."

"Why now?" Nick asked.

"Well, Jemma Simmons and Bruce are trying to make something so I can age again. I've lived like this for 70 years Nick. I want to age, I want grey hair dammit, I've earned it. I want to grow old with Steve, not outlive him again."

"Banner knows? If you trust Simmons-"
"Trust me. She is legit. Unlike Pierce, Garrett-"

"Garrett? I can't even trust people I trained now. Motherfucker," He said, growling to himself under his breath.

"Just don't count anyone out right away. We don't know how deep this goes. We might be able to salvage SHIELD, and then again, we might not," I sighed.

"How do we take them down this time?" Steve asked me, and I said, "We need to gather our forces. We can't tip them off that we know though. It could start a fire fight."

"But it's Hydra Elle. They've been growing like a parasite under your noses for almost 60 years," He said, "We need to strike and eliminate them."

"Not an option right now Cap. Say you just up and declare 'Hydra' without any evidence? The world will claim you have PTSD and you'll have zero credibility in the future," Fury reasoned with him, "Besides, they'd take you out before you could again. By the sounds of it, that's what they do best."

"Steve, this isn't the middle of a war, where you are commanding a ragtag group of men to take down Hydra. This is spy craft; this is what I am best at. Howard would tease me that I was born for war, but I was born for espionage. Trust me when I say we need to gather our forces, and figure out a way that doesn't involve Hydra eliminating thousands of SHIELD agents. And without giving them a chance to fight back," I said, seriously and he sighed.

"How do we know who we can trust?" Steve said, and I looked at Nick.

"Rumlow has been providing me with names that are marked for elimination. Those loyal to SHIELD through and through. People I trained and trust, and these days that list is maybe 50 people out of the whole agency, the higher ups that is. Most of Level 5 and below aren't on the list. The Academies? I don't want to think about how those kids will be fish in a barrel. We put trusted people there as soon as we know the timetable."

"What about your boy? How do we deal with that?" Nick said, and I thought for a minute.

"Give him a team, special ops team, make him feel useful. Bury everything about TAHITI, don't give him anything. If someone other than him tries looking into it, we confirm our suspicions. Only the Avengers, May and us, know about Phil. He'll be the only one aware that the Avengers know he is alive. Everyone else is told that it's a secret from us," I explained, "While he flies unsuspectingly under the radar in our search."

"Sneaky Colonel. Consider trading jobs with me?" He teased.

"Oh no. I was offered this job two times, and I will tell you what I told Howard and Peggy, I do best behind the scenes."

"Not according to the footage from the other day."

"Or during the war," Steve added.

"Nick, I'm counting myself out. You can do this," I said seriously.

"But you're telling Melinda about her husband."

"She's my daughter in law, of course I'm telling her," I said, taking a sip of my tea.
Nick left after that, a weight lifted off his shoulders and another put on with knowing it was Hydra. Steve sat at the kitchen table when I walked back in, staring blankly into his coffee cup.

"Okay, he's gone. Start yelling," I sassed, leaning against the island.

"I'm not going to yell."

"Really? Because it would be better than the silent treatment I'm getting. You're giving your coffee the 'Captain America Eyebrows of Disappointment' and I would rather you subject me to them. I make good coffee and it doesn't deserve that kind of treatment."

"You kept this from me," He started, looking up at me.

"I did. I lied by omission by not telling you something, that would make your reintegration into the modern world more difficult," I conceded, "Any questions?"

"Elle, this is serious," He said, lowly.

"And I am taking it seriously. I'm a Stark by blood. We ignore the deep feelings by covering them up with sarcasm and copious amounts of alcohol. But I am serious, any questions? I'm not keeping anything from you anymore."

"Zola was your first inkling?"

"Yes, but Howard and Peggy said I was just emotional because of Bucky. I hated them for saying that for years, I resented them. Now, I just want Howard here so I can say 'I told you so'. Peggy... she's not well enough to hear it. I'll tell her after we get rid of them," I said softly. He nodded and asked, "Did you bring it up again?"

"No. I kept it to myself. I bore the burden alone because I wouldn't be the Boy Who Cried Wolf. I'd just work, waiting for the perfect moment to strike."

"But Phil..."

"Having Phil, knowing Hydra was still out there, was reckless on my part. But it's why I kept him hidden, not just the government. If they knew you had samples taken, they'd have used your blood or his to replicate the serum. I couldn't let Bruce do it, so why would I let Hydra. I was protecting Phil and Abe's life's work from their clutches."

Steve took a sip of coffee before asking, "So this Rumlow..."

"Stop right there. If you are going to ask if I lied to you about being faithful you can stop because the answer is no. I was faithful to you and Bucky, despite thinking you were dead," I bit out.

"I'm sorry," He said softly.

"Brock... Brock was like my Dum Dum. He said I was his inspiration to join the military, the reason he accepted SHIELD's offer. I didn't manipulate him into working for me undercover, he volunteered. Like another knucklehead I know," I smiled at him. He scoffed and gave me a little smile.

"He did show an interest though, I won't lie about that," I said, making Steve look up, the green in his eyes more present. I held up my hands and said, "I shut it down right away. No man was ever going to compare to you or Bucky, and I didn't want anyone else. Put the green eyed monster away."
"He was almost my best student. Bucky and you are tied for first," I teased.

"So, how long?"

"Four years. They trust him, he's a fantastic actor. Almost better than Natasha. Some of it is just calling on his military personality. In public and 'SHIELD's' eyes, we barely tolerate each other. He pretends to hate my authority over him, while I pretend to hate his pretentious asshole attitude. In reality, there are only a few handful of people I trust to have my back and he is one of them."

"Before... before Howard died, you didn't try to tell him again?"

"No, he was consumed with recreating your serum at that point. He always said he didn't want me to be alone, and this way, I could have a family of people that aged like I did. I thought that would be cruel to give someone that option, but he did it anyways. He kept telling me that he felt something was wrong with SHIELD. He must have uncovered something, because as I was waiting at SHIELD when I got the call about the 'crash'," I said bitterly. Steve gave me a look and said, "It wasn't an accident, was it?"

"Not even close. First coroner's report said Howard had blunt force trauma to his face that didn't fit with the damage one would sustain from hitting the steering wheel. Maria... my dear sister in law was strangled to death," I said softly, and Steve's face paled.

"Oh god, Elle."

"Hydra had the coroner killed and switched the reports after I got to see the first. I know Howard didn't drive recklessly, so a car crash seemed a little fake to me. I'm glad I saw it before, or I'd live my whole life thinking my twin was simply an idiot behind the wheel."

"I am so sorry," He said getting up, and I waved him off saying, "Steve, it's been years-"

"But you... you knew and the world doesn't. You couldn't grieve."

I was quiet a moment before I said, "It was only me. I couldn't expose them without proof, I couldn't confront them without them either trying and failing to take me out, or making me disappear. I still had Tony to take care of, our son, our granddaughter to find. Grief could wait."

He wrapped me in his arms and said, "I understand."

"Steve, I didn't want to keep it from you. I just... I wanted you to catch your breath."

"Hey," He said, cradling my face in his hands as he pulled away, "I get it. You've told me now."

"But I'm not putting it off," I said, looking him straight in the eye. He looked confused for a moment, before realizing, "But Elle, we need-"

"No, I want a baby. I want this for you too. But I mainly want it, because I know myself."

"What's that supposed to mean?" He asked confused.

"Because if I'm pregnant or if we already have had the baby, I will be worried about our child's safety. I won't be tempted... tempted to repeat Kaesong. Because this is something I've been dreaming about. Being able to crush them, to rid the world of their poison forever. But I know, that I have to do it the right way. Imprisonment of them, versus the slaughtering of them," I said, closing my eyes in shame. I wasn't a good person. I did good for the world, but I knew my heart was black after the sins I had committed. Steve was the good one, and I worried he would be disgusted with
me. But he lifted my face, and said, "Elle, look me in the eyes, please."

As I opened them, he smiled at me and said, "You don't have to feel bad about that Elle."

"But I do. Because if I could, I'd kill them all with my bare hands. Starting with Pierce."

"I would too. He might not have been my brother for long, but I loved Howard," He said as I felt a tear trail down my cheek, "And I will avenge him with you."

"My vengeance is legendary enough. We don't need America's Golden Boy committing murders too. I am serious about a baby though. I've had three months to think about it, and I know I would never deny you what you wanted. And I want that too. The family we imagined all those years ago before our dreams were snatched away from us... It's in reach again and I won't waste another moment."

"But with Hydra out there, isn't that reckless?"

"Perhaps, but I have thought about it. Towards the end, we fake a fight or I fake an undercover op. I have a place to hide in DC that they don't know about. We can make it work, we can keep a baby safe."

"They wouldn't know?"

"Never even suspect. We have technology that can hide my stomach when it grows," I said, and Steve's arms wrapped around my middle. He looked apprehensive, and I could understand why.

"Steve, I can't put my life on hold because of them any longer. I want them gone, but I don't want to wait to live. I've existed these past 70 years, going through the motions but never feeling alive. I couldn't take a breath without feeling their gaze on my back. I can't hide from them, so why not trick them? Together we are stronger, right?"

"Yes we are," He said softly, nodding.

"So, let's live our life. Let's not let them win. Because I have never seen you back down from a fight," I teased. He smiled, and nodded, "Alright then Colonel. What's our next move?"

"Pack your bags, because we leave for DC in an hour. We're going house hunting Captain," I smirked.

Steve and I hunted for the next two days, me not really wanting to purchase another place if we weren't going to be here long. Nick offered an apartment SHIELD had as a safehouse, but we both knew it was bugged. It would placate Hydra while we were there, so Steve and I said yes and offered Steve an official job with SHIELD. He'd be Commander of STRIKE Team Alpha. While I was happy he would be close to Brock, so my 'eyes' could keep my reckless idiot of a husband safe, I worried about how Steve's acting had improved since the war.

My other reason for coming to DC was to see my daughter in law, and introduce her to Steve.

I found Melinda in Admin at the Triskellion, where she had been for four years, pushing papers. And if I hadn't known her, I would barely been able to tell she had been crying.

"Come with me," I said softly as I passed her desk. She didn't follow right away, but found me in an empty office, as I played the jamming frequency on my phone. One look in my eyes and she broke.

"Dry your eyes Mel. Please," I said, holding her, "You're gonna make me cry too."
"I'd heard second hand about Phil. When you didn't come to tell me, I thought he was okay. I knew it was too much to hope he'd made it, that he's in recovery somewhere."

"It's not too much," I said, and she scoffed.

"I never got to tell him-" She stopped, looking at me in shock, "What? He's alive?"

"Yes. He's alright," I said, "And soon everyone Level 7 and above will know he was revived. But for right now, I need you to listen. It's been a long couple of months."

"How?" She said, drying her eyes.

I jumped into my explanation of TAHITI and how Phil was revived, giving her the reasons for keeping it from him. She looked horrified as I told her about wiping his memories of the event, altering others so that he didn't have the side effects. And then why it had to seem like the Avengers didn't know. Not just to pretend that Phil's death was the reason we all banded together, but that we were looking for a way to take down Hydra from within now.

"Who has Garrett trained?" I asked, and she supplied, "Antoine Triplett, Grant Ward-"

"That psychopath?" I asked, having a sudden thought.

"Mel, I need you to put Ward on Phil's new team."

"Why? You just said he might be Hydra."

"Because I think he's a low level lackey, and he may feed information to the higher ups. False information, and then we know we've got a mole. He is a good actor, but I can see right through them. They wave the flag harder than the rest. He's gonna say he's not a team player, that he works alone. The way to get yourself in where you want to be, is to seem unattainable, and it's exactly how they operate."

"Okay. I trust you Mom," She said, and I smiled.

"How's the search going on your end?" I asked gently.

"Still nothing. We've been hitting dead ends for years, I don't know why I get my hopes up every time..."

"Because we dare to hope. Hope is exactly the thing we need right now. I have a good feeling about this. About Steve returning, Phil, and figuring out Hydra's play. We are close to being a family again, being whole."

"I wish I had your optimism. Speaking of good feelings, how's Captain Rogers? Doing well with modern life?"

"He's your father in law, you can call him Dad," I teased, "And he's good. We were just house hunting today. We'll be out here in a few days to a week at most."

"Find anything good?"

"We decided to take an apartment offered by SHIELD. Fury dropped the hint that it's bugged, so its not great," I said, "We'll need the second bedroom eventually, but for now it will do. I couldn't justify buying another place right now. Maybe once we determine how many kids."

"Kids? You guys are having another baby?" She asked, softening.
"Steve wants more. Well, I do too. I was blessed with Phil, but once I start aging again... well, that's a long story too."

"Okay, let's just stop it there, cause it sounds like a lot more than a 'chat' kind of topic. I need to get back to my desk. Are you in town for the night?"

"Yeah. Let's meet up for dinner. Martin's?"

"Perfect. 7?"

"Yup. You leave first," I said, giving her a hug.

"See you there," She said, before leaving the room. I waited a few minutes, before following out the door, heading down another hallway. I met Steve back in HR, where he was finishing filling out paperwork to start work in a week. I gave him the tour, where his locker would be, training rooms and then I introduced him to STRIKE team Alpha. They had surprisingly been at base, training as usual.

"Attention!" Rumlow called out when he saw me, making the men stop what they were doing and stand at attention towards myself.

"At ease," I said, turning to Rumlow with hard eyes, "Commander Rumlow."

"Colonel Rogers," He said with fake smile for the others, before acknowledging Steve, "Captain Rogers, it's an honor to meet you."

"The pleasure's all mine Commander Rumlow. I look forward to working with you in the field."

"Fury mentioned a change in leadership. I look forward to working as your SIC. We could use your brand of smash on our team," He smirked as the rest of the men approached us, while I introduced them to Steve. He went through the line up, smiling and playing the part well. He would at least have Natasha and Brock on the team when he started, allowing him to not be on guard all the time. Brock still had to play Hydra in the shadows, and pretend that he hated Steve for taking his job. In truth Brock wanted to step aside for Steve, which I understood was from a deep-rooted sense of respect for my husband. And me, but he wasn't a kiss ass.

She was going to give him some lessons on how to act like you weren't gathering information. But Steve's ' naïve, gee-shucks act' got him by just fine most of the time. Sometimes he would 'forget' how to work the microwave or the oven, only to prop me up on the counter and ravish me.

"We've got to stop down in Tech to see about a new suit for you. The stars and stripes aren't exactly stealthy," I teased, making some of the STRIKE men chuckle.

"Sounds like a good idea. Wouldn't want to be a walking target," He joked back, giving a nod to the men in goodbye. I caught Rumlow's eye when the men turned their backs and his lips gave a little quirk. I gave one back, knowing he was giving me a signal that camera's couldn't catch. I'd check the dead drop site here before we left tomorrow and let him know that Steve was aware of Hydra, but working along with our plans. He'd watch his back.

As we got further away from the training rooms, my smile dropped, and I nodded to him he could relax a bit. He sighed, "So, what are we doing tonight?"

"I was thinking about a dinner out. I'm tired of cooking, and I don't have access to a kitchen anyways in the hotel," I laughed. He wrapped an arm around my shoulders, "Well, I'm up for anything."
"And then later tonight, I had a little surprise for you," I said, giving him a wicked grin. He puffed up a little, "Like what?"

"That's for me to know, and for you to find out," I said, wrapping my own arm around him, settling my hand in his back pocket. He tensed up, a little embarrassed that I was doing this in public, but relaxed when he realized no one cared.

He was measured for a new suit and we left for a little sightseeing. We walked around the National Mall, Steve excited to have new material to draw. He had gotten back into it about a week after he was unfrozen, giving him an outlet for his frustration of the new world he woke up in. The other outlet was I would distract him with sex.

He seemed to like that better, I thought with a chuckle.

I explained that Fury had gotten a call from the Smithsonian, wanting to give Steve an exhibit. Steve was a little hesitant, really hating being in the limelight. I argued it would be beneficial for the public to remember what we sacrificed. It would be a memorial for our friends, for Bucky. He said it should only happen if Bucky had a spot, just for him. I agreed, seeing as he was the only one to lose his life in our fight against Hydra.

It wouldn't be open for a while, so we had time before we had to either be there for the opening or to see how they pulled it together. I relinquished my old suit in donation to the efforts, as did Steve. I had called all the Howling Commandos children, to see if there was anything they wanted to donate. All of them gave up the suits Howard designed, as well as some tech. I still had a lot as well, keepsakes in storage, so I would pull it out and ship it off, still keeping a few for myself.

By the time we were supposed to meet Melinda, I had worked up an appetite, and I heard Steve's stomach growl as well. We were in a secluded part of the restaurant, my usual table and I had been playing the jamming frequency since we arrived. Steve would grimace every once and awhile, the sound still grating to his ears.

"Mel," I said as she walked into the restaurant. She stood up to greet me with a long hug, before pulling back and saying lowly, "Hi again Mom."

"Steve, this is Melinda," I smiled, introducing my husband to his daughter-in-law.

"Captain Rogers, it's an honor," She said, holding a hand out for Steve. He shook it saying, "Honor is all mine. It's wonderful to meet the woman that caught my son's heart."

"Well, it's been a tough 25 years for us," She said, before gesturing for us to sit. My usual waitress was making her way towards us and waved as she smiled.

"Colonel, what'll it be?" Janice said coming up to the table.

"Give me my usual. I'm unusually hungry today," I smiled to her, "It's good to see you Janice."

"Good to see you too, Colonel. It's been a few months. What can I get you Captain Rogers?" She asked, pen at the ready.

"A burger?" He asked.

"You'll probably like the Colonel's usual then. Two burgers, two orders of fries and a large chocolate shake," She said, making Steve nod, "Sounds perfect."

"Half of that amount for me and a water instead," May said to Janice.
"Alright, I'll be back with that shortly," She said, leaving us alone.

"So, you are gonna age again?" She said, getting right to it.

"Yes. Dr. Simmons is working with Banner to determine if its even possible without changing how the serum works in my cells outside of aging. If not, I go back to being a regular strength human being," I smiled.

"And then, kids?" She asked.

"Yeah, a whole brood. I only had one shot, back when I had Phil, and I honestly hit the jackpot," I said, as Steve looked down at his hands.

"Captain, I hope you know how much Phil loves you. When he told me who he really was, he said he was so proud to be your son. Of course then he threatened to kill me if I spilled the secret."

"I understand. I can also understand why he wanted to earn his place in SHIELD, without the help of his mother. I just wish I had been there, for everything," He said honestly.

"He did as well, but living in the past never helped anything. He phoned me as soon as they found you, excited and nervous at the prospect of meeting you."

"I can understand the feeling," He smiled as Janice brought us our milkshakes and Melinda's water.

"So, I know you want to stay in Admin, but I need you out there with Phil. He's gonna come asking anyways, but it has to seem like he convinced you."

"I only wanted to stay in Admin…. Well, you know."

"Melinda, I know why. But Mel, you can't avoid your problems forever."

"You sound like Andrew," She sighed.

"Can I tell you something?" I asked, and she nodded.

"You think you don't deserve to be happy, after what you've done. But I am living proof that isn't true," I said, as Steve finished his milkshake with a loud slurp.

"Sorry," He said, putting the empty cup back on the table.

"You didn't have to do what I did," She argued.

"No, I've done worse. I've killed, I've made calls I didn't want to, and it cost people their lives. There was a reason Howard picked the name Athena after Korea," I said, shuddering as I thought of the mission I took in '52, "Because until I had Phil, I was dark. I didn't care who was in my way, or who I had to kill to finish my mission. I'd march back into SHIELD to submit my reports, uncaring of how much of a axe-wielding murder I looked like, with blood splatter all over my body."

"I read the report," She said, and I shook my head, "Not the classified one."

"There are two versions of every mission I've ever had. The official one for our records, and the hidden truth. We buried a lot of the shit we had to do, laws we had to break, and people we made disappear. Some of it was too gruesome for anyone to understand," I explained, as Janice came back with our food.

"Enjoy!" She said, with a perky smile before moving towards another table.
"So, Kaesong was a lie?" Mel said, brow furrowed once Janice left us.

"The report you read was. I killed 50 North Korean troops, because we didn't sneak in undetected, like we were supposed to. All 20 of my men died because of bad intel. I flew into a blind rage, killing those men. Some of them were so young, only following orders..." I explained, "It changed me."

"So, you are trying to say what exactly?"

"I left the field at first because of losing this knucklehead," I said gesturing to Steve, "And when I came back, I wasn't the same person. But that was okay, because I didn't need to be who I was before, for anyone. You don't have to be who you were before Bahrain. Phil understands, and he still loves you. He doesn't want you to be someone you are not. If all you want to do is fly the plane, fly the damn plane."

"He's going to want me back in action though, eventually."

"And you'll decide when that is," I said, "He can't force you back. He can only ask, like I am now."

We were quiet for a few minutes, as we ate our food. Mel looked at me hard saying, "If we find Daisy, she won't look at me the same, knowing what I've done."

"You don't know that. Phil knows everything I've ever done. He knows more than anyone, and he still loves me. Daisy is your daughter, and when we find her, she will love you."

"We don't know that either," She said, and Steve said, "She will. I know what it's like to find your family after so long of being alone. Granted, I didn't know I was alive while I was in the ice, but I woke up, and suddenly my wife was still here. And then I found out I had a son, who had just died never knowing that I loved him. And then he was brought back to life, and I had a second chance. I bet you anything, Daisy is looking for you as well."

Mel's eyes softened on Steve and said, "Mom was right. You always do know just what to say."

Steve chuckled, and put his hand over hers on the table, "I know, because if I were in your shoes, I would be leaving no stone unturned. Don't give up on yourself just because you haven't found her yet. We will."

"Thank you," Mel said softly, squeezing his hand, as I took her other hand. After a beat of silence, I had a thought forming in my mind, and I caused me to say, "Oh shit."

"What?"

"No stone unturned. What if the answer was right under our noses the whole time? We are the only stone we didn't look under, because they covered it up," I said to myself. I pulled my SHIELD tablet out of my bag, scrambling the signal and using a ghost account to search, in case it sent up red flags.

"I remember a mission that went horrible in China, around the same time Daisy went missing. And if we are looking for someone with a hidden agenda, they might have something against two of SHIELD best agents that had a child," I said, flipping through the scanned files till I found the one I was looking for.

"A baby girl was found in the remains of a slaughtered village. SHIELD deemed her an 0-8-4," I said and Steve said, "A what?"

"An object of unknown origin. Basically, what we thought could be alien artifacts or something
otherworldly. She was thought to be about 3 months old at the time. But Daisy was small when she was born."

"5 lbs, 2 oz," Steve said, remembering Daisy's information from my scrapbook of her first couple months with us.

"But healthy. She looked younger than she actually was. So at 5 months-"

"She looked three months," Mel said, asking for the tablet. She read the report, a look of hope crossing her features, before it vanished.

"She was put into an orphanage."

"Which one?" I asked, knowing she would have aged out long ago.

"St. Agnes, in Orangeburg. With an order to move her from each foster home every 6 months. She must have had an awful life, growing up without a steady family. She would have aged out 6 years ago."

"I'll drop by when we get back to New York, see if anyone can tell me about her, where she might be," I said, taking the tablet from Mel, "This is wonderful news Mel. We are so close. I just need you to have faith a little longer."

"I'll try," She said, taking a deep breath.

"We will find her," Steve said, "And she is going to love you."

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you thought. :)


Chapter Twenty Three

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello my faithful readers! I am so overwhelmed by those who have commented, given kudos and subscribed to story alerts for this. It's so wonderful to hear your feedback and see that it isn't simply me enjoying it. I mean, I like writing it, but I like knowing that other people like it. Only two chapters today, but I hope you enjoy them!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

The next day before we drove to New York to pack up, I took Steve to see Peggy. He was nervous, as I explained she had Alzheimer's, and she sometimes thought we were back in the War, or even just after. According to her nurse she was having a good day, and I asked if we could take her out for lunch.

"I think she will love that. I'll come back in a moment to get her ready," Jeanette said, brightly.

"Has Sharon been by today?" I asked before she left.

"She was here this morning. But I don't think she knew you were in town. Peggy hasn't mentioned anything," She said and I thanked her.

"Who's Sharon?" Steve asked, as I turned down a hall.

"Peggy's niece. Turns out Peggy's brother had a secret wedding during the war, before he died. His wife was pregnant and Peggy didn't learn about her nephew until after the war. And then he got married in '68, having two boys before Sharon was born in 1988. I'm also her Auntie Elizabeth. Tony and Peter are the only one that really gets away with Liz," I explained, dragging a worried Steve down the hall, and stopped at the door.

"Look at you, all dolled up. It's like you knew I was coming," I teased to Peggy as Steve stood behind the doorway. She looked up and said, "Eliza, come over here, you old bat."

"Is that anyway to talk to your best friend? Brought you a new crossword book, for when you finish this one," I said, as she put it down and hugged me, smiling wide.

"You keep trying to keep me sharp. You are the best friend a girl could have," She smiled up at me as I released her.

"We stick together," I said and she answered in her frail voice, "Show them who's boss. I have missed you terribly, my dear."

"I missed you too Peg. I brought you someone," I smiled, trying to hide how it affected me, walking back over to the doorway and dragging a bashful Steve into view.

"Steve Rogers! It's about bloody time," She said, holding a hand out to him as she smiled. He walked in, taking her hand and kissed her cheek, "Hiya Peg. I'm sorry for worrying you."

"Worrying me? You did more than worry me, you daft man. You put a bloody plane down without
telling us where you were! What you did to this poor woman, who did nothing more than love—"

"Peg stop, its okay. I roughed him up a bit and yelled at him. We're good now. All is forgiven," I teased. In truth, I didn't want to rehash the past. Peg had missed Steve, missed his friendship and heart. But she had held a grudge, much like I had. Mainly for how his ‘death’ had cause me to go AWOL for a few years, when she needed my help. And I didn't need Steve beating himself up anymore.

"All right, the past is past Captain. But I still want to hit you for putting that plane down. You saved the world though, so I can't be too cross with you. Still as handsome as ever. I saw you, on the TV, during New York. Still the same man even after all these years. Jumping head first into battle," She teased.

"Well, it didn't feel like years for me," He said, sitting down on the chair beside her bed. I sat by her feet, grabbing her crossword book and flipping through it. She seemed to be doing okay from her answers, and by the number of puzzles she completed since I saw her last.

"I could imagine that's hard. Waking up and suddenly there are cell phones, TV and microwaves."

"Yeah, but food's better. Can't say I miss army rations when I have gourmet food made by my wife's talented hands."

"It's gourmet, because 'a few months ago', you were on rations," I smiled.

"Yours might be gourmet, and yet I have something slightly better than hospital food. It's like Groundhog day every Thursday. Meatloaf for dinner, and Jello for dessert," She sighed, "I miss good food."

"Well in that case, can we spring ya for the afternoon?" I asked, "Lunch will be our treat."

"That sounds lovely. You remember my nurse will need to come as well, don't you?"

"Of course, she'll be by to get you ready soon. Let's go paint the town red," I teased.

"That's your specialty," She teased back and I laughed. Steve gave me a questioning look and I said, "Like I told Melinda last night, a lot of missions ended in me covered in blood."

"Oh."

"Don't worry, most of it was her own," Peggy smiled, making Steve grimace.

"That's not better," He said, making Peggy laugh once.

"She liked to scare the other agents mainly. I can't tell you how many times she was in medical growing back fingers and toes. One time her ear fell off when she submitted her report and Howard nearly threw up his lunch. She stuck it back on and went to clean herself up."

"I loved to make him nauseous," I laughed heartily, "It brought me such joy."

"You have a strange sense of humor Elle," Steve smiled.

"Well, if that scares you, it's a little late to back out now Captain," I snarked, "You're stuck with me."

"Wouldn't even if I could," He replied, winking at me as I gently played with my necklace. He noticed, sitting up straighter as my charm bracelet glittered in the sunlight, puffing him up a little more. I hadn't taken it off since our anniversary, and it was usually the only thing I still had on by the
end of the night.

"Darling, do you want to go bring the car around to the front?" I said sweetly.

"You trust me with it?" Steve said, acting shocked.

"You're gonna be using it more than I will, I need to let go of the wheel," I sighed dramatically.

"No, I will be having the bike more than anything," He argued.

"Changed my mind, the bike is mine," I said, sticking my tongue out at him.

"Children," Peggy sighed, before laughing. He took the keys from my hand and left the room. Peggy turned to me once she was sure he was out of earshot, "How quickly did you forgive him?"

"Peg," I sighed, knowing she was still mad.

"No, listen. I love you Eliza, I want you happy. And I know that he does too. But does he know how much he broke you?"

"Yes. He has been doing everything he can to make up for it," I explained.

"A little jewelry and you gave in? He left you after you had lost your child!"

"No, this was an anniversary gift. And I know he left me to deal with my own grief, thank you for that reminder," I chided her, "Why are you so against me giving him another chance?"

"Eliza, I'm not against it. I just caution you because I love you. He's basically in a foreign land and you jumped to be with him again, at the first "I'm sorry?"

"I didn't jump Peg. I took comfort in my husband's arms only hours after I saw his face for the first time in 67 years. He showed up at my apartment, and I yelled and screamed and got it out of my system. I wasn't going to waste anymore time thinking about giving him the cold shoulder, because I knew... I knew that even if he was here, I would still look the same in another 70 years. He would be old and grey, and I would be the same, holding a 140 year old grudge," I said lowly. She frowned but nodded, "I just don't want you getting hurt again."

"Peg, it is going to hurt like a bitch when I lose him again. I'm just taking in every moment I can, savoring the time I have with him," I said honestly. I didn't know if the serum in my blood could be reversed or altered.

She pursed her lips and said, "So, when you say 'rough him up'?"

"I punched him in the face, kicked him in the chest and later, I slapped him before throwing a wine bottle towards his head. He ducked and I still had a mess to clean up, but it was therapeutic. He understood my anger, embraced it, and now he's focusing all his efforts on making me happy. This is good Peg, I'm not just saying that. I'm not in denial, or oblivious to our problems. We're working on them, together."

"You do seem more alive than the last time you were here," She commented, "Still, I hope you'll use caution."

"I am cautious every day of my life," I said, honestly. What she didn't know, was it wasn't Steve I was being cautious about, but we'd tell her after we dealt with Hydra. She didn't need that stress right now.
Our lunch was short but worth it to see Steve smiling freely again after my Hydra truth bomb, even if Peggy had to tell the story of how she first met me. I had been running after Howard, who had just used a very early concept of a Taser on me, wanting to know if it affected me the same after my serum. It stung like electricity and he basically tucked tail and ran after I turned a murderous gaze on him. I had tackled him into the mud, turning the weapon on him as he screamed for help like a little girl, and I laughed maniacally.

We returned Peggy to the retirement home, just as she had turned. She wept and held onto Steve's hand, claiming, "You're alive!"

Steve was understandably sad as we left her, not really understanding Alzheimer's until he witnessed it himself.

"When she first got diagnosed, she worried about spilling secrets. So I had to vet a rotation of nurses for her and the doctors of that facility. It actually has former FBI, CIA and Homeland security agents as its patients. But certain SHIELD secrets couldn't be heard by everyone. So, I had them start a rigorous mental stimulation course for her. It would keep her mind active, and it actually improved her episodes. Though they still hurt to watch."

"I didn't know how to respond, I froze up when she starting crying," He said, still getting over the shock.

"The first episode she had, she was asking me where Howard was, and if he got everything ready for the procedure. She thought we were back in Brooklyn, preparing for your transformation. It's a scary disease, for the loved ones more than the inflicted. You don't know who you are going to be talking to from day to day, or how to react to certain things. And there is a chance one of us might have it when we are her age," I said as we got in the car

"I feel like I have it now. I'm here, in the future, but there are days I wake up thinking that it was only a few months ago we were in the war," He said, getting his seat belt on.

"I know exactly what you mean," I sighed, starting the car.

"So, shall we head home? It's a long drive back," I said, pulling out onto the road, "I'm anxious to pick up Zeus. I know he loves daycare, but I miss him."

"Sure, but can we get some snacks for the road? I'm hungry again," He said, and I chuckled.

"Check the glove compartment," I said, pointing to it while I watched the road.

"You think of everything," He laughed, pulling out a bag of cookies, smiling at me. Peggy's words about being cautious didn't apply to my relationship with Steve. He knew he did wrong, he knew he missed out on a life with me, with his son and any other children we could have had. He wanted to do better this time, and I believed him. He was my soulmate, one half of my heart. And while he couldn't fill the void left by Bucky's death, he could stand by my side and be there as we put an end to Hydra. So we could finally live.

The next day we were on the road again, this time to Orangeburg, to look into the girl who might be our granddaughter. I pulled up to the orphanage, watching little faces pressed up against the glass. I smiled at them sadly, knowing they might think we were prospective parents her to adopt or foster. Steve took my hand, kissing my head gently before saying, "Come on, let's find Daisy."

The head nun, Sister Margaret, was more than happy to go looking through their records for the girl from ours. I wrung my hands nervously, Steve took one for me to squeeze for stress relief. His eyes
met mine and I knew he was feeling my own anxiety with his. She closed the file cabinet drawer, turning to us and beginning, "As she had no name when Agent Avery brought her to us, we named her Mary Sue Poots."

"Oh boy," I said under my breath. That poor girl, probably teased to within an inch of her life with that name.

"Yes, she was with us from January 1989 till 2004," She continued before sitting down at her desk.

"But that's too early. Do you have contact info for her?" I asked, feeling a sense of dread in my stomach. She hadn't been here for 8 years. I knew she would have aged out already, but she left at 16?

"She left, and we never heard a word from her again. She was deeply affected by never having a steady home, and I believed it's what caused her to strike out on her own. We talked to the police, but once she turned 18 according to our records, she was no longer under our the government's care."

"Do you have a photo of her?" Steve asked, and I wanted to kiss him as I realized why he did. I could run a face trace on it, and narrow down our search.

"Yes," She said, taking a picture out of the hard file and passing it over the desk to us. I had to hold myself back from crying in front of the nun, as I gazed on what I knew was my granddaughter. She had my smile, with Melinda's nose and eye color. But the face shape was all Phil.

"Oh my god," Steve said, seeing what I was.

"It's her," I smiled at him.

"We have other copies, if that helps in your search," The nun said, as we nodded, "Thank you."

"This means a lot," I added, "Truly."

"As discussed with the original SHIELD agent that dropped her off, no one except myself knows the circumstances of her arrival here, or the reasons she was to be moved. And no one else will," She said, handing the paper order over to me, giving us all the evidence that she was ever here under SHIELD's orders.

"When you find her, please tell her we have missed her, and we hope she has found some happiness," The head nun asked us.

"We will. I promise, Sister Margaret," Steve said, holding out a hand to the nun, shaking hers in thanks.

We left quietly, as I was stunned that we had come so far in our search. I just wish I had remembered the 0-8-4 file sooner, I could have found her years before now.

"We're close," Steve said, taking my hand in the car, after he started it.

"As soon as we get back, I'm running in to New York HQ to do the face trace."

"How about we just drop by on the way home," He suggested.

"Smart man."

When we got there an hour later and started the face trace on her. Under my fake ID and watching
carefully for anyone coming in, of course. I wasn't expecting anything within the first twenty minutes. But I was pleasantly surprised when something did come up.

"Los Angeles," I breathed, as I read the location. She went by Skye, and I took a moment to think of how pretty it sounded. From what SHIELD had already gathered on her, there was no record of her in the DMV, she had been trying to break their firewall for months, but they claimed she was a low-level hacker. She was in a diner at that moment, working away on a laptop and I looked at Steve.

"I have to-"

"Go. I'll pack up, and Zeus and I will meet you in DC. Bring her home," He said. I shook my head, "I can wait until we're in DC. It would look suspicious if I didn't move with you."

"Alright. So, how will you go away without raising suspicion?"

"I'll tell Fury I need some time after New York. You are a workaholic and just don't want to be on vacation, or not doing anything any longer. So you'll start work, while I 'relax'. I've got the vacation days, plus I need to start my canning," I said wryly.

The move was easy, and Steve and I knew we would be back to New York after whatever was happening with SHIELD blew over. I marched into Fury's office and said, "I need a bit of a vacation."

"What was wrong with the month you just had?" He sassed as I put my written time off request on his desk. I pointed to the paper underneath it and he read it carefully.

"I've been working non stop for almost 70 years. I deserve a break," I smiled, as he looked up confused. The paper had read, "We found Daisy. Going to go train her to work on Phil's new team undercover, looking into Centipede and Cybertek for me. Can't trust that there aren't bugs in here too."

"Fine, but you better bring me back a damn souvenir from wherever you're headed," He said, giving me a soft look. It was a sore spot for Fury that he couldn't help more, or force the investigation of Daisy's kidnapping when the trail had gone cold. He pushed a note over to me that read, "Tell her I'm sorry."

"I will," I smiled at him, before walking out, nodding to Hill on the way in her office.

Steve met me in the lobby and said, "I wish you weren't going."

"I know, but I need some time. It's only a month, and you are coming to pick me up. Another little weekend getaway. Just you, me and a very secluded backyard pool," I smiled, wiggling my eyebrows.

"I miss you already," He said, gathering me in his arms.

"I will miss you too. But you need to learn who Steve Rogers is in this century, without me. Fly away from the nest, will ya?" I joked.

"I love you," He said softly.

"I love you too. Don't have too much fun while I'm away. Natasha is my eyes and ears here, and she will report back to me if you misbehave," I laughed as he hugged me tightly. He kissed me once, a sweet, soul-capturing kiss, and then released me.
"No shenanigans, got it. Have a safe trip. Call me when you get there," He implored seriously.

"I will. Take care of our boy," I replied, giving him a pointed look.

"Zeus will be in capable hands. And I have the new vet's number in case he does get into something. Just... don't have too much fun without me."

"Not possible. I wish you hadn't accepted so quickly, you could be with me. California in the summer is wonderful."

"Next summer," He promised, "We'll stop by on our July roadtrip or something."

"I like the way you think Captain. Just remember to feed yourself too," I teased, backing away slowly. I was flying my Quinjet out, parking it on Tony's property, what was left of it anyways.

I waved goodbye to him once at the beginning of the hallway to the yard, and realized this would be the first time since he woke up from the ice that we'd be apart for more than a day. He gave a sad smile and I held a hand to my heart, letting him know I loved him. He did the same, before gesturing with his head for me to get going. As I walked out to the yard, I chose to focus on my mission. Find Daisy, reunite her with Mel since Phil was still healing. Train her, and keep her safe until we could bring Phil out to meet her.

I had landed in LA, on what was the remains of Tony's property, cloaking the Quinjet. I hailed a cab to the nearest car rental agency, grabbing an SUV and going to open up the house first. Since Tony was no longer in Malibu full time, I was wondering if I should sell the house, but it was perfect for my needs. There were lots of rooms for kids, a pool, and an amazing security system designed by Tony and JARVIS. The New York apartment didn't have a pool for obvious reasons, but the backyard was completely surrounded by tall trees for privacy, and scramblers set up to block signal past the perimeter. No one was spying on me here.

After I had stocked the kitchen again, and double checked the weapons stash around the house, I started downtown and using the face trace to track Daisy again. She was at the same diner, sitting in a booth on her laptop. I grabbed another booth, with a good view of hers, ordering a coffee and a sandwich as props.

Well, partly. I was hungry again, damn serum.

For five days, I gathered her routine. She had an old VW Bus in which she lived, and she liked to frequent the cafe the Face Trace picked her up in. She was a member of the Rising Tide, but I didn't hold that against her. If she had worked for SHIELD, she would have understood why a lot of things were kept from the public. Picking up a discarded coffee cup of hers on the fourth day, I put it in a baggie to do a quick DNA test through JARVIS at Stark Industries. Tony had given me permission to use his system, with the promise I have him over for dinner to meet the girl. I called Mel on my encrypted line with the results I received the next morning.

"Found her," Was all I needed to say.

"I'll be there tomorrow morning."

"Don't rush," I said, as I watched the girl from across the street. Mel might be monitored, and a sudden trip out to California, even on her days off would be odd behaviour.

"I know," She said calmly, before hanging up. Keep the calls to 30 seconds max and no one can trace it.
I texted Mel where to meet me the following morning as she got into LAX. Her cab dropped her off in front of the bakery I was browsing at and she said, "Where is she?"

I paid the cab driver in cash and he waved in thanks as he drove off. I moved my head slightly, and she followed my line of sight, walking with me inside the building across the street.

Mel and I watched the girl from our spot in the diner, with Mel nearly holding her breath as she got a look at her daughter for the first time in 24 years. She was coming in, like she had almost everyday around this time. She would use the washroom, and then come back and order a coffee and cruller. But today, I had my jamming frequency running, that was interfering with whatever she was doing on her laptop. Mainly to distort any security footage, so Hydra didn't know I was here for anything other than coffee.

"What do we say?" Mel asked, eyes sad as she watched her daughter over my shoulder.

"We tell her the truth. You are what she has been searching for Mel. Don't doubt yourself."

"She went through hell without us. What if she never forgave us, and just wants someone to yell at?" She whispered as I finished my tea.

"Talk a deep breath," I ordered, and she obeyed.

"Chin up, let me lead. She's going to be thrilled," I said getting up from the booth. We walked over to her booth, waiting for her to take notice of us standing before her.

"Can I help you?" She asked sarcastically, before recognizing me with wide eyes.

"Skye, right?" I asked softly, using her 'adopted' name. If I called her Mary-Sue, she would never forgive me.

"Uh, yeah," She said confused as I sat down. Mel slid in beside me, with just enough space for her to get up quickly, in case Daisy bolted.

"You know who I am, but I would like to introduce my daughter-in-law, Melinda," I said, taking a chance.

"Daughter-in-law? You don't have kids, let alone ones that are married," Daisy scoffed.

"But I do. He was born in 1964, four days after what would have been his father's 46th birthday. There was a sample taken after Captain Rogers was given the serum, and it gifted me with a piece of him, almost 20 years after his 'death'. And then that son married Melinda."

"And they were blessed with a child. A beautiful baby girl named Daisy," I smiled at the girl, seeing Mel's eyes shining back at me.

"She was stolen from us, when she was 5 months old. We have been searching for her for over 24 years," Mel said softly, finding her voice as she stared at her long lost daughter in wonder.

"So you want my help finding her. Doesn't SHIELD have hackers or detectives for this sort of thing?"

"No, we've found her already. She was placed at an orphanage in Orangeburg, New York, and mysteriously vanished before she aged out," I said, watching her face drop. She looked back at Mel and I could see the question forming in her eyes.
"Hi Daisy," Mel said, as her unshed tears finally fell. Daisy covered her mouth in shock, sobbing as she scrambled out of the booth, to fall into Mel's arms. They sobbed, and held onto each other tightly, as I got out and walked around to the other side.

"So that makes you…" Daisy said, as she pulled away from May, and looked at me while wiping her eyes.

"Yes. I look way too young to be a Grandma," I teased quietly, as she launched herself at me. The cafe was deserted, so I didn't mind. If I knew we were in view of street cameras, or the jamming frequency was distorting the CCTV security cameras, I would have said no.

"I haven't held you in 24 years," I said, crying freely as I held her tightly.

"This is so weird," She laughed, pulling back to look at us again.

"You're telling me," I teased, and Mel laughed too.

"Where is… my dad?" She asked, after a moment, looking a little crestfallen.

"I will tell you, but I wonder if you know somewhere we won't be overheard. Some of it is not for the public's ears," I said quietly.

"Sure, let me just pay-"

"Nope, I got this," I said, pulling out cash and putting a twenty on the table. She looked at it for a minute, before packing up her laptop and grabbing her bag.

"Follow me," She said, giving us a bright smile and walking towards the exit.

"We're behind you. But we can't walk together," I said, "Big brother doesn't know."

"Ah. Got it."

She directed us down one block, before turning down an alley. We walked about 30 feet behind her, conversing softly about Steve and how Zeus was handling the move. Daisy walked towards a VW bus, unlocking the door and sliding it open. When I was sure that no one was tailing us, we walked up to the van. She smiled, motioning for us to get in.

"I've got a scrambler in here, so I'm sorry if you were expecting someone's call, but you won't get it until you're at least 30 feet from the van."

"Smart girl, you get that tech knowhow from the Stark side," I teased, getting in. Mel followed, staying quiet as we noticed the bed in the back. Daisy followed shutting the door behind her, and saying, "Home Sweet Home."

"You live in your van?" Mel asked, trying not to give too much sympathy in her voice. I hadn't told her about this because I knew it would upset her.

"It's easier to just not settle anywhere," She shrugged. I could tell she was embarrassed, but Mel smiled, "I just hope it's safe."

"I've got a can of pepper spray, and I know how to wield a tire iron if I need too."

"So, about your father," I said, shaking my head a bit and jumping into it, "He was injured… well, killed right before the Battle of New York, by Loki. Wait!"
She had looked horrified and I forgot to start with, "He's alive now. We revived him, and he'll live, he's just recovering."

"Oh, way to give me a heart attack," She says a little annoyed and relieved that she would get to meet him.

"Sorry, I'm all flustered. It was one thing when your grandfather re-entered my life; this is a whole new ball game for me. For us," I said, looking to Mel. She watched Daisy as she said, "He doesn't know we found you yet."

"I guess you had to be sure it was actually me," She nodded in understanding, but I could tell she was sad he wasn't here.

"I got the DNA test back yesterday and your Mom jumped out on the red eye last night after her shift when I told her the results."

"He's going to be so thrilled when he meets you. It will help speed up his recovery, knowing you are waiting to meet him," Mel said, tentatively reaching for her daughter's hand. Daisy gave it willingly, saying, "All I could find on you guys was a redacted SHIELD file."

"That's another thing we wanted to talk to you about Daisy. We have a mission for you, should you choose to accept it," I said wryly. She laughed at my movie reference and said, "Nice."

"Someone in SHIELD set up the almost invisible protocol that you should be moved every 6 months from your foster homes. Someone didn't want you found. And I think it's the same people that have a hidden agenda inside of SHIELD, something very dark."

"So, what do you want me to do about it? I'm just a hacker," She asked, confused.

"It's a lot to ask, but we want to put you undercover, on your Dad's new team."

"Seriously? This is so cool. I meet my family and I become an undercover agent in one day?"

"Not so fast missy," I said, "I'm training you a bit first. I won't throw you into this, not able to defend yourself or without knowing how to manipulate the situation. I've got a month to prepare you."

"I get the feeling I won't like this…" She said, looking at her mother.

"No, you won't, but you'll be stronger. She trained me," She said, smirking at me, "Actually, she trained all of SHIELD at one point in their careers."

"Yeah, and your Mom is a badass at SHIELD, so no complaining on my teaching style. Got it?"

"Of course… yes ma'am… Grandma?" She questioned the word, as if she didn't know if she should call me that.

"We had talked when you were born that you should call your Grandmother, Liz, as it would confuse you until we could explain why she looked so young. And because the world doesn't know that your grandmother even had your father."

"Yeah, and hopefully now we can age together, once Simmons works her magic. Hopefully not on Bruce, because while that would be so nice for Bruce, I need them focused-"

"Mom," Mel said and I shook my head, "Right. Okay, so I am gonna be here for a month, training you. Your Dad will be here in a month, after he's a bit more healed, under the guise of relaxing and
recruiting. You'll be able to meet him then, I promise. For now, your Mom has a few days here and then she's got to get back to DC."

"Can't I go with you?" She asked in a small voice, confused.

"Not yet. I wish you could Daisy, I really do. But your Grandmother needs to prepare you for this mission," Mel said, squeezing Daisy's hand, "It breaks my heart to leave you after getting you back."

"Where is… Grandpa?" She asked, still questioning the terms for us.

"He's back in DC as well, just starting a new job with SHIELD. He's undercover too, as well as your Aunt Natasha."

"Holy shit, I'm related to the Black Widow?" She asked, excited.

"Not by blood or marriage, sorry. She's a good friend of ours, and your Grandmother's," Mel smiled at her daughter, "But Director Fury is your godfather."

"Holy shit… again! That's like… I have no words."

"But enough about your mission and what we are doing, we want to know about you," I said, taking her other hand.

"Me?"

"Well, I don't have another daughter that went missing for 24 years," Mel said teasingly.

"Well, there isn't much to tell. Grew up in and out of foster care, dropped out of high school when I was 16 to start working, got the van," She said, looking around, "And bummed around the country. I joined… oh."

"What?"

"I'm kind of part of the Rising Tide," She said, wincing.

"We know. It makes your backstory work a bit better for the mission. Continue," I said, smiling. She told us how she learned how to hack, how she won her first laptop in a bet, how she's made money doing certain things, and how she has been trying to gain access to SHIELD for months, looking for more information on her parents.

"When's my birthday?" She asked suddenly.

"July 2nd, 1988," Mel and I said in unison. She looked confused for half a second before saying, "So I'm a year older than I've been told?"

"Yup."

"Cool, I'm actually 24," She nodded, before shaking her head.

"So what's this training going to be like?" She asked, and Mel scoffed.

"Just get ready to feel the burn, every waking moment and in your dreams," She said, giving Daisy a sympathetic smile.

"Great," She groaned.
"Don't worry, I won't be giving you the same version as I give my recruits. It's a little more focused," I assured her, "We're on a clock here."

"So what's the mission?"

"We are rooting out Hydra from within SHIELD," I said, and Daisy's eyes went wide.

"Like 'Hydra' Hydra? Nazi's?" She said, and I nodded, "It's been an interesting few months for us."
Chapter Twenty Four

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers. I hope you like this one, because we finally get a mini family reunion!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

Week One

Mel left tearfully a few days later, assuring Daisy she would video chat with her whenever she could over a secured line. I reassured her I would teach Daisy everything she needed to know, and I would keep her safe. They clung to each other, refusing to let go until Mel had to head back to the airport.

"Home sweet, home away from home," I said, as Daisy walked into her room. She'd been a little hesitant about moving into the house, so I had gotten a hotel room for the three of us to share while Mel was here. She seemed a little shocked at the room, looking around, taking in every detail. She touched the bedspread tentatively, still quiet.

"Sweet girl," I said softly, getting her attention, "This is your room. Decorate it how you'd like while you're here. I want you to be comfortable."

She nodded, still pensive as she took in the billowy curtains and reading nook.

"I've never had a space of my own, other than the van," She breathed.

"Well, you have one now," I smiled sadly.

"Did Mom and Dad... Did I have my own room?"

"At their old house, yes. After they separated, they closed it up. It's been sitting vacant since 1991. But your room," I said, holding up a finger as I walked over to the desk. I picked up her small scrapbook and brought it over to the bed, inviting her to sit as I opened it.

"Your room wasn't pink. Your Mom loathes the color, so they chose a soft yellow," I pointed out the picture of Mel rocking Daisy in her room. The same billowy curtains draped the windows in the picture, a white ornate crib to the right of the window. Mel was smiling down at the bundle in her arms as she sat in the rocking chair. An embroidered plush yellow blanket draped over Daisy in her arms bore her name.

"Like a daisy," She whispered, eyes sweeping over all the pictures on the page.

"Exactly."

"What is it?" I asked gently. She bit her lip and shrugged, "I guess... I'm still wondering if this is real."

I nodded, "It's something good after a lifetime of disappointment. Years of feeling like you weren't wanted."
"Yeah, how did you-"

"Your Grandfather had put the plane down, because he wanted to prevent the Valkyrie's bombs from reaching the US, but also because he wanted to die. His best friend... he had fallen to his death a few days earlier. And they'd been together since they were kids. He was overcome with grief."

"He chose to die, and you..."

"I was left behind. To never age like the rest of my friends, to raise a child alone, to believe I wasn't wanted. Obviously, we've worked it out now, but my point is that I know exactly how you feel. You've felt unloved your whole life."

"I thought I was left at the orphanage."

"Do you know how close I was... to you in the state? I was in New York and you were only about an hour away. And if I had known you were that close, secrets be damned, I would have ran to you along the highway. The three of us never stopped searching for you. We came up with dead ends every time."

"How was I even taken in the first place?"

"You were at home, your parents were out on an assignment. I had flown back to New York that morning, and you were with a trusted babysitter/agent. They... whoever had taken you, killed her first upon breaking into the house. You were taken, with no ransom note left behind. They wanted you, we believe, to divide your parents. Hydra is all about manipulation. Emotional or physical, they don't care. They only care about how people react. Your mother was distraught with grief and it took 20 men trying to restrain her before I stepped in. Your father did what he knows best, stuck to the mission and its details. He trusts the system, because the systems mission was to find you. They blamed themselves for your disappearance, when in all reality, it wasn't anyone's but Hydra's."

"Am I the reason they aren't together?" She asked, voice thick with emotion as she gazed at her scrapbook.

"No sweet girl, you are not the reason. Their marriage was a whirlwind. They got married in secret, they had you, they lost you, and then they lost themselves. A series of events designed to break them, to shatter their confidence in the world, did. They always said that they would work on their marriage after they found you. They are only separated, not divorced. They are still insanely in love with each other. They will have plenty of time to settle their problems in the future. They only want to focus on you now that they've found you."

"So, my Dad... he knows?"

"No," I said sighing. She furrowed her brow and asked, "I thought you were going to tell him, so he could heal faster?"

"I was. But his Doctor suggested no stress. And when I tell him what I'm going to be teaching you, he'll worry about you. Not that I am not an excellent teacher, remember that I trained Captain America and most of the Howling Commandos," I teased, "But because he lost you once, and it crushed him. He'll be out at the end of the month, and we'll surprise him then."

"I guess that's nice too," She shrugged, but I could tell she was disappointed. I wrapped an arm around her shoulders, and she leaned her head against me.

"I know what you are thinking, and it's not true," I spoke softly. I heard a tear hit the book and her shoulders shook under my arm. I held her tighter and said, "He loves you so much. Nothing you
could do or say would make that love go away. It doesn't matter what you've done. You were trying to find them, and they were trying to find you. We all just looked outside of the agency and you were looking inside."

"But how did you find me?"

"You may hate me after hearing it, but a repost came across my desk 24 years ago. A baby they thought to be about 3 months old was found in the Hunan province of China. You were a small baby, but you were 5 months old when you were taken. So I didn't think that could have remotely been you. China? 3 months old? I didn't look any further into it. Until two weeks ago," The last words tumbled out of my mouth, as I watched her face.

"Oh."

"With everything we have been trying to figure out about Hydra, we got thinking that we couldn't leave one stone unturned. And the only one I hadn't turned over, was SHIELD. Or Hydra. So I checked out the report, your grandfather and I drove up to St. Agnes and talked to the head nun—"

"Sister Margaret, is she still there?" Daisy asked, smiling.

"Yes. She gave us the SHIELD document telling them to move you every 6 months from homes, and gave us a picture from your file. I knew right away it was you. All I could see was your Mom and Dad in your features. Sister Margaret asked me to tell you, that they miss you and hope you are happy."

"I am now," She said, smiling softly at me.

"That's good to hear. But I had to move to DC with your Grandfather and your uncle."

"Uncle?" She asked confused.

"I have an adopted pitbull named Zeus. He's my furbaby," I teased her, and she smiled, "I always wanted a dog."

"You can talk with you parents on that one," I laughed, "So as soon as we got settled, I grabbed my Quinjet and flew out here on a 'vacation'. I was trailing you for about five days, making sure you weren't gonna disappear on me. I swiped a coffee cup of yours for a DNA test, and then I called your Mom when I knew it was positive."

She nodded, before smiling, "I guess we're stuck with each other then, Grams."

"Grams... hmm, I like the sound of that. Not too old sounding," I teased her, "And you are stuck with us, sweet girl. For the rest of your life. I am so sorry for not putting those pieces together sooner. We could have been telling you about the time you were missing for two months, versus our reality. You grew up without us because I didn't check out that report."

I pulled a phone out of my back pocket, another encrypted line, like I had for Steve, Brock and a few others. She stared at it for a moment, before gently taking it as I said, "This is untraceable. All you need are the numbers that are preprogrammed. You can call me anytime we are apart, and you can keep in contact with your parents this way as well if you are parted."

"Whose... Brock?" She said, going through the phone.

"Someone I trust with your life. Are you ready to start training?" I asked, "Because there is a lot you'll need to learn. People you can trust and your mark."
"I'm ready."

Week Two

We covered how to handle a firearm, how to manipulate someone into telling you things they wouldn't otherwise tell you at first, how to lie effectively, because what she would be doing was entrusting herself with her own safety. If she could lie and convince Phil's new team she was just a Rising Tide hacker, and not our eyes and ears on Ward, he would open up to her. At least, as much as his training would allow, but she would do it well. And she would be able to glean his weaknesses for us, and help expose Hydra from within.

Aside from operative training, and physical training, I taught her fun things, like canning and how to cook. It was one of the many things I was determined to pass down when she was born, as I had taught Melinda how as well. Besides the fact that my canning supplies were already at the California house, it was the perfect time for peaches, and Daisy would devour whole jars of my spiced peaches. Much like Steve did after having tried his first jar.

"This is like manna from heaven!" She moaned, on her second jar. I chuckled, "Not so fast, or you're going to be sick."

"When did you learn how to do this? Cook and stuff?" She asked, still eating. I smiled, as I continued putting the jarred peaches into the water bath, "Most of the cooking I learned while my mom was still alive. During the Depression, food was something we were careful to ration, unsure if they would have enough to feed the four of us. And then, they died when Howard and I were 18. I got a job at a local kitchen on the Lower East Side for awhile, until Howard finished school and started making weapons for the Army So, when the war started, I knew how to ration well. And after it ended, I was in Greece for a few years. I wanted to visit my parents homeland and I learned so much more from the kind older lady I was neighbors with."

"Really, I'm Greek?" She asked, intrigued.

"We are Greek, and you and your father are Irish as well. Your great grandparents, Joseph and Sarah Rogers, immigrated to America in 1915. My parents, Alexander and Sophia Stratis, immigrated to America in 1914, just before the war broke out. They changed their last name to fit in here, as there was a lot of English families that had come over at the turn of the century," I smiled.

"What's Mom?"

"She is first generation immigrant. Her parents were from Macau."

"Where is that?" She asked confused.

"It's an coast and island on the coast of China, across the delta to Hong Kong," I explained, "She was born there."

"My other grandparents, are they still alive?"

"Yes. They are divorced. Your Grandpa William May, lives in Arizona. And your Grandma Lian lives in DC. Your grandmother used to work for the CIA," I revealed.

"You're kidding," She asked shocked.

"Nope, but that doesn't leave this house," I said serious. She nodded, making a zipping motion with her lips.
"So, how many languages do you know?"

"Officially? 13," I shrugged. "Unofficially, I can pick up a language quickly, so the number is in the high 20's now. Though I'm not fluent in all of them."

"So, Greek, Spanish, Russian, French?"

"Mhmm. Irish, German, Korean, Romanian, Italian, even some strange ones. You name it, it's very likely that I know it, or at least enough to get me by."

"What do people in Macau speak?" She asked, glancing towards her laptop. She was very inquisitive, I smiled to myself.

"Cantonese and Portuguese," I answered.

"Can you teach me languages?"

"Of course, but I don't want them interfering with your training. If I think you are being stretched too thin, I will put them on hold," I said seriously.

She nodded, "That's fair."

"We have a lifetime to teach you certain things, but only a little under a month to make you mission ready. Now, memorize these pictures," I said, showing her the tablet.

"John Garrett, Hydra Sleeper. Grant Ward, Hydra Sleeper and mark."

"Good, keep going," I encouraged.


"And these?" I asked, scrolling down.

"Alexander Pierce, Hydra, Head. Brock Rumlow, SHIELD Triple, Ally. And holy shit, major hottie," She said, as I took a sip of water. I choked, laughing as I recovered, "Down girl, he's your contact if you get separated from your parents."

"What? I've had a bit of a dry spell, and he looks... mmm yummy," She smiled.

"Okay, until you've celibate for 67 years, you don't get to complain about dry spells. He's a whole 8 years older than you too," I chuckled.

"The age thing doesn't bother me. But ugh," Daisy grimaced, "TMI, Grams. Even with how young you look, you're my grandmother. Something's a girl doesn't need to know."

"Good, I thought I needed a bucket of cold water," I teased her.

"Ha ha," She deadpanned, before continuing with the Avengers and other SHIELD agents she might come across.

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**Week Three**

Daisy was a natural. I was teaching her more advanced moves by the third week, and she was improving in the kitchen as well. She could barely make mac & cheese when we first started, but she
managed to not give us food poisoning when I threw her in the deep end to cook for us. I understood her quirks a lot better. She used sarcasm to cover up emotion, like the rest of us Stark's, and she asked question after question. She wanted to learn.

"If I had grown up with Mom and Dad, what do you think I could have done with my life?" She asked me, digging a pint of Ben and Jerry's. We'd taken the night off from training to watch a new rom com.

"Daisy, 'what if's' aren't healthy. Take it from the Queen of them."

"But I could have been anything. I could have been an agent! I could have been a painter, a chef or a musician. Or-"

"Daisy, you could still be anything you want to be. Not everyone has their lives figured out by 25 years old. Some people don't have them figured out until they are 40. Trust me. Just roll with the punches right now. After we get rid of Hydra, you'll have lots of time to decide what you want to do. Work at SHIELD, work at some fancy company keeping them protected from hackers... The world is your oyster sweet girl."

"Why do you call me sweet girl?" She asked quietly.

"It's partly a funny story, partly something I already called you when you were born."

"Funny story?"

"Around Halloween, no matter what your mom did, she was binging on candy. She could work it off, but it was the breastfeeding. She needed the calories and the stores were chalk full of candy. I came over one time, and your Mom had been eating some chocolate while feeding you. I put you on my shoulder to burp and I noticed a little chocolate had landed on your cheek. I kissed it off your cheek, and you proceeded to let out the biggest burp followed by a little chuckle at my actions. From then on, you were my sweet girl."

"Damn, that sounded cute," She gave a watery smile.

"You were about four months, almost five at the time. Brightest little thing I'd ever met," I said, as she laid her head on my shoulder. I ran my hand over her hair and she sighed.

"Who should I be now?" She asked.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, am I still Skye, or am I Daisy? Who am I now that I know where I come from? I thought my whole life that something was missing from me, that I was didn't know who I was, because I didn't know who my parents were. So who am I now?"

"Ah. I know the answer to this," I smiled, still petting her, "What does a flower need to grow?"

"Uh, water?"

"And?"

"The sun, photosynthesis? What answer are you looking for?"

"A flower needs to be able to see the sky to grow," I answered.

"But what does that mean for me?" She groaned at my riddle.
"I mean, that you as Daisy, need to let your past and experiences as Skye, shape who you want to be now. You don't have to be an agent, or the perfect daughter for any of us. You can just be you. Fun-loving, sarcastic, sometimes shy, complaining, slobbish."

"Hey," She chuckled at my teasing.

"But I mean it. You don't have to be anyone other than who you are. Your name changed, but your convictions, your opinions or your outlook on life didn't. You are exactly who you were supposed to be. And if someone tells you differently, well get behind me, because I'm gonna start swinging. No one messes with my granddaughter and lives to tell the tale."

"Thanks Grams," She spoke softly, and I could hear the tears in her voice.

"Anytime you need my shoulder," I teased, kissing her head as we refocused on the movie.

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**End of Week Four**

Daisy was as ready as could be. She was growing more confident in our sparring sessions, running was getting easier for her every morning. She was learning Greek and Cantonese by the end of the third week, and doing well with it. She would be able to surprise her parents. She finally managed to get it out of me why I learned Irish. It was more to keep Steve's heritage alive for Phil, but I hadn't told Steve yet. She thought it would be funny for the two of us to start a conversation in Irish then next time we were all together. Little did she know, it would be soon.

Phil was due any moment, taking the scenic route after being given the okay to drive. Daisy had been on pins and needles all morning, nervous for her first meeting with her father. It was just like Phil with Steve, she was now nervous that he might be disappointed in her. Rolling my eyes heavenward, I thought, "Definitely my family."

Steve was still giving 'SHIELD' the impression that I had needed some time away after New York, and he just wanted to get back to work. He's been on several missions and started to get used to how STRIKE operated. His new suit was something. A dark, muted navy, with a white star and stripes on his chest reminiscent of the SSR symbol. Much more stealthy than the New York suit.

He would be coming out today, to 'pick me up' and spend a little time with his granddaughter and son on my last weekend. Daisy basically turned into a girl version of Phil, wanting to know everything about her grandfather and her father. I told her stories from the War as we rested each evening, stories Bucky and Steve had told me of their childhood. We'd go out shopping, using Photostatic veils just to be safe around surveillance, and we'd spend afternoons poolside in the backyard. It felt like a vacation with your best friend, aside from the 'Obsessive Canning Disorder' I apparently had. She would later retract it because I threatened to hide the peaches. While I might be 95, being around Daisy brought out my younger tendencies.

Phil knew that I was training someone, but not that it was his long lost daughter. He was just pulling up to the house, when I heard the Corvette's horn.

I opened the front gate and watched Phil park his car, smiling widely at me, as he got out and approached with his aviators on.

"Hello Colonel," He nodded.

"Drop it Phil. The place is clean and I've got scramblers at the perimeter," I assured him, as he took off his sunglasses and came up the steps to hug me.
"Never thought I'd get to hug you again, Mom," He mumbled into my shoulder sadly, as we clung to one another.

"Me either. I love you my sweet boy. I don't know what I would do if I lost you," I said, feeling myself tear up as I pulled away to look up at him.

"No crying Mom, I'm here. Is your trainee here?" He asked, as I guided him into the front hall.

"She is, but I need to tell you a story first," I said, directing him past the front hall and to a small sitting room. I saw Daisy scrambled around a corner from where I sat. She had taken the desk in my office as her own, and I didn't mind. Tony had given me an insane computer that she loved. I only needed my tablet for monitoring the security cameras.

"This particular girl, she had a rough life. SHIELD found her when she was a baby, in a slaughtered village in the Hunan province of China. She was placed in St. Agnes in Orangeburg, New York, where she spent the next sixteen years of her life in and out of foster care, with an invisible protocol that she couldn't stay more than 6 months at a foster home. She left before she was aged out of the system, living in a van she bought and driving around the country," I said, and Phil nodded.

"She did have a rough life, more than most," He agreed, "But why her?"

"She is a hacker now, and I've read her in on our situation in SHIELD. She's going to be picked up by your new team in a few weeks, gathering information for us on SHIELD members she comes across. She's an outsider, and if someone tries to turn her, we'll know," I explained, "She's a neutral third party."

"I can understand that logic. Who do you need her to survey?"

"Grant Ward. I have a bad feeling about John Garrett, and he trained Ward. A pretty face will get him to open up, I know it."

"Training her to be like Natasha?"

"And like me."

"And you trust her?"

"Considering she's family, I do," I said, watching as he furrowed his brow in confusion.

"Family?" He questioned.

"Daisy, won't you please join us?" I called out, watching Phil's face dropped in shock and disbelief. I saw the question in his eyes, "Could it be?"

She came around the corner slowly, as Phil turned, taking in his daughter for the first time in 24 years. She had chosen a white and blue plaid shirt over maroon capris, wearing her hair down over her shoulders. Her eyes were wide, fear written in them as Phil stood up, still looking shocked.

"Hi Dad," She said, tears gathering.

"Daisy?" He whispered, as if speaking too loudly would spook her. She nodded at him, as I got up and said, "Phillip, breathe."

"Is this real?" He asked, still looking at his daughter.

"We confirmed it. This is our Daisy," I said referencing the DNA test I had run. He took half a step
"Daisy," Phil said, rushing forward to take her into his arms. She was sobbing into his shoulder, holding onto him just as tightly as he was holding her.

"When? How?" He asked, pulling back to hold her face gently, studying her features before hugging her tightly again, "My baby girl."

"About a month a half ago after New York. I was in DC with your father, having dinner with Mel to discuss your recovery, and our weeding plan, before I was hit with a sudden thought. If Hydra had a secret agenda, they might have taken the child of two of SHIELD's best. They are trying to weaken us, and cause strife," I said, as the two of them hugged.

"But that story I told you was something that had come across my desk. I'm ashamed that I didn't follow up with it 24 years ago, but as I remembered it, we started tracking her down. First to St. Agnes, where they told your father and I, that she had left at 16. And then with an old picture they had, I ran a face trace. She was here in LA," I said, giving Daisy a look. She nodded and pulled out of the hug, drying her eyes and saying, "I joined the Rising Tide. Only to gain access to SHIELD. I had only found one file on you guys, redacted by SHIELD, and I thought I could get close with them."

"Oh Daisy," Phil said, taking her face in his hands again gently, "Don't be scared. I'm not upset. I would have used every opportunity to find you again."

"Did it hurt when you…"

"Died? I don't remember. It's a little fuzzy. I was only out for 45 seconds," He said and I let out a quiet breath of relief. The memory altering was holding up.

"Has your Mom-"

"Mel has been here. We wanted you to get better first, and she couldn't swing time off again to be here. It would have been too suspicious. She got her reunion and she wanted you to have yours," I said, leaving the room for a second to grab Phil's bag from the front hall. I checked that Steve's flight was on time as I put the bag in Phil's room. It had worked out so well for us all to be here on the same weekend, but it was a surprise for Phil and Daisy.

"So, I'm Daisy now, not Skye. But for the purposes of the mission, I am Skye," I heard Daisy saying as I came back in, "When Hydra is gone, I'll go by Daisy for the rest of my life."

"Skye, I like it. Maybe we can add it to your middle names," Phil smiled.

"Names? How many middle names do I have," She laughed as I sat down again.

"Just one, sorry. Daisy Elizabeth Rogers. But I don't go by Rogers at SHIELD. No one except the Director, Deputy Director, the Avengers, Agent Rumlow and Ex-Director Carter know who I really am. And now you do too."

"It's like a secret club," She laughed, looking at me.

"A very secret club," I teased, "Like Fight Club."

"So, wait…" Phil said, demeanor changing at my joke.

"You've been training her, as a spy," He said, eyeing me.
"Yes. I want her prepared for any eventuality."

"PT?"

"And weapons, reverse interrogation, how to lie effectively. I've drilled into her pictures and names of people she can trust, who I trust with her life. Rumlow is keeping me updated on when she comes across Hydra's desk and he will kill to keep her safe. She's covered Phil. She's ready." I assured him, "Though I wish she didn't grumble and complain when I wake her up for our morning run."

"Because it's 4:30 am! No one else is awake," she sighed, "People on the East coast are still sleeping!"

"It's safer for us to run in the morning, less chance of anyone being awake or noticing that I'm following you. It is exhausting running at normal pace. I have to force myself to take smaller strides," I huffed.

"Her drills at the academy were much worse, I can tell you that," Phil said, as if reliving some horrible memory as he shuddered, making Daisy laugh.

"You didn't want special treatment," I said in an "I told you so" tone.

"Anyways, after this weekend, it will only be a few weeks before you 'pick me up' for hacking SHIELD. Grandma Liz says there is something brewing already since AIM. It's got several offshoots, and all of them seem shady. Centipede in particular from Cybertek."

"My contacts run pretty deep," I said, waving him off, "We'll go over it later. I think you've got questions for each other."

"Of course," he said, turning back to Daisy and motioned, "You first."

"Okay. Am I the reason you and Mom aren't together?" She asked, and I winced. Even if I had told her that first week she wasn't, she wanted to hear it from her own father.

"Like a Band-Aid, right?" She joked, and I gave her a small smile.

He was quiet a moment, a little stunned at her question, before answering, "Yes and no. Losing you was hard on our marriage. We fought, and we needed some time apart. That time apart ended up being about 20 years. We are still married just separated, but it was hard to love each other when we blame ourselves for your kidnapping."

"But, you still love each other, right?"

"We do. You mother is the greatest love of my life, but it was hard to live with ourselves, let alone someone who was just as broken on the inside as you are. We wanted to find you, and work on healing ourselves, so that we might be able to give you all our attention and love. And then we'd work on our relationship. It just took us longer than we thought to find you. And a lot of stuff happened."

"Is it crazy to think you might get back together?"

"It's not crazy. But your Mom isn't going to like me when I ask her to come back into the field. So it might be a few years. She can hold a grudge," He joked.

"But you still love her, right?" She asked, in a small voice.
"I always will. There is no one else for me."

"She still loves you," She said, "So, don't waste your time. You aren't getting any younger."

"Thank you," He smiled teasingly at her unintentional 'old' comment.

"I know exactly what she means," I said, thinking back to mine and Steve's conversations about having a baby, "Go after her Phil. You've got Daisy, now go get Mel."

"Alright, alright," He said after a moment, smiling, "I'll go get her back."

"Yes!" Daisy shouted in glee.

"Phil, focus on your daughter now," I said, getting up.

"Where are you going?" They both asked, sounding nervous.

"I need to go pick something up. You can talk to each other without me. You don't need a buffer," I said, looking at my watch, "I'll be back with food, I promise."

"In-And-Out?" They asked at the same time, and I chuckled at their shocked faces as they turned to each other.

"Like you had to ask. There is no doubt you two are related now," I laughed, leaving the room and grabbing my purse.

"Text me what you want!" I called out, pulling the door open and shut behind me. It was still early to eat, so I was gonna grab the food with Steve on the way back from the airport. I had been renting an SUV for the time I was here, and it wasn't as fast as my Camaro, which was now in storage in an old Stark Industries storage unit in upstate New York. My other car, the black Land Rover was in DC now, being driven around by Steve. The bike was also in storage because we only had street parking.

I pulled up at the pick up lane at LAX, quickly getting out to jump into Steve's arms. He laughed as I clung to him like a koala. I was kissing his face sweetly, before he captured my lips with his. I moaned a little, knowing I was gonna get some hot loving tonight. I untangled myself from him to help put his bag in the back, as he got in the passenger seat.

"So, how was it?" He asked, taking my hand as I pulled us back into traffic.

"So funny. It's so obvious she's Phil's daughter. She was nervous he would be disappointed in her, like he was with you. She complained about my training," I grumbled.

"I'm pretty sure if your recruits weren't so terrified you'd make them run it again, they all would."

"That's good."

"That they would complain?"

"That they kept their mouths shut. I would have and have made them run it again because of one person. It discourages back talk," I smiled sweetly, "But how is everything in DC? Got our home all set up?"

"I do, and Zeus is a little mad you haven't been there," He said, sighing.

"He's clingy with his favorite humans," I nodded.
"Well, it isn't home without you," He smiled at me.

"I missed you so much," I said to him, as he brought my knuckles to his lips.

"I missed you too," He said, and I saw a spark of mischief in his eyes.

"You know, a couple years after the war, I was constantly hearing about this one store. It dealt in lingerie. I never really had a reason to check it out until recently, and their largest store is on Hollywood Blvd. So, I thought I should take a browse through their selections," I said, pulling up my phone's pictures for Steve. I watched him flip through the 10 or so pictures I took of various outfits and heard his breathing change.

"You look… god… so sexy," He said, as we were stopped at a red light. He leaned over to kiss me quick.

"Should I find a back alley? Relieve the pressure?" I teased.

"No, I can wait. I can wait," He repeated to himself. I smirked as I continued driving. I pulled into a parking lot, getting out and said, "I'll wave out the window when I need your help. Settle down, would ya?"

I walked into the restaurant and waved to the manager behind the counter.

"Back again?" She laughed and I replied, "I am. Got a big order."

"Alright, lay it out for me," She said standing ready at the till.

"8 Double-Double burgers, four as meals, four as singles. Three large strawberry shakes, and one large vanilla," I said.

"Do you need some help out to the car?" She asked.

"Thank you but no. The hubby will be in soon. Just finishing a phone call," I smiled, knowing Steve might still be trying to calm down. It was mean of me to work him up like that, but I had been without sex for 70 years. I was still finding little ways for him to make it up to me for leaving me alone. So turning him on and leaving him alone was harmless. He did it to me on our anniversary, and tonight he'd get reunion sex after our month apart. He could wait.

As I waited for the food, I got a text from Mel that Daisy and Phil had video called her, along with a screenshot of Daisy's excited face next to Phil's. I warmed my heart to know I had helped reunite their little family. And now Phil and Mel had to do some of the work.

"Hey," Steve's voice said, as he came up behind me and wrapped an arm around my waist.

"Hey yourself," I smiled, leaning up to kiss him sweetly, "And just in time."

The manager came up to the counter with all four drinks and three bags, saying, "Have a good day."

"Thank you, you as well," Steve smiled to her. As he turned his back with the drink tray, the manager gave me a big smile with a thumb up, mouthing, "Good catch."

"Mhmm," I smiled as I picked up the bags of food, following him out. I had to slap Steve's hand away from the bags a few times on the ride back, even though I could hear his stomach growling.

"This is like a snack for us, but I didn't want to be rude and make our son and granddaughter eat alone," I said, trying to guilt him into keeping his hands out of the bag. It worked, because as soon as
the car stopped at the rental, he was out with the drinks, waiting for me to open the door.

"Food!" I yelled, as I walked into the kitchen with Steve at my heels. He was looking around, only having seen pictures on my phone. He seemed to like the layout, with the small living room attached to the kitchen.

"Coming!" I heard Daisy say from outside. It was a beautiful day and I saw them sitting outside at the poolside. I grabbed plates and sent Steve to set the table. I heard the sliding door open and their laughter stop. I looked up to see Steve standing awkwardly at the end of the table, smiling at Phil and Daisy.

"Hi," He said to the pair, nervously.

"Hi Dad," Phil said, moving two steps forward before stopping.

"Oh, just hug already," I said exasperated as I set out the mayonnaise and ketchup. The two laughed at me, before doing as I said. They laughed it off as they separated, and Steve held out his arms again for Daisy.

"Come give your Grandpa a hug?" He said, giving her a teasing smile. She laughed, stepping into his arms to hug him tightly.

"It's so great to meet you finally," He said, resting his cheek on her head.

"You as well, thought I didn't imagine you'd be so close to my age," She teased as they separated.

"Ditto," Steve said, and I laughed.

"That sounded so weird coming from your mouth," I said, trying to control my breathing as I stopped laughing. Steve was smiling at me, before pulling out Daisy's chair.

"So, how was your training with your Grandma?" He asked.

"I'm a slightly more toned pile of limp noodles," She sighed, "But if I ever wanted to know how to defend myself, I figure I'm good if someone tries to attack me. Even if my arms might fall off from simply raising them too high."

"I remember feeling like that. Some days at the academy, she'd have us run the Absentee Father until someone actually puked. My muscles were screaming at me as I laid in bed most nights, and I couldn't fall asleep because I was in so much pain."

"Try being- how did you put it Elle? A 90 lbs. asthmatic? She didn't give special treatment to anyone. I had to earn the right to take the jeep back instead of run like the rest of them."

"Lynch pin," I coughed, making Phil smirk. It was his favorite story of his Dad, being his main reason for thinking outside of the box on missions.

"Even without using my brain, unlike the others, I was still just about dead before they gave me the serum. Thank you dear," He teased.

"But did you die?" I said cheekily, sitting down with napkins next to Phil. Steve had taken a seat next to Daisy, who chuckled at my movie reference.

"Grams, ba chóir dúinn a insint dóibh?" Daisy asked, and we watched the fries fall from steve's hand in shock.
"You taught her Gaelic?" Phil smiled, proud of his daughter.

"Sílim go bhfuil a cailín milis soiléir," I smiled at her, and she giggled. Steve was still looking at me in shock, so I spoke softly, "Mo ghrá grá, chaill mé tú. Agus choinnigh sé seo do oidhreacht teaghlaigh beo."

"Go raibh maith agat mo ghrá," He said with gravel in his voice.

"Your welcome. Phil knows it as well, if that wasn't obvious."

"She'd sing me irish lullabies as a child. I sang them to Daisy," Phil said, looking up at his daughter. She smiled back, "Grams sung it to me too. I had a bad night and it sounded so familiar."

"And that's why it sounded familiar. Your great grandmother sang it to your grandfather," I said softly as I looked at Steve, "We preserve family traditions."

"This is like the gravemarker all over again," He said, grasping my hand. I ducked my head a little, as I heard him continue, "You are amazing."

"No, just hopelessly in love with you," I smiled up at him. We continued eating, with Steve asking Daisy about her childhood and what she liked to do for fun. I sat back, watching the three of them bond, and soaking up the love in the room.

And then tonight, we'd have a little family reunion with Tony. That I hadn't told them about.

Gaelic Translation: (I used Google translate again. I can't help myself. I'm sorry if it's wrong)

Grams, ba chóir dúinn a insint dóibh - Grams, we should tell them.

Sílim go bhfuil a cailín milis soiléir - I think that is clear sweet girl.

Mo ghrá grá, chaill mé tú. Agus choinnigh sé seo do oidhreacht teaghlaigh beo. - My darling, I lost you. And this kept your family heritage alive.

Go raibh maith agat mo ghrá. - Thank you my love.
I prepared a big spread that night, shooing everyone away from the kitchen. Daisy hadn't had my Greek dinner and Tony expected it. Tony was coming over first, as Pepper had something to finish up with at SI, with Happy coming as her driver/bodyguard. I was glad to hear he had survived the Extremis bombing at the Chinese Theatre. He was a good friend to Tony and watched his back when I couldn't, like Rhodey.

"Who is here?" Daisy asked, seeing Tony's Audi pull up on my security feed from the tablet on the kitchen island. I buzzed him through the gate

"Your second cousin," I smiled as she looked to be panicking slightly. Phil reassured her that Tony was going to love her tech know-how. She argued that she only knew hacking; she wasn't a genius that designed weapons.

"Mmm, mmm, mmm. Aunt Liz, you know just what I needed after a long day," He said walking in, and taking his sunglasses off as he noticed Phil and Daisy.

"Agent," He said, quirking an eyebrow at Phil.

"Cousin," Phil shot back. Tony smirked, "Glad to hear you're okay. Pepper should be right behind me. Let's surprise her, okay?"

"She knows the circumstances surrounding my revival, and how it must be kept a secret?" Phil said, using his 'Agent voice'.

"Yeah, yeah. Look, she's thrilled you're alive, so she'll keep this one. I guess I'm glad too, considering I don't have the best track record with family, surprise or otherwise."

"Then here's your next surprise," I smiled from the counter where I was starting a salad, "Meet your second cousin, Daisy."

"Cool, the hacker," Tony said, nodding to her. She smiled, "Yup, hi."

"Liz says you're legit. I'll give you access to JARVIS. He can run untraceable within most hacks. Gives you a bigger punch through firewalls. HERMES works well for that too," He said, motioning his head for her to follow him towards my office. I had also had access to JARVIS, but he wasn't monitoring me like he was with Tony. It was JARVIS monitoring Tony for me.

"Seriously? That's so cool!" She said, grabbing her computer bag.

"We'll set up a password and then we'll test it out. Is that what you've been using?" Tony said,
looking offended at the laptop in her bag.

"Don't hate. I hacked SHIELD with this thing." She said proudly. He narrowed his eyes and said as they disappeared around a corner, "Teach me."

"Can you input her biometrics into HERMES?" I called out.

"Sure can!" Tony yelled back, before continuing his conversation with Daisy.

"Okay, I think Tony and Daisy are good. Ah, and there is Pepper, right on time," I said to Phil seeing him look a little nervous as we saw her car pull up to the driveway on the tablet. I buzzed them through as well, hearing Steve mulling around upstairs. There was a soft knock at the front door.

"It's open!"

"Elizabeth?" She yelled out as the door opened.

"In the kitchen!" I yelled back, wiping my hands on my apron to greet her as she came into the kitchen. Happy trailed behind her, looking around and noticing Phil, before starting a walk around of the main floor for security purposes. That man took his job seriously, even though he knew I was as 'prepared' as they come.

"So good to see you. Everything alright?" I asked and she nodded, "Yes, we still don't have a cure or a way to get it out, but I'm stable. Tony was saying the one biochemist that's hanging around the Tower for your 'project', said dendrotoxin might calm the effects."

"Jemma is the best. She's a little shy, especially around Bruce, but she's giving me hope I might age one day."

"Where's that husband of yours? Isn't he supposed to be helping?" Pepper asked as she walked around the counter to help me.

"He's upstairs. Should be down soon."

I heard Happy walk into the office and say, "Who are you?"

"Uh..." She said, panicking for a moment. I yelled, "He's cleared Daisy!

She responded, "Daisy Rogers. Nice to meet you."

"Phil?" Pepper said, from her place on my right, as I tuned out the conversation in the office.

I saw her eyes were looking past me at Phil, who said, "Hi Pepper."

She marched over to him and pulled him in for a hug.

"Do not do anything stupid like that again, do you hear me? You have a wife and a child. You don't do the crazy, super human threatening things," She said getting flustered.

"No more threatening mass-murdering gods," He joked, and she hit his arm.

"Don't try and make jokes. I'm so glad you are alright," She said, as I continued making the salad. Steve came in and said, "Hi Pepper."

"Hi Steve," Pepper said, greeting him with a kiss to the cheek. He responded with the same, "How
"I'm alright. The Extremis is stable. SHIELD is still working on a cure. Keeping your nephew from being reckless, but it's a full time job on top of running his company," She huffed, "Where is this granddaughter of yours?"

"In the office with Tony. He's giving her access to JARVIS. So, expect them to be conversing in tech babble for awhile," I said, tossing the salad as the oven went off.

"Where are the oven... mitts?" Steve asked, opening a drawer. I looked over as he kept quiet and sighed, "Sorry."

"That's never a sight I expect to see when I open a drawer in the kitchen, but I'm getting used to it with you," He teased, closing the drawer that contained two guns and four clips.

"I am nothing, if not prepared. Daisy's been eager to learn how to clean a gun and I forgot I put them in there when I was cleaning up this morning."

"How do you forget where you put a gun?" Phil smirked, as Pepper grabbed a wine glass from the cupboard

"Okay, I didn't forget. That's my usual spot for them. Just don't look in the ottoman for a blanket," I shrugged, with a small smile on my face.

"What's in there?" Pepper asked curiously, as she poured herself a glass from the bottle on the counter. Phil opened it before I could answer.

"It's an automatic assault rifle, throwing knifes and at least 15 lbs of ammunition," He said, looking up at me concerned, "There's a whole arsenal in here. Why do you need grenades in this neighbourhood."

"I was a Colonel in the Army, and I've been a spy for almost 60 years, what do you expect? Would you rather I didn't have weapons on hand to protect your daughter?" I sassed, pulling the dishes from the oven, "She's not two. She knows not to pull the pin on the grenades, and the guns have safeties on for a reason."

"Fine," He said closing the ottoman, "It's still a little weird, but you are a weapons hoarder."

"Damn straight. Food's ready," I yelled as Pepper and Steve helped me set the table.

"Yeah, yeah, give us a second! Your encryption is genius. You said you taught yourself?" I heard Tony say as they ran through something on Daisy's computer.

"Daisy, I give you permission to drag him over here by his ear if you have to, or you're running suicide sprints tomorrow."

"Yikes, you are strong for your size," He said, as Daisy snorted, "I've been doing intense training for the last month. I would hope I could drag you easily."

"You must be Daisy," Pepper smiled as Daisy approached with Tony. She released tony's arm to hold out her hand to Pepper.
"I am. It's taking some getting used to, introducing myself with my birth name though," She joked, before Pepper pulled her in for a hug instead.

"It's so wonderful to meet you. You don't know how excited Tony was to meet you. Kept going on about all the trouble you could get yourselves into, and how he was going to teach you how to hack the Pentagon," She said as she released my granddaughter. Tony kissed Pepper's cheek in greeting before sitting down next to her.

"It's actually surprisingly easy."

"That would be so cool! I mean... bad," She said, seeing my raised eyebrow.

"Tony, one of you is enough, okay?" I said sweetly, before he smirked, "I don't know. She's part Stark, right? She's got the 'Cause mischief' look to her. And Pep, you'll ruin my street cred if you keep talking about me like I'm a teddy bear."

"You are a teddy bear Tony," I said in a baby voice, as the rest of our family snickered.

"She has to hack the Pentagon once, just to say she can do it. Bragging rights," Tony argued with Pepper's distaste for hacking government agencies.

"Tony, no," Pepper said with finality, and he deflated, "Fine."

"Tony," Steve greeted our nephew.

"Grandpa," Tony sassed, giving a smirk.

"Behave you two, or I can repeat the last dinner we had," I warned Tony. He stuck his tongue out at me as Daisy snickered.

"Mom told me she slapped you," Phil smiled as he grabbed a dish of food to his right.

"I had a bruise for a week. I thought she broke my jaw," Tony faked sobbed, "But I deserved it."

"Colonel, have you caught up on Season 2 yet?" Happy asked me, as we all started dishing up.

"I have and I can say without embarrassment, I bawled my eyes out when he proposed in the snow," I sighed. Steve sent me a questioning look, "What?"

"Downton Abbey, TV show. I'll convert you like Happy converted me," I teased, "It's a time period piece that will seem a little familiar to you. It starts after the Titanic sinks. I didn't get into it until after Tony's AIM scuffle."

"Ugh, she got me hooked too," Daisy complained, "Stupid Matthew Crawley and his stupid perfect face!"

"New season comes out in January," Happy smiled and Daisy practically bounced in her seat, "I can't wait!"

After another bonding meal, where Tony and Phil actually got to know one another, Pepper and Tony actually had a plane to catch back to New York. Phil and Daisy wanted to stay up watching a movie and talking, but I was bushed. So Steve and I made our excuses, saying we wanted to be up early for Daisy's last morning run. He would be coming with us, following behind Daisy with me. But for tonight, as our room was on the other side of the house, I had him all to myself. As he
brushed his teeth, I undressed until I was just in the lingerie I had put on before dinner. I lay across the bed on my stomach, bending my legs at the knees, and crossing my ankles as I propped myself up by my elbows. I heard the water turn off, before I tossed my hair over my shoulder. I forgot how wonderful it felt when Steve or Bucky had just stopped and stared as I was dressing, or undressing. The looks in their eyes made me feel like the most beautiful girl in the world.

But when Steve came back into the bedroom with just his pyjama pants on, I watched him stop. His eyes filled with lust as I turned onto my back, stretching my arms above my head as I looked at him. He didn't say a word, but came to kneel over my hips. His lips ghosted across my own, as he began to peel the lingerie off my body. He started with the bra, kissing every inch of skin he exposed, and giving a small flick of his tongue to my nipples.

I shivered in need as he kissed his way down my stomach, repeating his technique from earlier as he peeled off my panties. I moaned in pleasure as his tongue flicked out against my folds once, before he latched on to my sex, driving me wild as I threaded my fingers in his short hair.

"Oh god," I moaned lowly.

"I'm not god, Doll," He chuckled, a husky edge to his voice as we locked eyes. He dove back in, humming in pleasure against my sex, lust blown eyes staring back at me.

I was losing my head to his ministrations, putting a hand over my mouth to keep from crying out as he added a finger to the stimulus. Instead of continuing, he pulled back abruptly, to pull his shirt over his head and drop his pants. He flipped me over onto to my stomach. He knelt between my legs, using one hand to hold me steady while he guided himself in.

"Oh, Steve," I breathed, as he became fully seated inside of me. He pulled me towards his chest, as he sat back on his heels, encouraging me to grind down on him. I rebounded on his member, making him shudder as he re-wrapped his arms around me, one gripping my hips, and the other massaging my breast.

I keened, feeling him brush up against the deepest parts of me, as he pulled my hair aside to nibble on my neck. He moaned against my skin, as I met him thrust for thrust. I was delirious with need as I felt him trail his fingers down over my hip to stimulate my folds.

"God, I missed you," He groaned, sucking on the spot behind my ear that drove me wild. His other hand was tight on my hip, pulling me impossibly closer until my back was flush against his chest.

"You spoil me when you get rough like this," I teased, before he released me to fall forward onto my hands. He gripped my hip harder with one hand, saying, "You want it rough?"

"Yes," I moaned, as he palmed my right butt cheek. He began to thrust into me, as I felt his thumb move closer to my puckered hole. He tapped it lightly, a silent question if this was okay or not. I practically sobbed, "Yes, please."

He slowed his thrusts, as he gently massaged my ass, preventing me from tensing up. He ran a hand over my sensitive clit, gathering my own lubrication, before he pushed his thumb in. I keened at the feeling, not used to anything being put into me this way. He kept thrusting, until I had relaxed around his thumb. The sensation was so new, that I didn't feel myself approaching the edge.

"Oh god, Steve I-"

"I know," he gasped out, "I'm there too Doll. Let go for me, let me feel you come undone."
My body convulsed with each wave of pleasure, milking Steve, who grunted at how tight my floor muscles squeezed him. He threw his head back before burying his face in my neck, withdrawing his thumb as he panted, "That... was... Fuck."

I laughed heartily at his drop of the f-bomb, "Fuck? Really? That's all you can articulate."

"How about... Holy shit, I missed you?"

We panted hard, trying to catch our breath as we collapsed back to the bed. Steve pulled out to spoon me from behind, dropping lazy kisses on my shoulder in between pants. I chuckled to myself, smug down to my toes with how he could play my body, feeling the evidence of our coupling leaking out a bit. I pulled myself up reluctantly, to clean up in the bathroom, coming back with a few extra facecloths to save on trips for later. I snuggled back into him, humming in content as he continued his kisses on my shoulder blade.

"You know, when Loki's mind control stuff wore off and you guys were acting like five year old on the ground, Nat asked me if the sex was still good," I said as he ran his fingers over my hip softly.

"And what was your answer?" He said smugly, before resuming his fun, now sucking a deep mark onto my neck.

"I said "Oh yeah." Now I want to call her and tell her that it's gotten so much hotter," I moaned, as I ground back up against Steve. At half mast already, but with a little wiggle he was ready to go again.

"Well, how about you can tell her tomorrow," He said, flipping me onto my back, and kneeling between my legs.

"Mmm, more please," I smiled deviously. His eyes darkened as I felt him jump against my thigh.

"Oh you'll get more. It's been a month without you, without you as I slept, without seeing you dance around the house as you cook or clean. A month without seeing this gorgeous figure waiting for me, as you were earlier. I planned on loving you all night, if you'll have me Colonel," He whispered, the husky tone in his voice sending heat pooling in my belly once more, before he dropped down to kiss me softly. I pulled him down to meet my chest, nipping at his lips as we kissed, not urgency but red hot desire fueling our actions.

"You'll hear no complaints from me. I am all yours Captain, always," I moaned, before giggling as his fingers brushed my waist, slapping a hand over my mouth.

"How am I just finding out you are ticklish?" He smiled, realizing why I was acting so shocked at the giggle I made.

"No, Steve, don't!" I squealed, as he assaulted my sides, laughing along with me.

Daisy was running about 50 feet in front of Steve and I, in the dawn's early light. I had made us all wear photstatic veils, not sure if Hydra had anyone trailing us. Even at 4:30am, I took our safety and security very seriously.

"This is so slow," I groaned.

"It's her last run with you. Just enjoy it. Even if she isn't technically with us," He said, smiling at me. He didn't even look winded, and I chuckled knowing I wasn't either.

"I usually open up the throttle about five minutes from the house. And that's about the last light post
on this street. She continues knowing I'm making breakfast by the time she gets home and finishes her training," I said, as we watched Daisy pass said light post.

"Have I mentioned how delectable you look in those pants today?" He asked and I snickered, "No. But I probably don't look as mouthwatering as you do in those contoured shirts."

"I doubt that. You can see every curve of your body and it's driving me crazy."

"You've been spoiled with too much sex, Captain. Pray tell, what you are going to do if we ever got separated again?"

"We won't be, because I promised you we wouldn't," He said softly.

"Damn, you got me there. Okay, you can have more of me tonight," I teased.

"Why don't you run ahead then? I'll keep an eye on her. You're distracting me."

"Really?" I smiled, "Thank you! I can't wait to run the National Mall when we get back to DC. It was always my favorite route."

He didn't get a chance to respond, because I was flying, moving at my normal pace, than was super human for anyone else. I passed Daisy, who laughed as I said, "Too slow!"

As I got back to the house, I stopped to take off my shoes and grab a water bottle from the fridge. Quickly showering and putting on clothes for the day, Daisy and Steve walked in the front door.

"Steve, go shower. Daisy, only 20 minutes today," I yelled, as I grabbed my ingredients from the fridge and I turned on my playlist.

"We are still going to that club tonight, right?" She asked excitedly as she panted lightly. I had promised her a reward for all her hard work, a night out. We'd have to be in disguise, but it would be a chance for both of us to let loose after looking over our shoulders this past month. It was more for her, because as I had told her, alcohol doesn't affect me.

"Not if you don't finish the workout," I said seriously.

"Slave driver!" She yelled teasingly to me as she turned to walk away, and I smirked as I half yelled back, "Shall we make it 40?"

When there was no answer but the sound of her heading for the gym in the house, I knew I won the argument. Sighing, I got to work, listening to the music that seemed to suit the mood. It was my last full day with Daisy, until I could come check up on Phil's new team. Whoever Mel picked as his science's department was her call, but I'd drop Jemma and Fitz's names too.

I zoned out as I flipped the pancakes, thinking back to the last time I had made blueberry pancakes for someone other than Phil.

"Beth, Beth!" Bucky's voice called to me. I shook my head and turned to see him smiling at me.

"Daydreaming again Doll?"

"Just imagining what our life will be after the war," I said, before flipping the hot cake.

"I think I know what it's going to be like," He said, leaning against the counter in the kitchen, "Quiet, peaceful."
"Not with your children it won't be," I smiled, gently reaching down to touch my stomach.

"Hey, I'm an angel compared to Steve, remember? That man never followed a goddamn rule in his life," He laughed, grabbing a blueberry from the bowl beside the stove. I smacked his hand with a wooden spoon, his left hand recoiling back as he feigned shock and hurt, "Ow. Abusive woman, I thought after basic I'd have a reprieve."

"Not with me as your SO still, Barnes. Those are for the pancakes. We have to save some for Steve," I said seriously, moving them out of his reach.

"Survival of the quickest, Doll," He teased, as Steve came in to kiss me good morning. I smiled against his lips, cupping his freshly shaved chin and saying, "Please tell Bucky that rations are still a thing? This was a treat this time of year to begin with."

"Hey, you remember that she's eating for two now. She needs it more than us," He said, taking Bucky in his arms to kiss him good morning. I smiled contently, watching them love one another.

"I remember. I'm going to carry last night with me forever. I just have to remember not to blurt it from the mountain tops," He sighed.

"Well, if I'm careful for the next two months we can tell everyone then," I said, stepping into their embrace. They sandwiched me between their chests, as I thought about this upcoming mission.

"What's wrong Elle?" Steve asked, as I sniffled, "I won't be there to help you if something goes wrong with grabbing Zola."

"Don't cry Beth, we'll come home to you. Always," Bucky said, and I tried to stop myself from crying.

"Are we having burnt pancakes?" Steve's voice teased, sounding far away.

"Elle?"

"Elle?" Steve said, breaking me away from the memory. I turned to him, seeing his concern, before I registered the smell of food burning.

"Shit," I breathed, quickly scooping out the burnt pucks onto a plate, and opening a window to air out the kitchen. I stopped after I had discarded the burnt pancakes, wiping my eyes, furious at the show of emotion.

"I miss him too," Steve said softly, causing me to sob. His arms came up to hold me from behind as I cried. I heard footsteps approaching from behind us, but I couldn't stop my tears.

"Mom," Phil's voice said, making Steve pull away as I quieted my sobs.

"I'm fine," I said, drying my eyes.

"You don't sound fine," Daisy's voice sounded from behind me, albeit out of breath.

"Is it Dad?" Phil asked, and I nodded, forcing a fresh wave back.

"What about Grandpa? He's right here," Daisy asked confused, as she pointed at Steve.

"We don't need to have pancakes Mom. Cereal is fine," Phil said, ignoring Daisy's question. I turned to face them, shaking me head, "No. I can't turn into a blubbery mess at the sight of blueberry pancakes. At least not forever."
"I'm confused," Daisy said, as Steve took over making the pancakes for me. I sighed, "Go shower Daisy, it's a long story and you'll want to be clean for breakfast."

She left, still puzzled at our reaction, as I started the bacon and eggs. Wiping my eyes, I helped Steve stack the pancakes and put them in the warming drawer until we were ready to eat. Phil set the table, and pulled out the syrup, juice and butter.

Daisy came back in, with her wet hair braided loosely, and said, "Okay, now can you tell me?"

"Daisy," Phil said, giving her a look. She looked a little guilty as she said, "I'm sorry, but I just want to know what everyone else knows."

"Sit down," I said, bringing the food over with Steve and making sure the oven was off. We dished up, before I took Steve's hand in support.

"You remember what I told you about Bucky Barnes?" I said softly, as I saw Steve's head dip in grief. I had been given 70 years to grieve over it and Steve barely had 5 months from his perspective. Either way, time didn't heal all wounds.

"Yes. That he was Grandpa's best friend before the war, and the three of you were inseparable. Great Uncle Tim called you the Three Musketeers," she replied, eyebrows furrowed. Phil's lips twitched up at the mention of Uncle Tim and again, I felt a pang of grief for my dead friend.

"Well, all of that was true. Except the fact that Steve and I both loved Bucky, and he loved us," I said, seeing her eyes widen and jaw drop in shock.

"As in, 'loved'?" She asked, sparing a look at Phil, who was still eating like he hadn't heard that his parents were swingers.

"Yes," Steve said, a proud note in his voice as he squeezed my hand, "If anyone had found out back in the day, we could have all been dishonorably discharged from the army, and labeled as sexual deviants for the rest of our days."

"Not to mention social pariahs," I added to Steve statement.

"So, we kept it to ourselves, sneaking away from SSR headquarters to your grandmother's place in London, where we didn't have to act for anyone. Bucky played the part well in public, the supportive friend, while we both knew it killed him inside to have to hide his love for us. I guess the proper term for it these days, even if it's still frowned upon, would be a polyamorous relationship."

"Your grandfathers had been together before I met them, knowing that they needed to try and find girls of their own, or people might talk about the two men still rooming together for almost seven years," I said, smiling fondly at the memory, "I met Bucky first, through basic training. He was one of my recruits, who flirted with me when no one was watching. I was falling for him, but he was shipping out. And as a Major, back then, I couldn't be in a relationship with one of the enlisted men under my purview. On top of the fact that I would never live it down, if any of my superiors deemed me khaki wacky."

"What?" Daisy smiled in amusement, Steve chuckling at the 40's term.

"Sorry, sometimes the 40's slang just slips out. Boy crazy," I smiled, "I had to be taken seriously, and there were plenty of men that wanted to prove Colonel Phillips wrong about me."

"Anyways, I was on furlough in New York for a week, because the next week we would be choosing the first Super Soldier. Well, whom everyone thought would be the first. And your great
Uncle Howard was showing off his failure of a flying car, that he would later perfect for your father—

"No way, Lola flies?"

"Yes, focus up first Daisy," Phil said, pointing at me with his fork.

"And as I was making my way to see Abe… Dr. Erskine, about some super hearing test he wanted to surprise me with, I saw Bucky again. He had two dates that I would later find out were meant for him and your grandfather. But that wacky blonde couldn't see past her nose, to see what an amazing man was right in front of her."

"Hey, she's not important right now," Steve smiled blushing, probably bashful at the reminder I liked him before the serum, "Finish the story."

"Alright. Anyways, he was polite and respectful, standing up straight as Bucky mentioned my rank, ever the soldier. Bucky was green with jealousy as I spoke to Steve, but later he would tell me that he was happy Steve was able to talk to a woman without fainting."

"Shall I tell the story?" Steve smiled at my teasing.

"No, I can tell it. After I left them and collected Dr. Erskine, we were on our way out to grab some dinner, because the super soldier metabolism is a bitch. We saw Bucky and your grandfather arguing at the Enlistment office at the World of Tomorrow Expo. I overheard with my super hearing, that they wished they could have had a last night together before Bucky shipped out. I also overheard them call me beautiful and that if Bucky couldn't have me or Steve, he would hope Steve and I could be together."

"It always confused me when you gave the reason of your rank for why you couldn't be with Bucky, but then I was only a private."

"Well, something about you made me want to bend the rules. Like Steve Rogers does," I teased, 
"And because I knew that after the procedure, you wouldn't be under my command. We thought there would be more, and you would have been promoted anyways for your big heart."

"We didn't know that..."

"Bucky and I did. After Azzano, I knew that if they didn't, I'd write the damn petition myself. And Colonel Phillips already knew I was sweet on you," I smiled.

"So, when he fell..." Daisy said softly, putting the pieces together.

"Our world was shattered. I had just told them a week earlier I was pregnant. We didn't know whose child it was, but we had to claim it as Steve's. After the war we were going to disappear, raise a whole house full of kids, but I lost the baby in my anguish after Bucky fell."

"And then this knucklehead crashed the plane," I said, kissing his knuckles softly to show him I wasn't mad anymore, "My world stopped. I became a very cruel person without them in my life. Until I had your father, that is."

"One of the last happy memories I had of them, was making blueberry pancakes, a few days before they went to capture Arnim Zola on that train. Bucky was buzzing with excitement about the baby, and I was weepy knowing they were going on a dangerous mission, without me as back up if something went wrong. Bucky tried to calm my fears saying that they would come home to me."
She was quiet after that, thinking about what I just said. Cutlery hitting plates was the only sound following our confession to our granddaughter.

"I could understand why you'd want to keep that to yourselves," She said in a small voice. I put my fork down to give her my full attention.

"It wasn't just to keep him to yourselves. It was so that the world didn't pervert his memory for you," She concluded.

"Yes. Even after they were both gone, I couldn't tell anyone. They would call them perverts instead of heroes. I let the rest of my friends die without knowing the truth, and I think, now that the world is a little more accepting, we can bring it out into the light," I said, looking at Steve.

"At least for our friends and family," He said, and I nodded.

"The way I saw it," Phil said, getting Daisy's attention, "Was that I have two Dads, two heroes to look up to. Two people who loved my mother, and made her happy. Who am I to say that's wrong?"

"Thank you," I smiled at Phil, feeling myself tear up.

"I'd do anything to make sure you were happy Mom. Including advising Fury to surprise you with the news about Dad," He said, grimacing a little.

"So I have you to thank for that kick to the chest?" Steve smiled at our son, who smirked nervously, "Sorry."

"Wait, you kicked him in the chest?" Daisy said, "I've got to hear this."

I laughed as Steve started in on the tale of his first day out of the ice, and how I Sparta kicked him across the floor of the New York base's training room. We could go from heavy and emotional to light and joking so fast.
Daisy and I did go out clubbing that evening, with Phil and Steve staying in for father/son bonding time. When we got home, Daisy was quite drunk, so I made sure she had plenty of water. She had a glass before I helped her out of her shoes and the veil, putting Advil and a bucket beside her bed just in case. I wasn't going to wake her up for a run tomorrow, because that would be very cruel. I've been a hardass to my recruits when they partied too hard the night before training. They refused to drink hard after, and most swore off alcohol after those sessions. But I could cut her some slack. Steve was waiting up for me, reading in bed as I walked in. He looked startled for a moment and I smacked my forehead, disabling the photostatic veil, "Sorry. It's like a second skin to me now, that I barely remember its on."

"Daisy's okay?"

"Poor thing passed out as soon as I got her in bed," I smiled sadly, as I tossed the veil onto a chair with my jacket.

"I'm glad you could have a night of fun though. With all the training she got, she deserved a break."

"Oh she did have fun. Do you want to run with me…. tomorrow?" I asked as he held up a sticky note I had left on my desk.

"Olympus 8am," He said, raising an eyebrow at me. I sighed and said, "I can't tell you where on a map it is, but I can tell you what it is. And what it's about."

"Okay," He conceded, as I started pulling off my dress, getting distracted by it falling for half a second.

"I'm meeting a doctor I trust, at a location off campus the day after we get back... to have my tubes untied," I said, watching his face turn hopeful.

"Really? Even with Hydra? Even without Dr. Simmons and Bruce knowing-"

"Even without knowing. And yes, even with Hydra. I can't let them dictate what I do with my life. I've lived with looking over my shoulder for so long, I'm tired. And I won't deny you something you want, just because I am scared I won't ever age with you," I said, climbing into bed, as he opened his arms to me. I settled against his chest as he held fast to me.

"Everything is going to work out. I believe that. You are going to age with grace, and we will have our happily ever after," He said, kissing the top of my head. I pulled back to look up into his eyes.

"I'm starting to as well," I smiled, leaning up to kiss him softly.
"Well, we have to be up in three hours for our run, so either you let me sleep, or ravish me knowing that I'm a bear when I'm up for over 24 hours," I teased as he tried to deepen the kiss. Sighing in exasperation as he pulled away, he said, "I guess I'll let you sleep."

"Good choice," I said, closing my eyes as I settled back against his chest. When my alarm went off later, I debated snoozing it to catch up on sleep. But I pulled myself out of bed reluctantly, seeing Steve stir at my movement.

"Run?" He smiled at me, "Or sleep?"

"Run. I need to stretch my legs, running at human speed is not enough for my muscles," I sighed, stretching and cracking my neck.

I got into my gear, pulling my hair up into a high ponytail and walked down the hall quietly to check on Daisy. She was still sleeping peacefully, and I knew she'd be out until 10am, at the earliest. Steve was already downstairs, pulling on his runners and tying them up tight. When he came out of the ice, I had told him that I went through a lot of runners and he didn't believe me. We were dropping maybe $500 on shoes alone each month. My accountant called to make sure no one had swiped our credit cards.

As I tightened up my shoelaces, Steve opened the door, saying, "So, if Daisy wasn't here, what's your usual route?"

"Honestly? I'd take the car up to the canyon and see how fast I could push myself," I smirked, grabbing the car keys.

"Alright. Lead the way Colonel." He smirked, as I walked over to the garage. A quick drive later, we were racing each other through the trail, laughing and having fun. It was the first time in years that I felt I didn't need to be another version of myself, the cold, hardened SHIELD agent everyone expected of me. Instead I was Elizabeth, the fun-loving version of myself from a million years ago, having fun with my fella.

We watched the sky start to lighten, before heading back to the car. Sneaking back in the house, I checked on Daisy first before following Steve. And as we made it back up to our room, Steve grabbed me close and started peeling off my running clothes. I giggled as he stripped his own off, knowing how our endorphins were up after a run and usually that meant sex. He pulled me under the spray of the shower, after stripping his own clothes off, effortlessly lifting me up and onto his waiting member.

"Steve, ohhh," I moaned.

"Elle, god, I love you," He breathed, before crushing my lips under his own.

With water pouring over us, Steve made love to me against the wall, teasing my ass with light touches.

"Don't tease," I moaned, "I know what you want to do."

"Are you sure?" He asked, sounding vulnerable, pacing faltering slightly.

"Do it, put in my ass Captain. Please," I keened, gazing into his eyes so he could see my sincerity.

He shuddered, using one hand to stretch me gently with his fingers. Once I had relaxed enough, he pulled out to set me on my feet and turn me to face the wall. He gently pushed his member into my ass, sucking in a ragged breath as he did. I tensed slightly at the intrusion, but relaxed as he stopped,
panting along with him. It was a few moments before he continued, stopping to let me adjust again. He dropped kisses to my shoulder as I relaxed, moving slowly to thrust into me.

"Ohh," I moaned softly as his other hand found my center, rubbing my folds gently.

"Oh god… thank you," He sighed in my ear, and I smiled to myself.

"I'm not god, but you can thank me anytime," I teased before he pinched my clit, making me squeal in pleasure. He rubbed harder, in time with his thrusts, and I could feel the build happening in my lower belly. Steve grunted, as I sunk my teeth into my arm to keep from crying out as I climaxed. He pulled out suddenly, spilling to the shower floor between my feet. He seemed so relaxed as I turned to him, wrapping my arms around his waist.

"Here, let me," I said, grabbing a loofah and soap for him. He sighed as he relaxed, sitting down on the bench to let me shampoo his hair.

"You must be an angel," He smiled at me as I helped rinse him.

"No, just your wife," I teased, as I checked him over for suds, "I think you're clean."

"Good, your turn," He said, soaping up the loofah again with my body wash. He was feather light in his caresses as he washed me, stealing kisses and teasing my body again. It was practically orgasmic having him wash my hair, massaging my scalp with just the right amount of pressure.

He finished rinsing me off before turning the water off, wrapping me up in a towel softly, before wrapping one around his waist.

"Mmm," I sighed, admiring his body, as we got dressed.

"Later," He smirked, winking at me. I laughed lightly, pulling my hair up into a braid. Steve started packing our stuff, and I went to make breakfast, only to find Phil coming back from the home gym.

"Damn, I've been caught," He sighed.

"The doctor didn't okay that, did he?"

"Not yet. But I need to do something. I've been in a hospital bed and then in Tahiti relaxing, but I want to run, train," He said and I held my breath as I asked, "How was Tahiti?"

"It's a magical place," He responded automatically, and I forced a smile, "I'm glad you are back though."

"Thank you, for surprising me with Daisy. It was like a breath of fresh air, knowing she'd been found. That she was back with us."

"The 'us' you are referring to, is missing one very important person; your wife," I said, grabbing eggs, ham and mix for waffles. Phil sighed, "I know. I think I'll find her first thing when I get back to DC."

"Remember, she knows she has to pretend we didn't find Daisy. We don't know where they have eyes or ears in SHIELD. So you may have to put on a front for awhile."

"So encoded messages?"

"Of course. This isn't my first rodeo. She's got a key and we pass them through Maria until you're on the BUS. Daisy has a non traceable cell that I have the spouse to-"
"Bus?" He asked, confused.

"Ah, right. I mentioned to Fury that a Globemaster would probably do for space for your new team," I smirked, as I opened the pictures Fury had sent me of the renovated space.

"Wow. And hey, it's got a bar!" He said excited as he flipped through the pictures.

"All packed," Steve came in greeting Phil with a, "Good morning. Were you just in the gym?"

"Morning Dad. Yeah, I should go shower before Mom gets after me," He smiled, leaving as I gave him the stink eye.

"Checked in on Daisy, still fast asleep."

"Might not be for long. Once she smells food, she's usually up for the day. She looks like the Walking Dead, but she's out of bed," I shrugged, starting food. Phil came back down, sitting on the couch with Steve to watch the morning news as I started coffee for them. My tea was iced today, and I had a detox tea ready for Daisy when she came down. I heard a grumble to my left and looked up to see her bed head first.

"Cousin Itt! I haven't seen you in forever," I teased her, giving her the iced green tea.

"You are a saint. Thanks for the Advil Grams," She said, squinting at the brightness from outside.

"I'm your Grandma, it's my job to take care of you. Even when it was your own fault for having those extra shots," I teased.

"I should have believed you when you said you couldn't get drunk. I challenged myself when I thought I could out drink you," She sighed, sitting at the island counter holding her head.

"Yeah, it's not something I take lightly. Now, we need to go over our play," I said and she sighed, "Again?"

"Daisy, you agreed to this. You need to be perfect. Remember, partial truths to help you remember the mission. Your father is in charge, and you'll start to act as if he is a father figure to you. You'll 'betray' your team at one point, and you'll know your opportunity when it arrives. Your Mom is closed off, and you know why, but you'll act like you want to know more about the Cavalry."

"You told her about Bahrain?" Phil asked, turning around on the couch shocked.

"Mom didn't want to keep that from me," She nodded, "I understand why she had to. It was an impossible decision."

"I told her to. We need complete trust in each other, especially for what were are about to do."

"I understand. I just know she always thought you wouldn't look at her the same way once you found out."

"She's not a monster, she isn't undeserving of love. She had to make a call, and when I had all the facts, I know she made the right one, not the easy one," Daisy said, before taking a sip of her tea. Phil smiled at her softly, "We don't deserve you."

"That's true. You are more than we deserve," Steve said, smiling proudly at Daisy.

"Oh stop," She blushed, ducking her head as I slid a plate of food in front of her.
"Come and get it. And then we'll run through the plan again," I said, motioning for the guys to get up, "We're a ways from the end zone, but we've got to be prepared for any possibility."

We left Phil and Daisy with a tearful goodbye later that afternoon. Steve drove to the car rental drop off, while I tried to pull myself together before our cab ride to where I parked the Quinjet. I had given her free reign of the house until Phil's team picked her up, when Mel would sneak away to close it up and throw away food that might spoil. Phil was driving back to DC tomorrow morning, flying part of the way with Lola. Daisy and I had encrypted phones that would only work for the other number and a specific password, so we could communicate as things changed.

Melinda had looked into my recommendation of Jemma Simmons and Leo Fitz for Phil's science department. Jemma had been keeping me updated on her research with Bruce, saying they were close to a breakthrough. It was my hope that I held onto, as Steve and I got in that night. Zeus was still with Natasha, and we'd pick him up tomorrow after we were done at Olympus. I had a few boxes of canned goods that Steve and I juggled easily up the stairs.

And while our evening was quiet, the next day was insane. Steve and I had our regular morning run, racing each other around the National Mall at least ten times. We grabbed Steve some breakfast before we ran back to the apartment, where I finally met our neighbor in the hallway. My eyes widened as Sharon smiled and introduced herself, "You must be Elizabeth. I'm Kate."

I turned to Steve quickly, who tapped his ear to remind me of the bugs and I nodded, "Hi, it's nice to meet you Kate."

"It's an honor to meet you Colonel. I never got a chance to meet you after you moved in," She said, and I saw the earnest look in her eyes that said she was sorry for not warning me about the security detail.

"Yeah, I had some business in California," I said and she nodded, "Well, I'm glad you are back. It seemed like he was only eating delivery for the first few weeks."

"Blame her, she's got me hooked," Steve smiled, and I knew he was aware of why she was here. Fury must have told him.

"We'll have you over one night for dinner. Non-takeout now that I'm back," I teased Steve good naturedly.

"I'll bring dessert," She smiled, "I make a mean peach cobbler."

"Sounds wonderful," I smiled, knowing I taught her how to make that. It was my recipe, it better be good.

"Well, I've got to get some laundry done before my shift, so I'll see you around," She said, taking her basket of scrubs and heading towards the stairs.

"See you," I said as Steve unlocked our door. After dropping our keys off in the bowl beside the door, and locking the door behind us, we moved towards the bathroom. He grabbed us towels as I started the water. The shower was the only place we could talk normally, without the act. The bugs couldn't hear over the water, and we could talk quietly enough they would think we were just being silent.

"Is this place somewhere you can have me?" He asked, and I hummed about that.

"I can, but we'd have to leave undercover. You'd have to be blindfolded about halfway there, to
"make sure you couldn't identify landmarks."

"What is Olympus?"

"A secret base of mine," I said as we got into the shower, "Peggy had one, Fury has another, and Olympus is mine. Fury and I know all the locations but we can't allow anyone else, other than Maria to know. It's important that you aren't able to give away any indication of where we might be planning our strike against Hydra And once I'm pregnant... I'm leaving SHIELD, going off grid. I don't want them knowing we are trying, or when I actually get pregnant."

"So what's the doctor doing today?"

"Surgery to untie my tubes. I'll be healed by tomorrow morning."

"How will you hide... the pregnancy from cameras on the streets or in stores? SHIELD does face traces all the time and if they want to know where you are-"

"I thought about that. We have something called a Photostatic veil, the thing I was wearing the other night to disguise my face for the club? I thought someone was wearing your face when you first came out of the ice, because our tech is that good. It can replicate anyone's face, even so far as adding or reducing the look of weight. I'm going to see if Dr. Fitz can make me one for my mid section. If not, winter is coming and I can wear bulky jackets until we figure something out."

"Alright, I trust you," He said, kissing me softly. I know he was still worried about a pregnancy with Hydra breathing down our necks, but he knew I had thought of every possible way they might figure it out and I had contingency plans in place. I was the master strategist after all.

"Let's hurry up, we don't want to be late," I said, quickly scrubbing my hair clean.

After throwing Photostatic veils on Steve and myself, a ball cap and some sunglasses, we left. We walked a few blocks until I turned into an overflow parking lot. I picked out the non-descript work van, pulling out a key and telling Steve to get in the back. He did, pulling on the black bag I handed him, as I started up the vehicle.

About fifteen minutes later I was pulling under my bases garage door, using the keypad for the door to shut it behind me.

"Okay, you can take it off," I said, and I heard him huff, "It's stuffy under those things."

"And disorienting," I smiled wryly, as I stopped the van.

I got out, with Steve following out the side door, sliding it shut. He came around to take my offered hand as we started walking up the ramp. I put my hand on a scanner by the door, and watched it work.

"Retinal scan," A male voice said, as I pulled the veil off. I looked into the eye scanner and tried not to blink as it passed over my eye.

"Voice confirmation," It said and I said, "Colonel Elizabeth Hermione Rogers. And guest."

"Confirmed," The male voice said. The door opened and Steve looked shocked at the facility. I didn't have workers running it, but it was still operational.

"Welcome back Ma'am. I would like to alert you to Agent Hill and Doctor Fine's presence. They are waiting in the medical wing."
"Thank you HERMES. Run systems diagnostic and please add Captain Rogers to the list of guests. We'll add official security clearance before we leave. Please ready the retinal scan, biometric scan and"

"Yes Ma'am."

Steve looked at the ceiling and asked, "What was that?"

"I had Tony make me my own AI when he made JARVIS. JARVIS runs the suits, the Tower, most of Stark Industries and Tony's personal computer. But I only needed something simple, data storage and security. HERMES runs the base, and before we leave, I'll get you added to the security system."

"Hermes? Like the messenger of the gods?"

"Yeah. Tony thought it was funny when he heard the base's name. Homebase Entity with Repository and Monitoring of External Systems. The original acronym was given when Tony was very drunk."

"What was that?" Steve chuckled, only guessing.

"Homebase Entity Recording Multitudes of Espionagey Stuff. Needless to say, I had JARVIS fix it to not sound like a ten-year-old picked it," I smiled, "It very important that you immediately scan your hand. If the sensors detect a presence at the door that hasn't within 30 seconds, the machine guns in the wall vent come out to play."

"That's... concerning."

"It's called paranoia, and I'm okay with it," I shrugged, "I've gotten through more secure doors in less time with SHIELD tech."

I led him down back hallways, past training rooms, a lounge, labs and an ops room. I could hear Maria's voice as we approached the medical labs, and I announced myself, "We good?"

"Yes Colonel," She nodded to me as I took in Dr. Fine, "We weren't followed."

"Good morning Dr. Fine," I said to him and he nodded, "Good morning Colonel. I assume you followed my pre-op instructions?"

"Yes. I haven't had anything to eat or drink in the last 4 hours. If I go any longer, I may die from starvation," I joked, as he motioned towards the bed.

"Put on the gown, and then we'll get started. Normally I have another set of hands to help prep you, so it will take me a few more minutes," He apologized

"I've got all day Doc, don't worry."

"I can help. I had some medical training in the army," Maria said, and he nodded in thanks.

"Because you'll just metabolize it, we can't do anesthesia," Dr. Fine explained as I got changed behind a screen.

"Yeah, that's what I was worried about. When I had them tied originally, it was a bitch to not punch out the surgeon. So Steve can hold me down if needed," I said, stripping out of my jeans.
"You aren't giving her anything?" Steve asked the Doctor, concerned.

"It will be painful, but the Colonel has had worse Captain. She's walked into my operating room with a spear through her shoulder and walked out an hour later by herself. I've watched her re-grow her whole hand. It was disgusting and intriguing," He said and I chuckled, "But it sucked for me. Bones are a deep pain when they heal that fast."

"I haven't heard those stories."

"I'll tell you later, Darling. This little bit of pain will be worth it Steve," I said, coming back behind the curtain to hop on the operating table. Dr. Fine hooked me up to monitors for practical reasons, making sure my heart didn't suddenly stop for one, and started an IV for the off chance of blood loss. And it would be just my luck to die when I just decided I wanted to keep on living.

Maria and Dr. Fine went to scrub up and Steve sat by my head as they left. He was looking nervous and said, "I don't think I can watch."

"Hey, they will put a screen up so you don't have to. Grab the straps from that drawer, will you?"

"What are these things?"

"Howard made them for me. After the last time I had surgery to have the tubes tied, I didn't want to rip myself free of the flimsy ones the hospitals use. Put one around the table, underneath right above me knees," I said, directing him, "Perfect, now one right under my bust."

"These feel familiar," He commented, as he rubbed them between his fingers and thumb.

"It's like the material he used for our Commando suits. He used it to reinforce my punching bags too. They should hold me," I said as Dr. Fine came back in, and started setting up.

"We are going to do this laparoscopically. I knew the last time you had it done was more invasive," He said, starting the machine above me.

"Yeah, it's not a memory I enjoy," I said, closing my eyes.

"I understand you may not pass out from the pain, which is unfortunate, but you need to keep talking so I can gauge how you are doing."

"Can do. Steve, what do you want for dinner?"

"I was thinking Chinese food," He said, as I heard Maria murmur, "Scalpel."

"I'm not feeling it. How about Indian-ARGH!" I yelled in pain, trying not to move as Dr. Fine made an incision. It was one thing in the heat of battle or a firefight to get injured. It was another entirely when you weren't in that setting, and relaxed.

"Remember just a little bit of pain," Steve reminded me gently, and I growled at him, "Shut up."
Chapter Twenty Seven

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! So my day just kept getting in the way of posting. It's midnight where I am, but I hope you can forgive me, because you'll 'hopefully' like these chapters. Enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

We got home later that afternoon, after Dr. Fine was sure I was healed. The one thing that sucked about my regenerative cells, was that I could have things heal wrong, like anyone else, and then it would have to be redone or reset. Dr. Fine suggested not to actively start trying for another week or two, as non-regenerative patients usually were told to wait a month. Nat dropped Zeus off with a smile, "He was exceptional."

"Hi baby boy!" I squealed, dropping to greet Zeus with a kiss to the head.

"So how was Cali?" She asked, as I cuddled my furbabies head.

"It was good, I'm feeling ready to get back in the game," I said, handing her a piece of flashpaper I had prepared while at Olympus, as well as my blacklight pen. She smiled, "Feeling all relaxed?"

"As relaxed as I'll ever be in my entire existence," I sighed, as she read the note. I knew what she was smirking at.

*Found Daisy a month ago. Trained her to work undercover, and she's excited to work with you. Phil met us there, and they are basically an older version and a girl version of Steve. Got my tubes untied today so expect to be holding a baby this time next year, godmother.*

"Well, some of us have a full time job babysitting children," She teased to Steve. She handed me back the note with a genuine smile on her face, before she hugged me tightly.

"I'm getting back into the swing of things. I had four months off," He sighed as Nat released me. She nodded, "Technically it was 70 years Cap. You're rusty. Well, I should let you settle in."

"Thanks again for watching him," Steve said, as Nat rubbed Zeus's head once more, "He's too adorable not to love. It was a pleasure."

"See you soon," I smiled as I shooed Zeus down the hall, passing Steve's shield against the wall.

"Bye," She said, before saying goodbye to Steve. The door closed as I looked around the living room. I hadn't really gotten a chance to look around since we got home last night, and I was impressed with how Steve set up our home while I was away. He had done a nice job, keeping decorations simple, not overcrowding the space. We hadn't brought much from New York, and a lot went into Howard's storage upstate. I really shouldn't say Howards Storage anymore. That particular facility had gone to me in Howard's will, but I kept it up. But my prized possessions, my guitar, my reading chair and my record player came with us. I had a little reading nook in the corner with Tim's armchair, already calling to me. It was something the kids had given me, and it was the comfiest thing I owned. Tim never let any other person sit in his chair, and the kids didn't want to fight over it.
"Could I interest you in a movie?" I asked.

"Which one?" Steve asked, pulling his little book out of his back pocket.

"What's on your list?" I asked, tucking myself into one corner of the couch, grabbing the remote.

"Um," He frowned as he sat down, "Star Wars/Trek."

"Well, I guess I will show you my least favorite of the two first," I sighed, turning on the TV and opening my library.

"This the one with lightsabers? Or whatever you and Tony were yapping about during New York?" He asked, inquisitively.

"Yes. I am actually excited to see what Tony comes up with. Mentioned he was almost done a prototype the other night," I shrugged, "I don't love the series, but we have to start with the first three."

"Isn't that how you would watch it?"

"No. Well, George Lucas the creator, made the 4th, 5th, and 6th movies first. And he waited until the technology was better to make the prequel films. Honestly, the only thing I liked was Obi-Wan and the sass-master that he is. I will sit through these with you, because you are the only unspoiled adult in the universe, and when you figure it out, it will be worth the torture to see your face."

"You know, you talk about torture a lot when you talk about these films."

"That's because I was forced to watch them all with Tony who, was 7 when the first one came out, and wouldn't shut up afterwards," I said starting up the movie. I set it a little louder, so that we could still whisper in each other's ears.

"So, two weeks?" He asked, and I shrugged, "It might be less before my body remembers how things work. I'm very sure we can still have sex in those two weeks, but not actively 'trying'."

"Elle, you know you don't have to do this for me," He said, and I nodded, "But I want to. I want a family with you. I want you to see your children growing up, and be there."

"God, I love you... Wait, the kid has this force too?" Steve asked louder.

So we waited two weeks, being very careful to not speak anything out loud about anything 'baby'. I was back at work by then, receiving encrypted messages from Daisy, who had been picked up by Phil's team already, and keeping my wits about me. Rumlow's dead drops continued, bearing more names marked for elimination, more Hydra heads and their locations. I was sending dead drops ot Nat and Clint to keep them apprised of the situation and how best to contact me off the grid.

I knew exactly why I was nauseous, two weeks after I was supposed to be receiving Aunt Flo for her monthly visit. I didn't want to get my hopes up, in case it was just my body playing tricks on me. I had to run the shower to cover the sound of my retching into the toilet. Steve padded in, pulling my hair back and rubbing my back soothingly. I could feel his anxiety in his touch, wondering if this was it.

"You have strong swimmers," I commented as we got in to shower for the day. I had quickly brushed my teeth to get rid of the bile in my mouth, before letting him guide me in to get clean.
"Thank you?" He smiled confused, before putting a hand on my stomach.

"This is it," I said softly, "The start of a crazy life."

"I still can't believe I get this," He said, pulling me close to kiss me, "The wife, the kids, and the house? It feels like a dream."

"Well, I am no dream buddy," I said rolling my eyes teasingly. "I've got issues. I was a bear when I was pregnant with Phil. I almost feel sorry for my latest batch of recruits."

"What issues? I only know one fault, you can't take a compliment," He teased back, kissing me softly.

"I am scared though," I said so softly, I didn't think he would hear it.

"I know. I am too. With Hydra looming over our heads, I wondered if this was a good idea. But we're together now, and we are stronger together than apart," He said, laying a hand over my heart. I knew he was thinking of Bucky, like I was as well. It hurt enough to raise Phil alone, but even after so many years without him, it still felt so fresh that Bucky wasn't here with us.

"How about, if this one is another boy," I started, "We name him Buchanan. Or even use it as a middle name? Bucky would ask, "Do you hate our kid or something?"

"It sounds wonderful," He smiled at me, "And he would wonder if we were cracked in the head with Buchanan."

"And how about Joseph or Robert for either of his grandfathers," I mentioned, biting my lip as I waited for Steve to react. He swept me in for a deep kiss and said, "You are amazing, do you know that?"

"You keep trying to tell me, but I can't take a compliment, remember?" I chuckled.

"Sophia," He said softly, and my smile fell out of shock.

"For a girl," He added, as I stayed silent.

"You want to name her after my Mom?" I said, feeling my eyes leaking as I spoke. He smiled, "She raised you to be strong and take care of others. She'd be so proud of you today. We should honor her, the way you want to honor Bucky. And we'll decide later if we name a boy after my father or Robert. Or even Alexander, after your father."

"Thank you," I said, leaning up on my toes to capture his lips in a searing kiss. He pulled back to rest our foreheads together and gaze lovingly into my eyes.

"So, what does this mean for work?"

"Dr. Fitz is almost done the veil. Phil's team should be back to the Triskelion while the BUS is being repaired. I'm going to sneak away to meet with Fitz and Simmons. Daisy and May will walk in, still using her cover and we'll 'bond' from there."

"Wait, what happened to the plane?" He asked concerned.

"They had to blow a hole in the side of it. A Peruvian black ops team was invited on board and commandeered it. Their leader was someone Phil knew from back in the day. Mel is not happy about the hole, and neither is Fury," I chuckled.
"As long as they are all okay," He sighed, and I reached behind him to shut of the water, signaling the end of our conversation.

We got ready for the day, with me playing music loudly to cover the two trips I took to puke my guts out again. I felt I had a handle on it when I walked in to the Triskelion that day. Steve went to go train, kissing my cheek in goodbye, before I went to find my recruits for the day, Zeus being handed off to an intern for a walk.

Because I was grouchy from the nausea, I put them through the wringer, more than usual that day. And when I heard a comment under one recruits breath that I was busting their balls, I eyed him hard, telling him he would be doing the course again while everyone watched.

It was particularly cruel of me, as I made sure to comment on his form to the group, so they didn't make the same mistakes. After I sent them on a run, I left the room, intending to meet Dr. Fitz and Dr. Simmons. Nat was following me, I could hear her, so I ducked down a hallway that I knew wasn't monitored regularly.

"Where are you going? What about your 'maggots'?"

"If my 'recruits' were smart, they'd either keep running or do the Absentee Father again. If not, they will run it twice as much tomorrow," I commented, stopping to say, "I'm heading to see someone about my aging thing. And a covert 'test'. Are you coming or not?"

She knew Jemma was the one I was consulting about it, and that she was on Phil's team. And where Phil's team was, Daisy and May were. She gestured her head silently, and we walked down several hallways until we were in the Science division.

"Colonel Rogers, ma'am, and Agent Romanoff," Jemma said, greeting us as we walked into the lab area.

"Good afternoon Dr. Simmons. I trust you are well."

"I am, thank you for asking," She said as she shook my hand, slipping a small piece of paper into my palm.

"Do you know where Agent May is? I heard a rumor she is out of admin and wanted to check it out for myself," I asked, as I snuck a peak down at the note. *We made a breakthrough. Still trying to make it safe for gestation. Fitz has snuck the veil into your gear locker with Agent May's help.*

"I'm not sure. She had to check in with command about the repairs on our BUS. Is there anything I can help you with?" She asked, smiling. I brushed my stomach lightly with a quick tap, saying, "Not me. Agent Romanoff here wanted to see about a new weapon or two. I thought I'd join her, but now I need to scoot off to the little girls room."

"Of course Ma'am. There is a small bathroom towards the back of the lab," She said, picking up on my subtle que. She grabbed something from a drawer covertly, and showed me the door, "Just let me make sure it's clean. I have to share it with Fitz."

"Oh I understand," I smiled, "I grew up with one of those genius slobs. Sorry to say, they don't grow out of it."

When I was able to use the bathroom, I saw that Jemma had put a small sample cup on the counter, along with a dipstick. I understood that she wanted me to test it myself, so that I could get rid of the evidence after. I'd had to have regular physicals during my time at SHIELD, regardless of knowing I was in perfect physical condition every time. I always denied the blood tests, and I knew they
couldn't do too much with a urine sample. So it wasn't unfamiliar to me to pee in a cup. But reading the instructions on the stick, I knew it would be different than a home pregnancy test. It would show pink immediately if I was pregnant.

_Yup, pink,_ I thought to myself, seeing the stick change color. I was equal parts excited and scared out of my mind at the thought. But I had Steve with me this time, and neither of us would let anything happen to this baby. I flushed the evidence and disposed of the cup before washing my hands.

I locked eyes with Jemma as I opened the door and gave her a quick nod. She gave the briefest smile that I was assume was congratulations before saying, "Fitz should be back in a minute or two. Agent Romanoff here was just telling me about your recent vacation. Was it nice?"

"Wonderful actually, just what I needed after New York. I normally get July off, but I had canning I needed to accomplish and Captain Rogers wanted to get back to work. I may just wait around to see how Dr. Fitz is doing before heading back. My recruits hopefully don't need a babysitter to tell them to continue working when I'm not there. But we'll see," I said as the door opened behind us. Nat and I looked back to see Daisy, acting like a deer in the headlights.

"Holy shit," She said, pointing at us and slowly smiling, "Black Widow and Athena!"

I narrowed my eyes for show as May came up behind her saying, "That's Colonel Rogers and Agent Romanoff to you."

"Sorry, it's just so cool to meet the most badass women in SHIELD. And they are Avengers!" She babbled, "Not that you aren't badass Agent May."

"What's your name?" I asked, using my authoritative voice.

"Skye," Daisy responded, knowing Nat was aware of her cover.

"What, no last name?" Natasha said, and 'Skye' deflated. She was a good actress, after a bit of training.

"No. Orphan," She said pointing to herself.

"I'm sorry," Nat said softly, "That sucks."

Daisy shrugged, "C'est la vie. But it's an honor to meet you both."

"It's nice to meet you too Agent Skye," I nodded before May said, "She's not an Agent, just a consultant."

"Well, either way, I know you'll do some good with SHIELD," I said, and she gave a small smile, "Thanks. I will do my best Colonel."

"Good to see you out of Admin Agent May. You were missed in the field," I nodded to her, as she held her head up, "I am glad to be back in the field Colonel."

"I know it wasn't your choice, but I believe you were picked for a reason. And the reason may be to get back on that horse, so to speak," I said, as she nodded. Daisy smirked a little and I turned to her, "Something funny?"

"Just the horse thing. Her nickname is the Cav-"

"I'm gonna stop you there. Melinda May is a damn fine agent, deserving your respect young lady
and the 'nickname' they have given her was in poor taste to what transpired that day. You would do well to remember that the next time someone mentions it," I said sternly, chastising 'Skye'.

"Yes Ma'am. I'm sorry Agent May," Daisy said softly. I saw Melinda give her a slight nod, before turning back to me, "How is the Captain ma'am?"

"He's well. Seemingly adjusted to modern times, yet every once and awhile forgets how to use the microwave. Apparently he's been eating take out for the month I was on vacation."

"That doesn't surprise me. You told me he couldn't cook," Nat smirked.

"He can. Just likes my cooking better. During the war I was making every meal, but in this century I actually expect him to pull his weight around the house," I joked as Fitz walked in.

"Colonel Rogers, Ma'am. And Agent... Agent Romanoff," Fitz said blushing, and swallowing thickly. She gave him a once over and smirked, "You must be Fitz. The Colonel tells me you might be able to design a couple new weapons for me. Or improve my current arsenal."

His eyes widened and he stammered, "I... I could... could do that for you. What... What were you thinking of?"

"I'll leave you here then. Need to go check to make sure my 'maggots' haven't done something stupid, like think they were done for the day," I said as she waved me off and Mel smirked, "Need a sparring partner for them? I need some exercise."

"Sounds perfect. I have an unfair advantage. They need to know how deadly we 'unsuspecting, petite women' can be," I smirked and then looked to Daisy, "Care to watch?"

"Uh, yes please!" She said excited, "Simmons, are you coming?"

"I think I'll just stick close to the labs today. We may need some smelling salts on hand for Fitz," She smiled at how flustered Fitz seemed to be with Nat's presence. Nat seemed to notice how nervous she made him, but it wasn't amusement on her face, it was something akin to fondness. Nat knew she was considered beautiful, a sex symbol even, but people usually feared her because of her code name. Fitz was acting like he had a crush on her, stammering and blushing under her gaze. I noticed how tightly to the counter he was standing and bit my tongue to keep from smiling. She wasn't even wearing her catsuit, just a pair of dark wash skinny jeans, black heels and a green top that brought out her hair and eyes.

"Alright, let's head back to the training rooms," I said, catching Nat's eye. She gave me a coy smile and turned her attention back to Fitz as he rambled on about how to improve her Widow Bites.

I backtracked the route Nat and I took to the labs, pausing by grabbing Daisy's arm. I smiled at her and whispered, "No cameras." She leapt towards me, holding me tight and whispered, "I missed you Grams."

"I missed you too my sweet girl," I smiled at her as I saw Mel touch Daisy's shoulder. Daisy leapt into her arms, happy to not be on guard for the moment and reveling in her mother's love.

"I missed you Mom," She said, as I watched her eyes leak. Mel just squeezed her tighter and said, "Not as much as I missed you. It has killed me not being able to hug you since we picked you up."

"Me too. Same with Dad. Did the house get closed?" Daisy asked her Mom as she pulled out of the hug.
"I did, and I managed to swipe a few cans of your Grandma's spiced peaches. We may need to use them to bribe someone for their kidney," Mel teased and I smiled as I kept watch of the hallway.

"Okay. First things first, I need to speak to your Dad tonight. Can you find him and tell him to meet me at Olympus and veil up?" I asked Daisy softly.

"Where's that?" Daisy asked softly, and Mel sighed, "Top secret."

"I'll type it out on my phone and show him," Daisy said, understanding she couldn't know yet.

"We need to go. Game faces on," I said, nodding towards the end of the hallway. We walked, passing agents who nodded to May and me, and giving Daisy confused looks. She was in street clothes and definitely didn't look like an agent. As we got to the gym, I was happy to see that at least half of the recruits were completing the course without being told, and another quarter were running still on the track. The other quarter however...

"Is there a reason you are just standing around, twiddling your thumbs?" I barked out, watching them flinch in fear as they noticed me striding over to them.

"No ma'am," They said, standing at attention for me.

"Then you'll be glad to know I have a treat for you. Those who were not finding something to do, like continue their running or running the course, will be sparring," I said, as they looked ready to partner off.

"Not with each other, but with Agent May," I said, as Mel stepped up beside me. They didn't know who she was as I picked the cockiest one out of the crowd. They got ready on the mat, with the recruit looking at me confused as to why his classmates and I took a step back from it. May attacked him viciously, taking him down easily. He looked shocked as she pointed a finger to his head and said, "Dead."

"All those who were not using their time productively will be sparring Agent May. All those that were using their time to run the course or simply run, will be watching," I said as the rest of them stopped the course in shock, running over to grab a seat on the floor before I changed my mind.

One by one, they all fell, some even trying to get back up. But Mel was relentless, getting back into the groove of things after so long in Admin. Daisy was entranced, seeing some of the moves I taught her mom and her, finally being used in action. Natasha walked back in halfway through, chuckling at the shocked faces of my recruits. And when the last one fell, Mel stepped back, blowing a lock of hair out of her eyes and said, "Anyone else?"

The recruits shook their heads and Daisy snickered, "Way to hand them their asses."

"For those who kept working and pushing themselves, I can tell you that you will go far in SHIELD. For those of you who that took my absence as a reason to take a rest, I will say this; You can rest when you are dead. I had a hand in building this organization from the ground up, demanding excellence of my recruits. For some of you, you worked your asses off to be here, others were picked from your military career. All of you, have something to give this organization, whether it is involved in the sciences, communications or as specialists," I said, hearing footsteps behind me.

"You give your all, or you get out. I have no time for those who think its fun to be an agent, or that are here to travel the world. We are trying to build a better world, protecting the people of Earth from threats like we faced in New York. If your gonna stand there, shaking in your boots, you need to find another line of work. Cause I'm not going to hold your hand, and Agent May here certainly
won't count on you to have her back in the future if you freeze up now."

"So, are you going to be wimps, crying in your foxholes, or are you going to be warriors, charging into battle to defend your world?"

"Warriors!" They yelled back at me.

"Then act like it. The fight isn't over until I say it is. Run it again, and then hit the showers. You're dismissed for the day after that," I said, turning my back as they yelled, "Yes Colonel!"

I saw Steve giving me a look and I felt the heat from across the room as I heard the recruits start up the Absentee Father again.

"Oh my god, it's Captain America," Daisy said excitedly, "Three Avengers in one day? I may faint!"

"Calm yourself," May said softly, and I knew she was telling Daisy to stop laying it on so thick. She took a deep breath and said, "Sorry, but this is insane. I joined SHIELD not even two weeks ago, and I've met three Avengers."

"If you aren't up for the job-" May said, but I cut in, "We are ordinary people too Skye. Right now, I have to go ask my husband what he wants for dinner tonight. Tomorrow morning, we go to work like everyone else. I hope you remember that we fight to keep people's lives normal, not for glory."

"I understand," She said as Steve came up beside us.

"So, we have a mission," He says, frowning as Nat groaned.

"Okay. ETA home?"

"Hopefully around 12am. Across the pond," He said, and I nodded, "I'll make enough for leftovers."

"Yeah, I'll just grab something from the cafeteria before we leave, or my stomach is gonna start eating itself," He said and Daisy chuckled.

"Sorry, how rude of me, Steve Rogers," He said, introducing himself to 'Skye' with a handshake.

"I'm Skye. I work with-"

"My team," Mel said cutting in. Daisy knew not to mention her Dad, but 'Skye' wasn't under obligation to keep Phil Coulson's status from the Avengers.

"Nice to see you again Agent May," Steve said, giving her a smile.

"Likewise Captain Rogers," She nodded to him.

"Alright, well I have to get home then and make food for myself," I said, before looking back at Daisy, "It was nice to meet you Skye. Try not to get into any trouble while you're on Agent May's team."

"Yes ma'am," She said, "I'll try."

"Alright, I'll see you around," I said, nodding to Mel. Nat said goodbye to Daisy and Mel, before following Steve and I out.

"I've got to go gear up," Nat said, motioning for head towards the locker rooms, "I'll see you there."
"Sure thing," Steve said, before turning back to me.

"Be safe, remember to play nice, and don't rough them up too badly," I teased as he pulled me into a deserted hallway.

"I love you," He said, leaning down to kiss me. I smiled as he released my lips, "I love you too. Don't sneak in okay?"

"Yeah, I learned my lesson last week," He chuckled, before kissing my knuckles and walking away.
After dinner that night, I walked into Olympus, giving my security clearance and waiting in the lounge. I forgot how spooky it was when you were here by yourself and I was glad I didn't assign one of the Koenigs's here. Fury was almost cruel to cut them off from the outside world for months on end. Now, I felt I would need to bring one in. Sam, I liked his no nonsense attitude, compared to Billy and Eric. Their other brother, Thurston, was a piece of work. But LT? I could use her here for muscle. It was another hour before I heard footsteps down the hall, where a voice said, "What is this place?"

"Your grandmother's top secret base. Not on any SHIELD record. Fury is rumored to have one. And former Director Carter another."

"And I thought we said it had to remain a secret," I said, as the rest of my family walked in.

"Uh oh," Daisy sing song, "Someone's in trouble."

"Yeah, I know," Phil said, smiling apologetically at me, "But how often do we get a family reunion?"

"Oh, come here," I said, getting up from the couch and opening my arms to them. Phil hugged me first, and then Mel, with Daisy following, hugging me tighter.

"Okay, sit down and tell me all about the plane," I said, gesturing to the table where I had brought in beer and snacks for us. Phil and Mel finally were able to talk to their daughter without their guard up and I could see how light they were. My bottle of water stuck out like a sore thumb, with Mel giving me a questioning glance when the conversation quieted down.

"The reason I asked you here tonight, was I have a little announcement," I said, turning to Phil. He raised and eyebrow in question, before I said, "You remember how I had that operation, when you were about four?"

"Yeah, so you couldn't have any more kids..." He said, confused.

"It was redundant because I wasn't going to be with another man after your father... Anyways, after New York, I went to see Simmons about my slowed aging. To see if the serum's effects could be reversed, either to allow me to age, or to reverse the serums effects all together."

"Simmons, our Simmons?" Daisy asked, "She's a terrible liar."

"So were you," I reminded her, to which she shrugged, "Touche."
"Anyways, she's working with Dr. Banner, and to make it safe for me to either take it long term, or one dose. But now it needs to be safe for pregnancy," I said, watching Phil's eyes widen in shock. Mel smiled at me, "Congratulations Mom. When did you have the reversal?"

"About six weeks ago, but I was practically healed the next day," I said as Daisy squealed, "A baby! I'm gonna have an aunt or uncle. Man, this is weird."

"Weird runs in our family," I teased, as Phil continued to gape at me.

"I know this is a shock to you, and it's very early to be telling you, but you're here. I didn't want to tell you over encrypted text or the next time we meet like this for me to have a large bump. By the way, don't freak out, but I had Fitz make me something to hide the pregnancy from SHIELD. Like the veils, but for my midsection," I explained.

"I…I'm just caught off guard, a bit," He said, closing his mouth and nodding, "Okay. Wow."

"Wow what?" I asked amused.

"I'm gonna have a sibling after all. It's been 44 years since I asked for a little brother," He snickered, and I smiled at my son.

"Well, better late than never."

A month and a half passed, and Jemma was working hard whenever she had time in between Phil's teams needs. I would still be updated on their progress through Daisy, who was working hard at keeping the amount of 'flirting' fun with Ward, to help crack him. Steve was reading baby books in an effort to glean how things had changed.

We talked about where we would live once the baby was closer to being born. I couldn't have anyone in SHIELD know, so we were going to move into the penthouse if this wasn't wrapped up before I delivered. Fury understood and would have Steve picked up for missions, or relocate STRIKE to New York for the time being. But then I knew that if Hydra hadn't been eradicated yet, we were going to be needed here, at least living at Olympus and Steve would say I was undercover for Fury. Who knows how long that would keep them placated.

But I had to start wearing the veil earlier than I thought I would, which led Jemma to suggest an Ultrasound when I got Mel to pass along a message to her. So I had taken a quick flight of my personal Quinjet to the Hub, where they were waiting for news on Fitz and Ward. Daisy had found the perfect reason to lose the trust of her team, using her ex boyfriend Myles's involvement with Centipede. The Restrictive bracelet she had to wear was actually my idea, to keep her skills up. She needed to rely on other methods in her career, not just her computer skills. And as always I was never let down when she continued to excel and get what she needed. I got the alert she had hacked the server from the middle of the Hub before I landed. The only thing she wasn't restricted from was the encrypted phone, because I still needed to communicate with her.

She had snuck me into the BUS, making sure no one could see me from the open ramp. Both Lola and their SHIELD Tactical SUV were blocking most of the line of sight inside. I was playing my jamming frequency for precaution, not that Jemma could hear it.

"I'd say you are about 10 weeks along, taking into consideration your conception window." She said softly as she played the heartbeats for me, "And this little one looks healthy. I'll take a few pictures for you."

"Can you put these on this encrypted drive for me? The recording of the heartbeat too," I said, trying
not to cry. Steve was missing this, and I couldn't risk playing it at home. We'd pop by Olympus or somewhere away from bugs to show him.

"I'd love to. I assume this if for Captain Rogers."

"He was upset to miss this, especially since its new technology to him. It's just a plug and play thing," I said, handing her the flash drive from my pocket. As she plugged it in, a light came on it that told me nothing was being tracked. I got an alert on my phone from Daisy that she would be walking into the lab any second, and Mel and Phil were right behind her by minutes.

"You're showing early, with how petite you are. If this is to be kept from SHIELD, you may need to think about leaving in the New Year. A Photostatic veil will only do so much," She said, as she worked.

"Yes, I suspected as much. If that is all Doc, I think I'll be out of your hair," I smiled to Jemma, who quickly cleaned me up and gave me back the flash drive as I finished putting the Photostatic veil back on my midsection.

"Dr. Banner and I may need another sample soon."

"I'll see about dropping by the Tower next week," I nodded.

"No rush."

"Colonel Rogers," I heard Daisy's voice say as the door to the lab opened.

"Good morning Skye," I said as Jemma quickly shut the ultrasound monitor off.

"The information you requested Colonel," She said handing me the drive, and I nodded before turning back to Daisy.

"I understand from Agent May you've been using your position here on this team as a way to gather information on your parents."

"Yes, I was. It was selfish of me to betray their trust," She said, looking soft and sad.

"I can understand why you did it, but you went about it the wrong way. I will look into it and send what information I can to Agent May," I said, as I heard Jemma drop something behind me. Probably in shock that a Omega clearance operative/administrator was doing a favor for a consultant. Not that anyone in the agency knew that Clearance levels went higher than Alpha.

"Really?" Daisy said, faking enthusiasm and disbelief.

"Of course. It helps to have friends in high places," I smiled, "Isn't that right Jemma?"

"Of course, Colonel," She said, and I gave her a look. She corrected herself, "Elizabeth."

"And you can call me Elizabeth too Skye. But not in front of the higher ups, or anyone but May and Jemma," I said, and she nodded furiously in thanks, "I understand."

She all but leapt into my arms, hugging me, "Thank you. You don't know how much this means to me."

"I understand what it's like to be separated from the ones you love, and who love you. I will do everything I can Skye, but you need to be prepared in case it's not what you wanted," I said, patting her back reassuringly. She pulled back and wiped her eyes, "I understand."
"I'll do everything I can. But there usually is a very dangerous reason a Level 8 document was
redacted. If it means keeping you safe from certain truths, I will put that above you knowing," I said,
and she nodded, "Understood."

"Good. Go do some good for your team," I gave her a half smile, to which she said, "I promise. I'll
do you proud Colonel."

"I know you will. Well, I've got to head back to DC now. Anything discussed here today never
happened. Thank you Jemma and Skye for your time, I know that hacking into secure servers is
nerve wracking and stressful. Especially for news on members of your team," I winked at them,
before grabbing my bag and turning off the bug jammer, "Have a good day ladies."

"How badass is she?" Daisy said to Jemma as I left the plane, who snickered, "Very."

As I walked away further, I locked eyes with Mel and Phil. Phil pretended to act scared as I
approached them.

"Phillip," I said lowly.

"Colonel," He responded, as I narrowed my eyes at him.

"Glad to see you on your feet."

"I'm glad to be on them. Director Fury wanted me on leave awhile longer," He said awkwardly. I
saw several people around the hangar, watching.

"Next time you let me deal with the god with the pointy stick," I teased. He smirked in response, "I
think that would be wise."

"Alright, you should probably go help your team. I'm pretty sure Hand was counting on you as being
the extraction plan," I teased, clapping him once on the shoulder, "But the Avengers do not know
about your... resurrection. So keep yourself off the radar, okay?"

"Yes Ma'am," He smiled, before I nodded once to Mel, "Keep him in line."

"Of course," She smirked. Phil looked undignified at our conversation, "I don't get into trouble that
often."

"Yes you do," Mel sassed.

"Well, I've got to get back to DC before someone comes looking for me."

"Colonel," Phil said as I walked away. I turned as I stopped, and he said, "I'm sorry."

"Just don't do it again," I said seriously. He nodded, "Yes ma'am."

I flew myself back to Olympus, worrying the whole time. I would need Jemma to come to me as we
got further along, and that would get tricky. I wanted to trust her, but until I knew for sure she
couldn't be persuaded or tortured to give up information, I would get May to bag her and bring her to
Olympus. There was always Fine but we couldn't drag him to Olympus too frequently. Steve wasn't
home when I got back, so I started dinner's prep and waited for him to text.

I got a text from him that he was heading home from HQ about ten minutes later and that he would
be there soon. So I chucked the food in the oven and started the record player. We had come up with
a signal that when we had something to talk about, regarding our foxhunt, we would play an old
record; giving the impression we were trying to set the mood for the other.

Steve came in, wrapping his arms around my midsection, cradling the bump gently.

"Do you want to join me?" He said in a flirtatious tone, for the bugs.

"Of course," I smiled, turning in his arms to flinch at the bruise on the side of his face.

He shook his head once and gestured to the bathroom. Peeling off our clothes and dropping them, Steve started the water and I pulled the Photostatic veil off my belly. He smiled warmly seeing the bump, kneeling down to kiss it softly. I smiled softly as I said, "It has to do with the pregnancy that I wanted to talk."

"Everything okay?" He said getting up and guiding me under the spray. I sighed at the warmth. With the weather turning towards winter, it was colder and rainier in DC.

"Yeah, baby is happy and healthy," I smiled up at him.

"Really?" He asked, looking equal parts scared and elated.

"Yes. But at one point, I'm going to need to leave SHIELD. If Brock is right about Insight being Hydra's New Dawn, then sometime in April they launch. No definitive date yet on it. And I'll be showing early with how small I am."

"So, in the New Year?" He asked, touching my stomach as he thought about my words.

"I'll claim I need a mental vacation from SHIELD or the undercover thing for Fury. No calls, no contact whatsoever. I don't want to be told if Fury gets a paper cut let alone another crisis like New York. But Rumlow is my inside man, and will still inform me. I just won't be able to do anything about it from Olympus. I won't be able to be here closer to the due date. If they are watching you, and notice the distortion around my belly, they might clue in."

"Bed rest is what Jemma advised?"

"Yes. I can work from Olympus with Fury and Hill. We can make this work," I said.

"What about Rumlow? Can he help you out when they're not available?"

"Can't risk tipping Hydra off. Steve, we are playing a dangerous game with people's lives. I won't ask him to do something that could blow his cover. He's got to seem loyal to them by sticking around for if they need him."

"I just hate how they have grown in something that was supposed to be good for the world."

"You are preaching to the choir. SHIELD was my first born, remember? I'm pissed, beyond that, I want justice for my brother."

"Anything from Fury?"

"Not much," I said, "Just that he's got names of people that are loyal and will place them strategically before Hydra can put their plan in motion."

"We'll stop them. I promise," He said pulling me close and saying, "For our children's futures. I won't let them grow up in a world where Hydra still exists."

"Well, it's just one child for now. And I know you won't," I smiled up at him, kissing him once before
saying, "I should go check on dinner. Who hit you?"

"Not a who, a what. Wasn't wearing the helmet and didn't dodge a metal pipe, should be gone within the hour," He said and I chuckled, kissing it gently.

"There is something for you in my bag. Rumlow's dead drop," He said and I sighed.

"It must be important. He knows that if I'm not there, the information is safe to go through you or Hill. You are the more direct route, so it's highly important."

With that, our secret conversation was over and I got dressed to check on dinner. As Steve set the table, I pulled out the flash paper that was rolled up under Steve's workout clothes. I stuffed the clothes in the washer, humming to myself as I noticed the load looked light, adding things from the bathroom hamper.

"Anything else you need washed Darling?" I called out as I pulled my pen from my purse, shining a light on the paper.

"Just the bag itself, it's starting to smell," He called back, as I felt the blood leave my face. I could hardly believe my eyes, what I was reading sounded so horrifying. Zola developed an algorithm and he was still working? Databanks underground at Camp Lehigh? The Insight Helicarriers were going to bring Hydra's New Dawn, by taking out millions using Zola's Algorithm? And the last sentences made me want to vomit all over again.

_They have Barnes. He's alive, brainwashed and the Winter Soldier._

"Oh my god," I breathed. _He was... alive?_

As I already had the music on, I turned it up and fled to the bathroom, heaving and heaving into the bowl. Steve didn't rush to me, but when he did come by my side, I thrust the crumbled paper into his hand as I retched. There was no more I could bring up, but my stomach still contracted painfully. I had to focus on my breathing and not the crushing anxiety and despair that was coursing through my body.

Bucky was alive, and I hadn't even sent out a search team for his body. Hydra had snapped him up and turned him into an elusive assassin that had been active over the last 50 years. The Winter Soldier was not well known in intelligence circles, only a few believed he even existed. If Hydra had made him this killer, I had failed him. Whatever Zola was doing to him back in that lab in Azzano, must have been what helped him survive the fall in the first place. I sat back on my heels and tried to stifle my tears. I glanced up at Steve and saw him growing pale as he shone the light on the flash paper, clicking it off softly when he was done. His eyes met mine in a steely resolve and I knew Hydra was going to **burn** for what they had done to us.

Rumlow snuck away the next evening to meet me at Olympus, giving an in detail account of what he knew to Fury and I. Bucky was put in cryo in between kills, and wiped after each thaw. Rumlow had managed to get me a picture, and I had to look away for a second. He looked cold and vacant, a shell of the man I once knew. His left arm was missing, and in its place was a metal prosthesis. My _love, what have they done to you?_

"After Insight launches... Hydra won't need a ghost to take out their enemies," Rumlow said softly, and I closed my eyes.

"They'll take him out. Leave no trace, no loose ends."
"He's a lot of work for them, if the Helicarriers can do the same job, they'd take the easier route," Nick said, and I looked back into Bucky's vacant eyes.

"So, what's the play?" Rumlow asked me. Nick was looking at me too, waiting for something.

"I can't believe I'm saying this... but we'll get him after," I sighed, putting the photo back on the table, "From what you said, his programming is fragile, and I don't want to risk him getting violent. We have a room here, like the Cage on the BUS for him if we do get the opportunity."

"Understood," Nick nodded.

"There is only one way to stop this. Those Helicarriers are going to need to come down."

"You want them to launch in the first place?" Rumlow asked, confused.

"I know from the specs on them that they have a very specific targeting chip with Zola's algorithm. We assume all the tech on them is dirty and can't be salvaged. We let them launch, but we switch the chips from the algorithm ones to ours. They destroy each other. A bit of a 'Fuck you' from SHIELD, if you will. At one point you're going to need to come into the light," I said to Rumlow.

"And you ma'am?" He asked and I said, "I will be about... 32 weeks then? But I am not going to be able to be there with you, fighting at least," I said and he nodded, "I will, however, be your eye in the sky."

"So, what's next?"

"They're launching the satellite in March, right?"

"Yes, the 30th," Nick said, and I pursed my lips.

"Satellite launch on the 30th. Helicarrier launch on the 4th... huh."

Suddenly I looked up and said, "I've got an idea, but if they trace it back..."

"What's the idea Colonel?" Rumlow asked sincerely.

"We get a merc to commandeer the launch ship, send Nat in to back up the files. Make it seem like she had a separate mission, Steve will act annoyed that there isn't trust. You'll show him Insight before trying to access the information on the drive. You ask Pierce to delay the launch, and... they'll want to take you out. Leave no trace. Just like Howard."

"So where do we go from there?" Nick said leaning back in his chair, unfazed by us faking his death. Just another day at SHIELD.

"We have to fake your death. You'll come here to lay low, and then you and I stroll into the World Security Council to arrest Pierce the day of the launch," I said, "There may be some improvising along the way. Steve's gonna have opinions on this too."

"Arrest him? I'd like to stab him through the heart," Rumlow said and Fury scoffed, "Line starts behind the Colonel, and I'm next."

"I'd love nothing more than to put a bullet between his eyes, but I want justice, not vengeance. Death is too quick, but life imprisonment? For killing my brother, for following Hydra? For Bucky? It would be enough."

"How did Cap take it?" Rumlow asked, and I shook my head.
"He wants to burn the Triskelion to the ground with all the rage he has, but he's holding back for now. It was an emotional night for us," I said softly.

"They've designated me as one of Barnes's handlers. If he gets lost in the midst of things, I can help you track him down. He'll trust me," Rumlow offered.

"How do they usually get him back after a mission?" I asked.

"He returns on his own once his target is dead. But he will recognize me."

"Might not be a good thing, he'll think we are Hydra too when he comes back here," I said, narrowing my eyes on the Insight specs.

"What?" Nick asked.

"I need to make a call," I said, getting up and leaving the room. I dialed the number on speed dial and put the phone to my ear, hoping she wasn't sleeping.

"Hey, what's up?" Daisy answered in a whisper.

"Code phrase that you are alone?"

"I've been up since 4:30am, not by choice," She said and I smiled, "How about covertly passing me to your Mom?"

"Sure, I can do that. Give me a second," She said, before I heard her shuffle around. A door or two opened and I heard her say, "Agent May, I was wondering if I could sit with you? Maybe talk?"

"It's Grams," I heard whispered, hopefully in Melinda's ear.

"Not right now," Mel said in her harsh voice, "Please shut the door behind you."

"S'cool," Daisy said, faking rejection.

As the door closed, I heard Mel clear her throat slightly.

"Tap once for yes, twice for no," I said softly, "Can you get Andrew in touch with me?"

One tap. Yes.

"Can you also tell him that it may be a few months before I will need his services, so I need him on retainer?"

One tap. Yes.

"Has Phil exhibited any odd symptoms?"

Two taps. No.

"Has he mentioned any weird dreams or memories?"

Two taps. No.

"Does he seem off to you?"

There was hesitation before I heard two quick taps. A little.
"Keep me posted. Sneak the phone back into Daisy's bunk."

One tap sounded for yes, and then I cut the line.

Walking back into the kitchen, Nick and Brock were discussing something about the Lemurian Star.

"-I know a couple merc's that would do it, but only one would stay bought."

"So when do we contact him?" Nick asked.

"Week before tops, give him plans and half the money. STRIKE gets called in and we'll bring him in. He won't talk. Only problem is making the trail look legit enough, only giving minimal clues it might have been you."

"Wire it through at least 15 different IP's in different countries and then dangle the carrot. I have an idea of how to, only someplace Pierce would know I could be connected to."

"I'll make sure we have tech for your getaway. Fitz was working on something called a Mouse Hole. It's actually pretty hand from what Daisy has told me. Okay, I think we've covered everything for tonight. Nick, you leave first out the back entrance," I nodded to him.

"Meet back here in ten days?" He said, and I said, "Make it twelve. We've developed a pattern lately and we need to shake it."

"You got it boss," He smirked, nodding goodbye to Brock.

"So, what's up that the pirate couldn't hear?" Brock said after Nick was gone a minute or two.

"Nothing he couldn't hear, just I need to get home," I shrugged, "Steve has been more anxious about Hydra since we found out about the baby."

"Nothing else?" Brock asked, and I sighed.

"How… how bad is it?" I asked softly.

"The wipes?" He asked, watching me gently. I nodded, "Just tell me. Don't sugar coat."

"I have to call on every ounce of your training not to break. It sounds excruciating. He's gonna be really messed up if and when you bring him out of this Colonel."

"That's what I'm worried about," I sighed.

"You know I'm your guy if you need extra muscle," He said respectfully, "They want me as his handler. I know how to calm him down."

"I know. I just have a feeling that SHIELD is gonna have its bridges burnt with the government after we expose Hydra. They could flip and called us terrorists because of Hydra. I've worked most of my life to build SHIELD, and this might kill it. We're gonna have to figure something out to keep legit SHIELD information out of the weeding," I said, as I got a text from Steve on the encrypted phone. He was making dinner for us and wondered when I was going to be home.

"Is there a way to keep the government informed?"

"We don't know if this is just SHIELD, or if they have ears anywhere else. I can see about one or two of my military contacts, but it's too risky right now."
"What about the President?" Rumlow suggested, "I know they have a couple senators and one or two generals in the military."

"It's possible, but if I just meet him at the White House, it might tip them off. I'm not exactly best friends with the President, and requesting a meeting like that would seem suspicious," I said and he nodded.

"But they wouldn't suspect Fury," He pointed out.

"I'll think on it. But even the President can only do so much with Congress and Senate approval. In the meantime, has Phil's team caught anyone's attention within Hydra?"

"Just Garrett's. He's obsessed with how Phil was brought back to life," He said and I sighed as I typed a response to Steve.

"There is a chance I may need you to go off reservation at one point, to keep an eye on them or help out I'm unsure."

"Give the order and I drop everything."

"Except your cover. It may be undercover I would send you. Ward knows who you are within Hydra, so he'll get suspicious if you just showed up. You'd need a veil, but Daisy needs to contact you before so she recognizes your cover," I said, shaking my head as I gestured for us to leave.

"Gonna send them a picture of what I'll look like?" He said, and I nodded, "At least to Daisy. She's got the encrypted phone."

"I don't think I've actually seen a recent picture of her," Brock said and I heard the hesitation in his voice, like he wished he hadn't phrased it that way.

"Did you want a picture of my granddaughter Rumlow?" I teased him, pulling out my phone.

"I believe I should have one ma'am," He said as I showed him a picture of Daisy smiling at the camera. The last one I had of her was by the poolside, and I saw him swallow a little as he took in the photo of her stretched out over a pool lounge chair.

"She's gorgeous," He said a little breathy, "But…"

"But what?" I asked, quirking an eyebrow.

"But perhaps a photo with more clothing? Not that she isn't stunning- That's not what I meant ma'am," He said trying to back peddle. I smiled up at him and said, "At ease, you should have one to memorize of her in civilian clothing, as it's all she wears for her cover. But honestly, she is a beauty. It would be very hard to forget a face like hers."

I saw the train of thought in his eyes, that it wasn't just her face he wouldn't be able to forget. And the thought of the two of them almost stopped me in my tracks. I trusted him with her life, with being a triple for us. He could be good for her. She was still dealing with the effects of being an orphan and Brock was stable, dependable. May might not love the idea, and I know Phil had sworn up and down until he was blue in the face, that his daughter wouldn't be dating until she was 30. And the fact that Brock was 8 years older than her was also a caveat.

"Just remember, mission first," I smiled at him.

"Of course ma'am," He answered, as I sent the photo to his encrypted cell phone. It pinged a moment
later and I saw him quickly glance at the photo, nodding to himself and then looking forward.

"You aren't going to be court martialed for thinking she's pretty," I teased him.

"I would never presume to think of your granddaughter that way-"

"Relax Brock. You've been undercover for the last four years for me. After this all blows over, if anyone deserves a chance to have some fun, date a little, it's you. That's an order," I said as we approached the exit, "HERMES lockdown in five."

"An order to date your granddaughter Colonel?"

"Well, maybe not her specifically, but I wouldn't object if it happened. It's Phil you'd have to worry about. She's 24 and you're 32, don't assume that will be overlooked. You have a whole mess of people to expect if you hurt her though. Besides, I already know she likes you," I said as I walked towards the van. He was locking up behind us and I saw his head snap up at my statement, in the windshield reflection.

"Wait, she does?" He asked.

"Mhmm, she said, and I quote, "Holy shit, major hottie." But you didn't hear that from me," I said raising my hands as I turned to unlock the van.

"Normally you meet someone first. We may not even be compatible," He shrugged after a moment, playing it off.

"Oh, I highly doubt you aren't," I smirked as I put my Photostatic veil on, getting into the van. I gave a quick wave and pulled the vehicle into reverse, before driving towards the garage door. By the time I had made it home, I could smell something burning. I ran in to the kitchen to see Steve failing to put out something on fire on the stove.

"Grease or food fire?" I asked and he said, "Grease!"

"Salt," I yelled, pulling a container out from the cupboard and dumping it over the pan. The flames doused easily, and Steve sighed, "I'll get the take out menus."

"It might be salvageable," I pointed out, using a wooden spoon to prod it, "What was it?"

"A steak. Yours are always amazing and I wanted to try making it for you. Thought after watching you so many times…"

"Hey," I said softly, wrapping my arms around his middle, "I wasn't perfect the first ten or twenty times. Practice makes perfect. And I love that you were making something for us."

"Well, it's nothing special."

"How about we cook together tomorrow?" I offered, "I can teach you all my tricks."

"Alright," He smiled down at me, kissing me softly, "Indian?"

"Pizza? Actually, maybe just sandwiches tonight. And we can watch a movie," I said, laying my head against his chest. We were both still raw from finding out out Bucky was alive. So it wasn't surprisingly to me when I felt his chest rise and fall with silent sobs. I buried my face in his shoulder and said softly, "We'll get him back. I promise."

He nodded, and kissed my forehead, wiping his eyes, before pulling out sandwich fixings from the
fridge. I put on a record and grabbed the bread. We worked silently, listening to the music, and sharing comfort with each other.

Try to think that love's not around
But it's uncomfortably near
My old heart ain't gaining no ground
Because my angel eyes ain't here

Angel eyes, that old Devil sent
They glow unbearably bright
Need I say that my love's misspent
Misspent with angel eyes tonight

So drink up all you people
Order anything you see
Have fun you happy people
The laughs and the jokes on me

Pardon me but I got to run
The fact's uncommonly clear
Got to find who's now number one
And why my angel eyes ain't here
Oh, where is my angel eyes

Excuse me while I disappear
Angel eyes, angel eyes

Chapter End Notes

A/N: This is the song Elizabeth was listening to in the bath Steve's first day out of the ice, before Phil called her. I hadn't added the lyrics because it took the focus away from her emotional struggle. It's so beautiful, and it fit so well with this scene though :) If you think the song is nice, watch The Crown Season 2 Episode 4, Princess Margaret's breakdown makes it so much more heartbreaking.

Anyways, give me some love and let me know what you thought :)
Chapter Twenty Nine

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! Christmas came early this year! Just kidding, it's still November. But we are approaching Christmas in Elizabeth's world, so I hope you enjoy the fun family moments, mixed with the bad. Just like any normal family Christmas. Except with super soldiers, Hydra, family drama and pranks on friends.

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

Steve came with me to Olympus the next night to help me wrap Christmas gifts. Several had to be under my own name for postage, and others went under a fake name, specifically for the Barton's. He didn't question me when I said it was a family I was close to, but they didn't want their location to be known. Natasha got a new scarf she'd been eyeing on our last shopping trip and a new perfume I thought she would like. Daisy got her baby album along with photos I had tracked down of her over the years, and gift cards for the next time she wanted to do some online shopping. I included a few of the recent snapshots of her life, our training month to be exact. Pictures with Mel and Phil and with Steve and I. Phil was getting the Captain America and Lady Liberty trading cards I had kept in storage, and Mel was getting a 25 year old bottle of bourbon, new pair of boots and a gift card for a new athletic wear store.

I usually gave Nick a nice bottle of rum and new eye patch, one that he would definitely never wear because it was either bedazzled or decorative. It was more of a running gag now. He did enjoy the rum though.

Most of the nieces and nephews would just get gift cards or cheques if they were out of country, because I liked that they could choose something themselves. It was hard to keep up with everyone's interests and they usually spent it on something they wanted anyways. My gift to the adults was usually a gift card to a nice restaurant or something practical for their age, like crochet hooks or fishing gear.

Tony was the same every year, a new tie and socks. It was just something so practical that an aunt would give you, it was more out of sentimentality now than need. He could buy all the ties and socks he wanted, but always made a point to wear mine on New Years Eve.

Peter usually wanted a subscription to Popular Mechanics and I threw in new clothes, some new gadget Tony would say he used in the lab. And as always, a day at the spa for May, along with a few months rent paid. Tevan's gift was usually a new winter coat, cause the kid grew way too fast, and then he'd regift his old one to a kid in the building that needed it. His mom Janice was the same as May, spa day and a few months rent free.

But planning and putting Clint's and the Barton's gifts together was always my favourite part of the year. I always made it a point to send the kids on a Scavenger hunt, and every year, Clint managed to hijack it from them. So I decided to tailor it to him this year, and part of the kids gift would be the prank at the end on their father. Laura was already on board, and would prepare it for me since I wouldn't be there this year during the holiday.

"So, each year you and Clint try to outdo the other in gift giving?" He asked, as I kept winding
around Clint's present with the gift wrap.

"Yes. Last year he tracked down a vintage 1958 Les Paul for me. The one hanging on the wall in the apartment in New York. I will never play it because the strings are so fragile. I had found these old crossbows, but they weren't as nice as the guitar. So this year, I went one step further and I'm including a clue that I'm hiding his present inside of another present. He's got to rip into the stitching to find the note that says his present is elsewhere though," I snickered.

"I think this passive aggressive Christmas gift war is getting out of hand," He commented as I struggled with gift wrap around the eight foot monstrosity for crate shipping.

"Shut up and help me wrap this giant teddy bear," I muttered, "I find joy in aggravating him."

"Is this really the time to be putting all these together?" Steve replied, a sad tone in his voice.

"Darling," I said, taking the scotch tape from his hands and putting mine in them, "We know where Bucky is. We know he is alive, and we know how we are going to get him back. In this moment we have to sit tight, and pray things play out like we want. We have to keep living our lives, or they get suspicious."

"How can you be so nonchalant about this? About everything he's going through, been forced to do?"

"Steve, remember what I told you about Kaesong?" I said lowly, "I have to be. I have to detach myself from my emotions about a mission, or I will fall apart. You think its easy? I die everyday knowing that it's another day I could have saved him from his fate, but he would understand that we were doing it to make sure he never fell back into their hands. If we move too soon, they may kill us, or at least try to in my case. We are waiting until the right moment to expose them and we need to be patient. We can fall apart after its over. It's been 70 years for me, and I'm trying to focus on one day at a time as it is. But they will be extinguished, I promise you."

He nodded, letting his head fall to my shoulder as I hugged him tightly.

"So this family that doesn't want their location known... Young kids?" He asked, seeing the model plane and wooden dollhouse kit I had off to the side, along with new dolls, clothes, movies and Lego sets. For Laura, I had found a sweater I knew she would love and a new laptop. She homeschooled Cooper so I knew it was practical, and it was untraceable so we could talk.

"Two young kids."

"And the reason they were piled next to the giant teddy bear for Clint was a coincidence?" He asked, and I smirked, "Maybe it's part of a secret I haven't been allowed to share, but it's been killing me to keep from you."

"Clint has a family, doesn't he?" He said softly, and I sighed, "You always were too intuitive for your own good."

"SHIELD doesn't know?" He asked, and I shook my head.

"Fury and I helped him set it up when he joined. He's been with us 11 years, and at first it was only Laura, his wife, we had to hide. Then Cooper and Lila came along and I was an Aunt again."

"I won't say anything, you know that," He said, holding me tightly.

"Of course not," I chuckled, "There are ways I can silence you."
"It should terrify me that you're threatening me, but I'm a little turned on just imagining ways you could," He teased, raising an eyebrow at me as he smirked. I chuckled lowly, leaning in to rest my lips at the shell of his ear.

"Gift wrapping can wait. Meet me in our room in 5 minutes, Captain Rogers. And you better have less clothes on," I whispered, biting his earlobe gently and beamed when it elicited a shudder from him. I walked away, wiggling my hips a little as I went to grab my straps from medical.

Another three weeks past and I was out of the first trimester. With the fall/winter weather, I was able to wear bulkier coats and most of the recruits had been taken to their respective academies. So I started crafting my reasons for not returning to work. The last time, I had simply been able to say I needed time and Peggy let me go without hesitation. Now we were under more scrutiny than ever, in the age of security cameras and listening devices. I had taken to doing deskwork in order to hide the bump along with the veil, and no one questioned why I never stood up to greet anyone. I normally didn't anyways.

Phil's team had been to Greenwich to clean up after Thor's scuffle with the Dark Elves. Brock's team was sent to go take out a giant alien that was left behind, minus Steve, who was helping the Smithsonian out with double-checking facts. So it was no surprise to me when Daisy sent a photo on the encrypted phone showing Rumlow giving the camera a thumbs up as he held up his veil in the other, signalling that she had seen his disguise for future reference. I smiled, knowing I would have to ask them both later how the first meeting went down for our audience.

But that was almost two weeks ago, and now they were switching gears and going after Centipede. His team was given two weeks off starting today, so tonight we would all meet up at Olympus to spend Christmas together, our first. And we would tell them about the growing baby in my belly, and about Bucky. We had already told Nick, for any bugs in our offices, that we were going off the grid for Christmas. Just the two of us, as it was our first in 67 years.

Hill walked in without knocking and said, "Colonel, I need you to sign off on some paperwork."

"Of course," I said, holding a hand out for it. She placed it in my waiting palm and stood in front of my desk as I shuffled through the document. I spotted a piece of flash paper and let it fall into my lap.

"Hill, is there money in the budget for new Quinjets? The last patch were faulty, and I'd like these ones to be bug free," I said, giving her a small quirk of my eyebrow.

"I'd have to get Secretary Pierce to approve it. With Insight nearing its final stages, a lot of our budget is being stretched to ensure completion," She said and I understood. *Hydra had a tight rein on the finances.*

"I'd rather not bother if it's going to be difficult then. Let's see if we can't allocate a few of the older models then. They do the trick, point A to point B and all. Hit and miss with cloaking though. We can always have them fixed up if there are bugs," I said, signing off on the document after reading through the information. She knew where they would be going. The Playground and Olympus.

"Yes ma'am," She nodded, taking the papers back from me and walking back out. I turned in my chair to look outside. It was snowing, and I could see a few Quinjets coming back in to land. A knock at my door frame had me turning quickly to hide the distortion of the Photostatic veil. It was being stretched to its limits and I got May to slip a note to Fitz about a larger one.

"Hey," Steve smiled at me, as he leaned against the door.
"Hey yourself," I smirked back, pushing back a loose strand of hair.

"Can you play hooky?" He asked, gesturing to the paperwork.

"I can. What did you have in mind?" I smiled as I gathered a few things into my bag.

"For one, they want to talk to you about a few things for the exhibit, some fact checking. I thought it would be nice to walk it together. It won't open until January. Something about last minute touches and the holidays are crazy," He shrugged.

"Alright then, it's a date. Pick me up in, mmm, say, 5 minutes. I just need to visit the ladies room," I said, gesturing to my office bathroom.

"It's a date," He laughed. I pulled the piece of flash paper behind my cardigan and stood up. I really did need to pee, but it was the perfect excuse to see what Hill was passing along.

Pulling the pen from underneath the lip of the counter, I quickly read the dead drop. Since I wasn't in the training rooms, Rumlow had to bring his information to Hill with his reports, who would pass it on to me inconspicuously.

*Something called Deathlok is brewing within Cybertek.*

*Phil gave me a warning to stay away from his consultant. I think that meant to stay away from Daisy without alerting anyone.*

Probably, I thought wryly.

*I'll be by in a few days if I have more information. Merry Christmas Colonel.*

That was it, so I actually went to the washroom and flushed the burnt remains of the flash paper, putting my black light pen back after I washed my hands. Steve was looking out my window at the Potomac below when I emerged, "Shall we?"

"You really have a great view," He commented, as I grabbed my coat.

"I like having a bird's eye view of things," I said as Steve slung my messenger bag over his shoulder.

"What a gentleman," I smiled as we left. I locked up, before interlocking his hand with my own. After a quick ride towards the Smithsonian and a leisurely walk through the Captain America and the Howling Commandos exhibit, we popped home to grab Zeus. Putting on our veils, we grabbed the van and enough food for the next two weeks including Christmas dinner, Zeus salivating over the smell of meat.

"Grams!" Daisy said as I entered the base carrying only two bags. Steve was paranoid after reading I shouldn't lift more than 25 pounds at a time. I argued that was for non-super soldier pregnant women, but he wouldn't listen. But it was nice to see him using his muscles and being protective of the baby. Zeus barked at her from my side and she stopped on her approach.

"Zeus, family," I said sternly to him. He untensed, approaching her to sniff. When he decided he liked her, he wound himself around her legs, licking her hand in greeting. She laughed, rubbing his head gently before continuing her approach of us.

"My sweet girl, how are you?" I asked, hugging her tight.

"I'm great. You popped! Why can't I see it?" She said, pulling back to touch my belly in seemingly
"Yes, I have. And it's the veil. Fitz is good but not good enough to hide the bump itself, just the appearance," I said, "Where are your parents?"

"In the middle of an argument," She sighed, "10th floor."

"Argument?"

"Mom and Ward got affected by the Asgardian staff and she thought she might be able to glean some weaknesses off of him by sleeping with him," She said, making a face.

"Oh brother, this should be an interesting two weeks," I muttered to Steve as we walked.

"Let's just assess the damage first," He replied, warily, as we got into the elevator. When I had the place designed, it was originally underground, but with needing office spaces and a hangar like the Playground's, I needed to go bigger. I spent my weekend setting up rooms for almost a year, building bed frames and putting in appliances and desks myself. That was back in 2004. It was technically 12 floors, but two sub-basements and ten above ground, including the hangar that looked like another building, but with a retractable roof. It blended in well with the buildings close to the Potomac and Ronald Reagan International that Hydra would have no clue I was basically under their noses, down the river a ways from the Triskelion.

As we got closer to the lounge, I heard raised voices and looked at Daisy.

"Could you go bring our bags from the van Daisy, and take them to our room?" I asked her and she nodded, "Absolutely, will do anything to stay away from that."

As Daisy left, Steve and I walked closer to the shouting match.

"Why would you think it was a good idea though? He's Hydra, you're just giving them ammunition against us."

"You have no problem when it's Natasha using her feminine charm against a target, so why is it different when I do it?"

"Because Natasha never has to take them to bed to get what she needs! And because you are my wife!"

"That's rich! I was your wife but you had no problem seeing that Cellist," We heard Mel sneered.

"What about Andrew, he wasn't your little taste of freedom?"

"No, because he was a friend, that helped me through a lot of my demons. You had turned your back on me," Mel snarled as we came to stand in the doorway.

"You don't think I wanted to help you? You kept pushing me away Mel. You wouldn't let me in, wouldn't let me take any of your pain. And now suddenly you can talk about it with Daisy and my mother, but not me?"

"Because I had just been put through another rollercoaster, hearing you had died and then were revived. I didn't want to hold it back any longer. But you pulled me out of Admin, forced me into a situation where I had to save our daughter. You knew I didn't want to fight, didn't want to relive what I went through. But you pulled me in," She said and Phil shook his head.
"I only asked you. You didn't have to follow me-"

"Of course I did you idiot, because I missed you and to keep you from doing something as stupid as facing an Asgardian alone!" Mel said, before she turned to see us.

"Mom, Dad," She said softly, clearing her throat and looking down.

"Mom, Dad, sorry about-" Phil started.

"Sit. Down," I snarled, handing Steve my two small bags. He put them on the kitchen counter to start putting things away, while I watched Mel and Phil sit at my order.

"Phil," I said softly as I approached him. He looked up in confusion at my tone, before I clapped him upside the head.

"Ow," He muttered, rubbing his head.

"I thought I raised you better than this. I taught you to never raise your voice to a woman, or to fight in front of your children. You've just accomplished both, at the very beginning of our holiday together. You both realize what this is, right? The reason we are all together, even though it's risky? For Daisy. For the first damn Christmas we've ever had as a family. Her first with us, your father's first with us," I said lowly, as Mel ducked her head slightly. Phil looked at Steve sadly and back at me nodding.

"Instead of talking about it rationally like the middle aged adults you are, you scream at each other. You should be ashamed of how you are behaving," I said, scolding them, "You love each other, and this is not how people who love each other show it."

"Phil, you said you wanted to work on healing your relationship together, and this is your chance. You are blowing it. Mel," I said turning to my daughter-in-law, "Andrew told you to be completely honest, always. You can't just be honest with Daisy and I, and not your husband."

Silence. Their body language screamed that they were avoiding confrontation, turned away from the other, arms tight.

"So, I have to be the mediator again, fine," I said as they both stayed silent. I sat down gently on the couch across from them and said, "Don't make me get the truth serum."

Phil gave a little smirk before taking a deep breath and saying, "Audrey... She was more of a companion, a friend that I could be honest with, about most things at least. Nothing happened."

"Andrew was the same, a good friend. He knew we weren't over, and pushed me to talk to you. There was never a good time, and then New York… I thought I died inside more than I previously thought possible," She said softly.

"When I woke up, I knew the first thing I wanted to do was find you," Phil said, turning to Mel, "But I was afraid you would still push me away."

"You acted like nothing had happened, like your feelings hadn't changed. I had been so lonely. I guess that was my fault. I did push you away after Daisy was taken, and even more after Bahrain."

"I guess I assumed things should remain the same at first, in case we were being monitored by Hydra. Little things would change, nice notes, flowers… but you were cold, and I thought you were disappointed that I hadn't… so we didn't have to go through the trouble with a lawyer…"
"You idiot, even after all these years, you don't know? I will never love anyone as deeply as I love you," She said, eyes watering.

"Can you ever forgive me for my pigheadedness? I know it's a good tactic, but I'm a little territorial over you. I know I shouldn't be-" 

"But I'm still yours. I have been for 28 years, since that night at the Academy," She said, taking his hand.

"I'm sensing a pattern here. He's definitely your son," I said to Steve under my breath, who smirked at me as Phil kissed Melinda sweetly. As they pulled apart, they smiled shyly at one another. That was probably their first kiss in over 20 years.

"Okay, now that that drama is over with, you have one more apology to make," I said to the two of them.

"Where is she?" Mel asked, worried she had hurt their daughter with their fighting.

"Coming back right now," Steve said, as he put away the last of the food.

"Wow, you got it to stop," Daisy said to me as she entered, impressed. Phil and Mel were up and hugging her in less than five seconds from the time she entered the room.

"We are so sorry Daisy," Phil said, pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

"What for?" She asked in a strained voice, confused as her parents hugged her tightly, "Can't... breathe!"

"We spoiled your first Christmas with us," Mel said softly as they pulled back to look at her.

"I was taught better than that, to not fight in front of your children. This is our first Christmas together as a family. We need to remember that," Phil said and Daisy shook her head.

"You don't have to walk on eggshells and make things perfect for me. Parents fight, no big deal. The only thing that makes this perfect is all of us being together," She said wisely.

"I agree. But let's try to keep the arguments to a minimum while we are here, okay? Christmas isn't a time for fighting," Steve said, coming over to join in the discussion. Phil greeted him with a hug and said, "I agree. It's about being together."

"Well, we don't have a tree or a fireplace, but we do have everything for an authentic Christmas dinner, including the turkey," I smiled at my family, as Daisy hugged her grandfather.

"Hi Mom," Mel said hugging me, and pulling back in shock as my belly poked her own stomach.

"Yeah, so as you can tell I look further along than I should be..." I smiled, as Phil clued in to what I was talking about. I pulled the veil off my midsection, revealing my bump.

"Go on," I smiled, "It's just cause I'm more 'petite'. Which really is more of a "You're short and thin so you'll look like you swallowed a beach ball faster." This little one isn't due until the beginning of June though."

Mel and Daisy excitedly rubbed my belly, giggling at one another in glee.

"Alright, who's helping with dinner tonight?" I asked as I moved towards the kitchen.
"I will! I want to improve my cooking skills a bit more," Daisy said, volunteering.

The next few days were peaceful. Nothing major came up, and Rumlow was due tonight for a check in. I offered for him to stay for the night, to spend some time with us, and he'd accepted. Nick would be by too, but not to stay. He'd decided to let us have our evening to ourselves, as he had some SHIELD stuff to attend to.

Daisy hadn't known about Rumlow, but I told her to wear her cute outfit I bought her in LA. She was a little skeptical of why, but I shrugged and said, "We aren't acting right now. You don't have to dress like a hacker or an agent. You can just be Daisy."

She had went through a little identity crisis during her training, wondering who she could have been if she had grown up with her parents. I pointed out that she could still be doing the same thing, but had already been working for SHIELD, gone to the Sciences academy and been part of the computer sciences division at any of our bases or even so far as being an operative.

She had started dressing more appropriate for training, and more like an agent in general. There were days when she'd still wear t-shirt and mini skirts, but they were few and far between. I didn't want her to change herself to fit into any preconceived mold she thought we had for her. She understood, but she felt better about herself now that she had a real identity.

But she did as I suggested, even going as far to curl her hair slightly. I knew that some days it helped my own confidence to look good. Most days I didn't care, because I had no one I needed to impress. Until Steve came back that is. But I knew she would clue in as to why I suggested the outfit in 3… 2…1…

"Colonel," Brock said as he entered the 10th floor lounge. I had received his text just a minute ago that he was pulling up, and he brought the butter I requested. I forgot how much I went through every Christmas when I baked.

"Brock, at ease," I smiled to him, as Daisy's head snapped around so fast she might have given herself whiplash.

"Agent Rumlow," Daisy said standing up to greet him.

"Agent Rogers," He smirked to her and she snorted, "Not official quite yet."

"It will be. You are an agent right now, just of our little faction of SHIELD," He pointed out. She pursed her lips and nodded, "I can get behind that."

"Okay, how about you give me my butter and I'll disappear," I smiled, as Brock held out the grocery bag.

"You don't want to debrief ma'am?"

"Brock, you are practically family, and it's Christmastime. Call me Elizabeth or I'll put you on KP," I half threatened, as I tossed the butter into the fridge.

"Alright, I yield," He smiled at me, before Daisy jerked her head towards the couch, "I barely know you, tell me about yourself."

"Well, there's not much to tell. Three tours with the Navy SEALs, recruited by SHIELD, and your Grandmother hand picked me to be her eyes on the inside…" I heard their voices drop off as I asked HERMES where Steve was.
"Level Four Ma'am, Operations."

"And my son?"

"Agent Rogers is on Level One with Agent May, in Training Room B."

"Thank you. Run systematic diagnostic check on perimeter defences and run a systems check while we are at it. I'd like to know if we need any updates to our SHIELD files as well," I said walking into the elevator.

"Yes Ma'am. I shall start that now. New files to be cross referenced with existing Hydra members and marked for recovery if no connection to Hydra?"

"Yes. See about hacking SHIELD's bank account too. I think we'll need a little nest egg when the carriers come down. Senate may not want to give us a dime," I answered wryly.

"Of course Ma'am. Shall I label this one, "Nest Egg?"

"I thought I asked Tony to not give you a personality," I smiled.

"I believe his last update gave me one Ma'am. I have no recollection of one beforehand. JARVIS Main has been changing certain code to allow for a more approachable presence. Though I do not understand why I must be approachable."

"And his childish antics are why I don't tell him things," I sighed to myself, "You sound like CP3O and he knows I hate Star Wars."

"Shall I delete the code?"

"Confirmed. And relay a message to JARVIS that any changes are to be confirmed through me unless they are to do with operation. Aesthetic is not something I need in an AI."

"Agreed Ma'am. Code has been deleted and message delivered."

"Thank you HERMES. Please remember Director Fury will be arriving soon," I said, as the elevator stopped, and I walked out.

"Yes Ma'am."

I was approached the training rooms, where another sound was heard. I peered around to see Mel and Phil training. He'd been given the okay by his doctor to start working out again and being more active in the field, and threw himself back into it from what Daisy told me.

"Rumlow's here," I said as I entered.

"Are he and Dad catching up?" Phil asked, dodging Melinda's foot.

"No, but he and Daisy are getting to know each other," I said, watching both of them falter.

"No, no way. I forbid it," Phil said and I smirked, "Like you said you forbid me from making your favorite Christmas cookies, and yet every year, they magically disappear an hour after they are made."

"This is different. He's too old for her. And those cookies made me pudgy," Phil complained, as he and Mel grabbed towels.
"No, too many make you pudgy. Phil, he's a good man. From what you told me about Miles and what she told me about her past relationships, she has only ever been with assholes. Brock isn't that way. He puts on the façade for STRIKE and Hydra, but I know him. And who knows, maybe they'll only be friends?"

"He's eight years older than her Mom. Eight!"

"He's a protector and a gentleman," Mel pointed out, "Even without his Hydra persona, he never disrespects women. He's called out a few of his men for being lewd."

"Not you too," Phil sighed, before taking a drink of water.

"All I'm saying is that when it comes to someone like Ward, you'd want the next best person possible to have Daisy's back if we couldn't. That would be Rumlow," I said, "And I've already discussed him coming as backup to you at one point, undercover of course."

"She's not a little girl anymore Phil," Mel said softly, and he frowned at the reminder. She was an adult. She had grown up quickly being in foster care, and knew what she was doing when she signed on for the mission, so why was dating any different?

"Wash up, dinner is almost ready," I said, leaving them be. Taking the elevator to Level Four, where Steve was going over the Helicarrier designs, I watched him for a minute. He was trying to see how we would get in and disable their targeting chips, memorizing our strategy, but I could tell he had the weight of the world on his shoulders.

"Rumlow's here," I said, after I knocked on the doorframe.

"Alright. And I'm assuming food is almost ready," He said looking down at my apron. I looked down as well and said, "I knew I forgot to do something."

"Pregnancy brain," We said at the same time, laughing a little.

"Do you think if we got him back…" Steve said softly.

"He won't be the same man Steve. You can't go through something like he did and not be changed by it. We just give him love, acceptance and support," I said tucking myself into his side.

"I know, I just worry about how he will be around the baby now," He said and I nodded, "Maybe at first, until he feels comfortable around them. But we can't show him we don't trust him."

"Did Dr. Garner get back to you on the reverse brainwashing stuff?" He asked, and I nodded, "Last week. It will be a couple weeks at least of working with him everyday, keeping a normal routine for him, allowing him to approach us in his own time. Let him initiate conversations, and ask us about his memories if they are still there. There is going to be a lot of guilt for what they made him do, and he will want to push us away."

"Love, consistency and time," Steve nodded.

"And if he feels he can't be with us, we have to respect that. It's something Andrew emphasized. I could see where he was coming from though, learning how important Bucky is to us, he feels we'd just steamroll the process to have him back. But we want him whole, so we follow his instructions or this might hit the fan."

"What?"
"Figure of speech. Throwing shit at a fan, it disperses and ruins everything," I explained and Steve chuckled.

"Gross. Well, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. It may take him time, and we won't pressure him," Steve said, holding me close. We stood there a moment, silently hoping that we could have him back, even a part of him. My phone beeped and I looked down as I brought it out of my back pocket.

"Nick's almost here. Let's eat," I said, taking his hand, and towing him gently towards the elevators. We walked in silence to the lounge, where Daisy had set the table and was smiling and laughing at something Brock had said. I had been too far into my own thoughts to register what he had said before I walked in.

"Fury's on his way in. Look alive," I smiled tightly, pulling my oven mitts on and pulling the chickens out. Placing it on the table, along with the mashed potatoes, candied yams, green beans and gravy, I finished as Nick came strolling in wearing civilian clothes and not his normal trench coat.

"Rumlow," He greeted Brock with a handshake.

"Director," He nodded back as the handshake finished.

"Director Fury," Phil said as he and Melinda came in.

"Phil, Melinda, nice to see you again. Haven't damaged the plane again, have you?" He teased good-naturedly.

"No more holes, I promise," Phil smiled as Daisy came up beside them, "I'd like to officially introduce you to your goddaughter."

"Daisy, I've heard a lot about you from your Grandma. You are one hell of an agent. Not many can pull off being undercover like you have," He said, shaking Daisy's outstretched hand, "Call me Uncle Nick."

"It's an honor to meet you, sir. I mean Uncle Nick," She said smirking.

"I'm sure your Grandmother relayed my message to you, but I am sorry we couldn't find you. We searched until the trail went cold and we wanted to do more, but we had no information to work with," He said apologetically.

"I understand and there is nothing to forgive. Hydra was the one that took me. I blame them. SHIELD may not have been clean, but at least there was an agent that wanted to see me protected by putting me in that orphanage. I understand that I was deemed an 0-8-4 when I was found, so there was a reason Hydra might want me, other than to divide and conquer SHIELD's best."

"Smart girl," He remarked as I gestured for everyone to sit down.

"Dig in," I said, sitting down myself. Food was dished out, and I didn't miss the way Phil's eyes were hard on Rumlow who had taken a seat beside Daisy.

"Alright, debrief. Rumlow, you start," I said after everyone had finished.

"All I have is more news on Barnes," He said, after wiping his mouth on a napkin.

"Barnes? As in Dad?" Phil asked as he looked at Steve and I, making Nick and Rumlow's eyebrows furrow.
"Yes, your father is alive. Hydra took him, brainwashed him... turned him into their killer, the Winter Soldier," I spoke softly, seeing Phil and Mel's faces drain. They knew the name, but now they knew it was true.

"Who?" Daisy asked confused.

"The Winter Soldier is ghost. The Soviets made him first, and then Hydra brought them into the fold. They used him for missions, to take out Hydra's enemies and be unseen while doing it. He's credited with over 2 dozen assassinations over the last 50 years. It took 20 to break him," Brock said and Daisy's eyes watered, knowing from me the kind of torture it took to actually break a person.

"Oh god, Grandpa," She whispered horrified.

"Is there something the rest of you know, that we don't?" Nick sassed as he gestured to Rumlow and himself.

I sighed, before looking at my two protégés, "Bucky, Steve and myself were together during the war. It was beyond frowned upon in our day, our unconventional relationship. It was enough to have us all kicked out of the army if anyone found out, so it's not public knowledge. Peggy and the rest of the Avengers are the only ones that know. The other two, were Tim Dugan and Howard."

"Right," Brock said clearing his throat and saying, "About your brother…"

My blood ran cold as I realized what he might be saying, "You don't mean…"

"Howard was developing a Super Soldier formula, that much you know. Hydra wanted it, and didn't want witnesses to the theft. So, the day you were waiting for your brother ma'am-"

"They sent Buck- The Winter Soldier after it," I said, feeling my chest tightening as I held back sobs, "And he left no witnesses."

"They have the video footage from a camera on the highway. He killed your brother first, and then Maria," He confirmed.

I was shaking in anger, as Steve took my hand, and I asked, "What else?"

"They used the formula on five soldiers of their own. Already trained killers, trained to bring down governments overnight. They are in cryo in Siberia, the facility was abandoned though. So no alarm bells would be raised if we dealt with them before the Helicarrier launch."

"How did you get this information Rumlow?" I asked, lowly. If he compromised himself for it...

"They didn't give me a choice. They said if I was going to be his handler, I needed to know how he worked, the situations he might get in, and who he has already killed for them. The rest they chalked up to me wanting to know 'our' history better. Sick fucks actually thought I was eager to learn about their dirty deeds. But I managed to copy it all in case the government ever gets wind. We might need it as evidence."

"Good thinking. They trust you and that's good. But does he?" I asked, as he shrugged, "He hasn't been out of cryo since our first meeting a month ago. He isn't out for long when he is. Just long enough to take out whoever they send him after."

"Elle," Steve said softly and I looked up at him as he said, "It wasn't him."

"I know that Steve. But Hydra ordered him too. They forced him too. You once told me that you
wouldn't stop until all of Hydra was dead or captured, but now I want to burn them all alive. They took him from me, my twin. They will answer for this," I said seriously, as Phil's hand found my right. I looked over at him and he said, "They will burn, I'll help you see to that Mom."

"We all will. They've messed with our world for far too long," Nick said from the other side of the table.

"Centipede?" I asked Phil, redirecting our conversation to the original topic, pushing down the emotions I was feeling. Once everyone had laid out their current Intel on Hydra, we cleaned up the table. Fury took off and said he would see me after the holidays.

Daisy suggested a movie after the tense atmosphere of our debrief, and popped in White Christmas. It was one of my favorites when Phil was little, showing him how we used to dress, and what my uniform would have looked like. He always thought it was funny, and Danny Kay's character always made him laugh, year after year. It was also funny to him that his name was Phil.

I saw Brock from the corner of my eye looking at Daisy when she wasn't looking, and smiling to himself. Steve was enthralled with the movie, seeing something that reminded him of the war and simpler times for us. I was singing along lowly to all my favorites and Steve would kiss my temple as he rubbed my bump, content with our relatively normal family movie night.

Mel and Phil were curled up together, having patched things up for the holidays. He whispered something in her ear along the lines of, "I can't wait until we don't have to pretend anymore."

She smiled up at him, and I laid my head on Steve's shoulder, relaxing further into the comfort he offered. But in the back of my mind, I was thinking up all the ways I would make Hydra pay for stealing away my life, my organization, my brother and one of the loves of my life.

They would burn, if I had to light the fire myself.
Chapter Thirty

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! Second chapter for today, and then I'll see you all next week. I hope you enjoyed the updates and please let me know what you think. It makes my day to see reviews in my inbox and actually hear back from my readers. Enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

As New Year's Eve approached, our days together were drawing to an end. I had thoroughly enjoyed our family Christmas, even when we started to drive each other crazy. Daisy and Mel had taken to sparring, using the gun range, pushing her limits with PT to keep up Daisy's skills, and Phil and Steve bonded over stories about Steve's past and different battles during World War II. Clint sent me a very short message over an encrypted email.

I hate you. And subsequently, thank you for the new arrows. Nat says Fitz is a genius, so I'm looking forward to testing them out.

Kids say thank you, so do Laura and Nat.

PS. Thank Steve for the letter, and tell him, "Always."

There was an attachment of a Clint doing a grumpy cat impression in a pile of teddy bear stuffing, while Cooper, Lila, Nat and Laura all smiled around him, holding their gifts victoriously. I giggled manically when I showed Steve, watching as the amusement spread over his face until he was laughing with me. I sent one back of our family around the little decorative tree. Brock had snuck it in his last visit, much to Daisy's enjoyment. She crafted a little star for the top and we carefully set presents around it. The present nearly swallowed the tree, but it made for a funny family picture.

"What letter is Clint talking about?" I asked Steve as we snuggled on the couch early that morning. Mel and Phil hadn't come out of their room yet and Daisy was also dead to the world after staying up half the night familiarizing herself with HERMES' systems. We were enjoying a quiet morning with Zeus sprawled out at our feet.

"Something I snuck in there before we mailed it. I was thinking about how you have all this family you take care of. The Commandos kids, grandkids and great. Our son, Mel, Daisy, Tony, Peter and May. Even Tevan and his mom," He said and I nodded as I followed his train of thought.

"You had said the day I came back that you found friends again, a new family after the guys and Bucky's family had passed. Clint was one of the first of that new family. In turn, you got Laura and then Cooper and Lila. I thanked him for befriending you, for being the pestering younger brother that you needed. It wasn't that they needed you, but that you needed them. You are a very nurturing person by nature, and you have thrived being able to take care of other people," He continued.

"You surrounded yourself with people that made you feel loved, at a time when you were losing your connection to the past. It kept you sane, and I'm grateful to Clint for allowing your Mama Bear side to keep growing. And in turn, I get more family, so I thanked him for the opportunity to keep his family protected by guarding his secret."
I was sobbing by the end, with Steve rubbing my back as I said, "How are you so wonderful? I am the luckiest woman to have even found you all those years ago."

"No, I was the lucky one. Because if that confident and gorgeous Major who came to me, hadn't stopped and said, "Chin up soldier, you'll get your shot," I would never have dreamed I could be this happy. Married, a son, and another baby on the way? It was a dream. I would have still signed up for the program when Erskine offered, but I'd have been so focused on serving my country that I'd lose sight of the things I wanted after the war."

"You were the self-sacrificing type, Mr. I'll Jump On That Grenade," I teased, "But I saw your fight, because it was my own. To show the world I was more than what they saw."

"You have always been more. You have this charisma, You exuded confidence, even when I knew seeing Bucky with those girls was crushing you."

"He said he'd wait. But for appearances sake, he kept up the facade," I shrugged, "I can't blame him, girls would flock to him during the War. He had natural charm."

"It was crushing me too. More because I wanted to be with him. But yeah, Bonnie, I think her name was, she looked so... disappointed in me. I never thought a woman would even look my way... until you."

"I still think she was a shallow snob for making you feel that way. You were so handsome," I smiled, holding his cheek, "I'm glad no one else but Bucky saw it, because we got to fall in love with Steve Rogers first. The world fell in love with Captain America, but we wanted the man behind the shield. That kid from Brooklyn, who was basically a chihuahua with aggression issues."

He laughed at my comparison, holding me closer.

"But you like how I look now?" He teased, quoting himself from back in the War. I chuckled, "I do, but that's not why I married you, or fell in love with you in the first place knucklehead. Actually, I'd like to see what you look like with a beard."

"Maybe after this is over, I'll see how it looks," He teased.

"Mmm, you know, I like the sound of it more and more. You'd go from a guy that looks like, "I'll have her home by 9 sir" to "She calls me Daddy too"," I said, leaning in for a kiss. He pulled back before I could and said, "Are you saying I look too much like a goody-two-shoes now?"

"Oh Darling, with your track record you could never be. Lying on your enlistment forms, jumping from planes? Steve Rogers has never followed a rule in his life. Because a goody-two-shoes would never bring up the suggestion of a strap on for his wife to fuck his ass," I chuckled As Steve blushed. That had been an interesting day a few weeks ago, but again, I could never deny him something that brought him pleasure.

"You said you didn't mind," He still blushed.

"I don't. Especially when I get to see that look of pure ecstasy on your face," I winked, "Bucky was partly the goody-two-shoes, keeping you from taking on all of Brooklyn single handedly. You are the bad boy, and apparently I have a weakness for them."

"Really?" He smirked.

"Really? Wasn't that obvious when I fell for you and Bucky? Didn't want to follow conventional rules of society and fell in love despite society telling them not to? And then to add me to the mix?"
The girl who got drunk and took a serum she wasn't entitled to?"

"Yeah, I guess we do have a type," He smiled, "But you knew your value."

"I do. Peggy always had a saying for us. We know our value, and anyone else's opinions don't matter. But It's nice to hear yours."

"Anytime you want it, it's free," He smiled.

"Now, how about you do your morning pushups?"

"Here?" He asked confused, looking around the empty lounge.

"Yes," I smiled, and added "Take off your shirt."

"Do I have to?" He laughed.

"Please," I wiggled my eyebrows at him.

Rumlow dropped by that night, but I didn't tell anyone he was coming, mainly as a surprise for Daisy. Her cheeks pinked up, and I could see the lightness in his eyes when he saw her. Phil wasn't amused though, basically trying to intimidate Brock the entire time. Daisy wasn't fazed by her Dad's behaviour, because come midnight, Brock kissed Daisy's knuckles when the ball dropped. She blushed at the gentlemanly gesture, seeming to be floating on air the following morning.

The best part of the holiday was watching Daisy and Brock get more comfortable around one another, her playful side coming out, and seeing the fondness in his eyes when she laughed. After Miles, she was sure all the guys she would attract would be assholes, which is why I was so sure Brock would be good for her. He would show her that she was worth more, and that she deserved better. I would just never tell her that at one point he was into me. That shit was too Twilight for me, and I'd prefer to block it out and deny it ever happened.

Rumlow got the full story out of me about Bucky, promising that he would do everything he could to get Bucky back to us. Steve was grateful, as was I, but I knew it might be more complicated than that. Bucky was trained to be a ghost, and if Hydra went down while he was loose, he'd go to ground and we may not find him. My job would be to keep an eye out for him when we brought the Helicarriers down. Not that Jemma or Dr. Fine would advise it, but I'd fly a Quinjet if I could to keep my eye on them.

And it was a week after our vacation ended that Daisy called me in a panic. Phil had been taken by Centipede. It had been a trap, Centipede had taken him and I knew why. They were after TAHITI. I had our Guest House agents rig the place in case Phil gave something away, and wished them luck. They would lay down their lives to keep the secret.

Steve had to quietly remind me not to cry or give any indication for the listening bugs that I was in distress over our son's kidnapping. Rumlow even went AWOL to go shadow Daisy, who had been kicked off the BUS by Victoria Hand. Hand was a great operative, but a bit of a hard ass, and coming from me, that was saying something.

But I hadn't asked him to do that; he went because he knew she might be in trouble and would need back up.

Daisy had texted me that Rumlow had found her and helped her trace the money back to Ian Quinn. It's how she got the idea to search his properties. Brock had to leave her to let her meet back up with
the team. While I was grateful, I was ready to rake him over the coals. He could have blown his cover, and I was surprised as he was to find his little jaunt off the grid was never even acknowledged by Hydra. But I couldn't be mad that he kept her safe and helped her find Phil.

Phil had to pretend to look into 'Skye's' past with May, while they had dealt with a problem at the SciTech academy. It all resulted in a new Gifted, Donnie Gill. He was taken to the Sandbox and it had me thinking of all our bases and academies. If Hydra was brought down at the Triskelion, what would stop them from taking other facilities? What if they went after the FRIDGE and the hidden arsenal in the sub-basement?

So, under the guise of a random inspection, I snuck in Nat, Clint and Hill to help me deem what couldn't fall into Hydra's hands. Clint was pissed at being left out of planning for Hydra's downfall, but he had been a little busy at home.

We snuck out the Gravitonium from the sub-basement, a couple 0-8-4's that were very dangerous, and the Berserker Staff that had been delivered before Christmas. One I recognized from a Hydra raid right after Steve put the plane down. It had been found by a group of villagers from the Hunan province in China in Chaves, Portugal, and then taken by Dr. Werner Reinhert, who took it back to Austria to test it. I took great pleasure in punching him unconscious and locking him up, especially after he had called me, The Captain's Widow.

"What's that?" Clint had asked quietly, as I stared at the box.

"The Obelisk, the first 0-8-4. Hydra had found it in 1945, and a single touch would turn you to stone," I said, biting my lip as I looked at the case.

"What's wrong Elizabeth?" Nat asked, seeing my expression.

"Nothing, just… after I lost Bucky and Steve, I had tried everything I could to end my life. Nothing worked, and touching this thing… I thought it would work."

"What? You touched it?" Clint asked, concerned.

"Yeah. The thing glowed, but no one saw me try. Jim... Morita, came back for it and I backed up before he saw. It was sealed up in this case and never seen again," I said, feeling a fluttering in my stomach. And along with the fluttering, a building curiosity for the object in the case. Why was I the only one to be able to touch it?

"Something wrong Colonel?" Maria asked as I stared in deep thought at the case. Shaking my head once, I refocused on my companions as I said, "No, just feeling the baby kick. Let's finish up."

Another two months had passed since we raided the FRIDGE of anything Hydra might want. I had officially been on my extended vacation for a month and a half, beginning to realize I would need to live at Olympus to avoid Hydra from following me and possibly discovering the location of my base. Fitz had made a new Photostatic veil, and it was working quite well. Except I could only wear black. It was easier than trying to add a new image to its memory, and I usually wore black anyways.

Steve and I had to have a 'fight' to make it believable that I wasn't living there, and so that he wasn't tracked when we met up incognito.

I had just gotten my bag packed, when Steve came home. I left him a note next to the key bowl, explaining that anything I said in this fake fight, I didn't mean. I had to act more and more annoyed over the last month, keeping with the story that I needed time away from him.
“Elle?” He called out. I lugged the tac bag over my shoulder, walking out. With my suit and weapons, I had packed a lot of my valuables, in case Hydra ransacked the place afterwards. Steve would bring small things to me whenever we met up at Olympus.

"Here," I sighed.

"You got a mission?"

"Something like that," I muttered under my breath. He knew I was baiting him, so he asked, "What's up? Or is it classified?"

"It is classified. I just... a deep cover op came up, completely off the books. I took it. I just need some time away from DC."

"Away from DC or me?" He sassed, mouthing, "Sorry."

"Honestly, I just need some room. To breathe," I said with a little bite, "I'm feeling smothered."

"Smothered? I thought we were okay?" He asked with a confused voice.

"No, we are not. Because while you've been getting to know the new century you woke up in, I'm still getting used to having someone around. I lived by myself for years. You act like everything has gone back to normal. Normal for me is cutting myself off from the world after work... being alone. Do you know how many years it took for me to finally be okay with being alone? 5 years alone in Greece. And since then I'd gotten so used to being alone, that if I had guests for more than a night, it would make me a little squirrely."

"Elle, I'm not just anyone."

"Yes, how could I forget? You're my husband, and I'm your wife," I bite out again, "Funny how that didn't factor in 70 years ago, but it means the world now."

"That's not fair Elle. You know I-"

"Yes, you had to save the world. Had to prove to everyone that you were a hero. But what you didn't see, or didn't want to see, was that you were already mine. And you threw me away. You only want me now because... I don't know. Divorce wasn't an option for our generation, money, my position, I'm the only familiar face in the world for you or convenience. Maybe a bit of all."

"None of that is why I-"

"I don't care. I don't care why you want to stay with me. Right now, I need space. It's not you, it's me. Maybe I am just too broken to accept love. Peggy was so cross with me for letting you back in so fast. Maybe I should have kept you more at arms length at the beginning. You have formed an unhealthy attachment to me-"

"You're my wife! I love you. If I didn't want to spend the rest of my life with you-"

"It's funny you should word it that way. You certainly didn't mind leaving me alone, when you could have waited for me to get Howard on the line. You just took a nosedive with a plane into a glacier. I can tell you really wanted to spend the rest of your life with me," I sassed, grabbing my keys.

"Elle, don't walk out. Please," He pleaded, "We can work on this. I can be better, I can be what you need."
"No Steve, I have to walk out. Because I'm going to say things that cannot be unsaid if I stay."

"Don't go, please," He begged, coming to take my hand.

"Let me go Steve. I'll be back, when I don't know. But despite how I'm feeling, I do love you. I'm not ready to bear my soul. I can't... I can't take Zeus with me. Please take care of him. And we'll talk and hash everything out when I get back. I just need to sort out my thoughts."

"Please," He said, and I was surprised when his eyes watered. I could hear it in his voice and I knew the bugs would pick it up as well. I dropped my bag, to wrap my arms around his neck, pulling him in for a kiss.

"Till the end of the line, I am yours and you are mine," I said, feeling my own eyes watering as I pulled back, gazing into his eyes. He smiled before mouthing, "I'll see you soon."

"Always. I'm sorry I've hurt you. I'll... I won't fight you. Just come home to me."

"It's what I wanted from you as I watched that plane take off. But I promise you that I will come home. I just don't know when."

I kissed Zeus's head once and said, "Be good for Daddy."

"And you... don't get into trouble. I know that's like asking you not to breathe Mr. Risk Taker, but try please," I smiled, and Steve nodded, "I'll try. For you. You are all I want Elle. I'd give up everything to make you stay."

"I know. But there are things that you wouldn't give up, and that's my point. Figure out why you always seem to disregard your own personal safety if it means saving people. I can't die, but you can. I won't watch you kill yourself, not again."

And with that, I picked up my bag and walked out. I used the veil to buy groceries and settled myself in at Olympus, regretting not getting one of the Koenigs to keep me company. It may not be too late to ask Sam, but for tonight, I wanted to wallow in my isolation.

It was hell, being away from Steve and being as pregnant as I was. Rumlow had been bringing me groceries and passing notes between Steve and I, and sometimes Nat. It was hard on Steve, not being able to see me, not being able to see how I was growing or feeling the baby kick. His visits were few and far between.

"Elle," A voice called from down the hall. I looked up in shock, seeing Steve there, just putting a veil into his pocket. I tried my best to run to him, but I was waddling more and more these days. At 29 weeks, I was looking a little bit more along. Dr. Fine assured me the babe was perfect size and Jemma was right about petite women and pregnancy. Steve met me halfway, kissing me passionately, one hand holding my belly and the other my cheek.

"God I've missed you," I smiled up at him, as Rumlow came up behind him, "This is a surprise."

"Colonel," He said, looking pale.

"What's wrong? You weren't followed, were you?" I asked, concerned.

"No, not followed. But, I went to text Daisy earlier and Agent May responded. Daisy was shot," He said, swallowing hard.

"What?" I asked, horrified.
"She was on a mission to find Quinn, and the bastard shot her. May nearly beat him to a pulp, but the doctors say that she won't make it," Brock said, as I felt myself sway.

"No," I said, crumpling in Steve's arms.

"What's more, May wants permission to tell Coulson about TAHITI… He is trying to find out the exact treatment, hoping to use it on Daisy. She wants him to have all the facts."

"I'll text her. It's gonna be a bitch to explain it to Phil, but I'll face the music. The only issue is the side effects… I feel bad about putting her through them, but I'd rather have her go through them than die because of Ian Quinn. Tell May to monitor Daisy. This must be coming to a head, because the launch is in three weeks."

"Our merc is ready to go on our mark," Rumlow said, steering himself to what he knew, work. He was distracting himself, and I could tell he was worried about Daisy.

"Dr. Fine knows his part?" Steve asked and I nodded, "He'll bring him back here once you and Nat have your 'goodbye'."

"And you won't be leaving the base," He said, to which I shook my head, "If you need me, to help with Bucky-"

"Bucky might not be stable, he might hurt you, or the baby. And I certainly won't let Hydra get their hands on you."

"Steve, if we bring down Hydra, we are going to need to dump all their dirty secrets, and to do that you need two Alpha level clearance ID's. That's Nick and I. Pierce won't even get the chance to speak, because I am putting a bullet right between his eyes."

"Elle, calm down," Steve said gently.

"This is all too much right now," I said, sagging against his chest. He easily picked me up, carrying me down the hall to our room and laying me on the bed. Rumlow hovered at the door, saying, "Should I go grab the Doc?"

"No, I just need a minute. If we grab him any more than normal it will tip them off. And you are both MIA right now to Hydra," I said, trying to calm myself down.

"Rest Elle, I'll check in with Melinda," Steve said and I nodded, "Just tell her to be up front with Phil. And that it was my choice. He'll understand… in time."

I was so deep in thought and worry that I didn't realize how much time had passed since Steve left the room.

"Have you rested at all?" Steve asked at the doorway, makign me look up.

"You just left, didn't you?" I asked, confused.

"No, it's been about two hours. Rumlow and I need to head back. I'll be back tomorrow night like we planned."

"Any word?"

"They've got her stabilized and they are on their way to the Guest House. Anything they should know?"
"I'll tell them," I said, knowing the facility couldn't survive. I wouldn't let this fall into Hydra's hands.

"I love you," He said, kissing me softly, "She's going to make it through this."

"Just with a couple of side effects," I sighed, and he nodded, "But it's better that she's alive. We can deal with the side effects. It's her death we would all have trouble with."

"I sent her," I said shaking my head and feeling my throat tighten with emotion.

"She chose to accept it. She knew the risks. Maybe there was more, like she couldn't defend herself without blowing her cover. She might have taken those bullets so that Hydra didn't get tipped off. We don't know," He pointed out.

"Let's… let's just talk about this tomorrow. Have a good night," I said softly.

"You as well. Don't think I don't notice the dark circles under your eyes. Try to sleep."

"It's hard without you next to me," I smiled sadly at him.

"How's Zeus?" I asked suddenly, wondering where our lovable Pitbull was.

"He's at daycare right now, loving it. Weather was nice enough that they will be having an outside day. So I get to bathe him when I pick him up."

"Just play some music, it keeps him calm. But in truth, he loves baths," I smiled, cupping Steve's jaw.

"I'll be here all night tomorrow," He said, kissing me again, "Nothing is going to keep me away from you."

"Miss you already, goofball," I chuckled and he smiled, "Not as much as I miss you."

And he left without another glance. It was easier on us if he didn't look back, because if he had, he wouldn't be leaving this room. And he needed to be home tonight.

When I was sure that Rumlów and Steve were gone, I texted Daisy's phone telling May what needed to be done.

Another agonizing hour later, Daisy was stable and she was going to make it. Mel called me the next time she and Phil were alone on Daisy's phone. He tapped the phone twice to let me know it was him and I said, "You have a lot of questions right now, and what I can answer is this."

"There was a reason the place was set to blow. I wouldn't let anyone get their hands on that research, and we both know Garrett was after any information he could give to Hydra."

"There are side effects. We don't know if she will exhibit any of them, but Melinda knows what to look for, because part of why she accepted to fly the BUS was to monitor you. I was the one who gave Fury the order. You already know that we had to alter your memories, and I'm sorry, but I didn't want to chance you experiencing symptoms based off your previous memories."

"It might have been your choice to face Loki, knowing you may not win, but it was my choice to do everything I could to have you in my life. You can hate me for it, but at least you are alive to do so. I thought that I wanted to die when your father put the plane down, but when you died in my arms, I wanted to Slingshot myself into the sun," I choked up.

"I will answer anything you want to know. I won't lie to you," I said honestly.
"I think I need a drink, it's been a long day," He said to Mel, hanging up. My eyes watered, as I knew he was angry with me. He had every right.
Chapter Thirty One

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers. I'm sorry this may be late in the day, but I was in the hospital last night. I was in a lot of pain and my husband took me to the emergency room. Short version, I was suffering from an ectopic pregnancy and had emergency surgery at 3:30am PST. It wasn't confirmed if what they removed was my baby or something else, but I'm home now and resting. I'm in a lot of pain emotionally, but I want normal things right now to distract myself. Writing had also always been my escape, and I'm grateful that I can share my escape with you all. They say art imitates life, so I know the pain Elizabeth went through when she lost her first child. Even though I am not in a happy place, Elizabeth is. I won't let me cynical outlook reflect in my writing. Please give me the distraction I need.

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

Steve came the next afternoon, and held me as I cried about how Phil hated me. Damn hormones. He didn't say a word, but just held me tight. And later that evening, Rumlow brought Dr. Fine for my 29 week check up. It was a move that required the cover of night.

We had wanted to be surprised about the baby, but with everything going on with Phil and Daisy, I needed something. Steve was more than happy to hear the gender, still intrigued with the technology that could show you your unborn children in the womb.

"And we have…" Dr. Fine said, as I held tight to Steve's hand, anxious for the result. He smiled at me, giving my hand a quick squeeze.

"A girl," Fine said, making my jaw drop.

"A girl?" I asked, feeling emotional. I had been so blessed with Phil, and I knew I was getting another chance at having kids when Steve suggested it. But knowing there was about to be a little girl I could play dress up with, tea parties and teach how to cook… It was too perfect for words. I looked up at Steve smiling, "A girl."

"We're having a girl," Steve breathed, clearly overjoyed at the prospect. He gave the softest sob as we smiled at each other. He was getting his chance at raising a family, and it was a sight to behold as he watched our little girl yawn and stretch on the monitor. He looked back at me as Dr. Fine kept going about her current weight and where she was development wise. But we were still in our little bubble, with Steve gazing from my belly to the monitor in awe, before smiling like a fool at me. He kissed my forehead as we looked back at the monitor, holding my hand tightly to his chest.

"She is doing great. You weren't kidding when you mentioned what Erskine said Colonel," He said, looking back at me once.

"About what?" Steve asked, wiping the emotion from the corner of his eyes.

"Abe theorized I would be the perfect incubator because of the lack of Vita Ray stimulation to my
cells. I'm in a constant state of regeneration and it increases when I'm pregnant, protecting the baby."

"Ah."

"Yeah, my doctor was so impressed with my pregnancy with Phil. He claimed there was never a more perfect pregnancy. I didn't gain any weight, Phil was just the right size and stayed there until my due date. Exactly nine months after I conceived, my body decided he was perfect," I mused. I heard Rumlow snort in the background, and looked over to him.

"Have they given Daisy back her phone? It makes me anxious when she doesn't have it on her," I said and Dr. Fine shot me a look, before I said, "Okay, no anxiety. Happy?"

"Very," He said, printing out a few pictures for Steve and I, "Because the next time I hear about any anxiety, you are on bed rest. Not that this whole cloak and dagger situation is a walk in the park, but I'm not taking any chances when no one is here with you."

"Daisy has her phone back, but very rarely can she use it. She's locked in a med pod, and it's all windows. Don't want anyone questioning why she has two different phones," Brock replied after I nodded at Fine.

"Good call on her part, but she still needs to check in. Unless she's mad at me too," I sighed, feeling Steve squeeze my hand again.

"She isn't."

"It doesn't sound like she knows why she's being monitored. She's a little confused as to why Phil is tense though."

"You can tell her that he is mad at me for hiding the truth about his revival, and I'll explain the rest later."

"Alright, this is the time you need to be on bed rest. While I'm happy with her size and your blood pressure, it can never hurt to be too cautious," Dr. Fine said, cleaning me up, "Especially with everything going on."

"Alright. You're the boss," I conceded, mentally crossing my fingers. He didn't need to know I would be flying the helicopter on the big day.

"Expect my bill," He joked.

"Considering that you're staying on with us afterwards, I'll add it to your paycheque," I teased back.

"Don't know whether or not I'm crazy for that. But what do I know? I'm not a psychologist," He shrugged.

"Great, they've got Asgardian trouble," Rumlow said, and my head snapped over to him.

"Loki? Thor said he was dead."

"No, someone named Lorelei. She enchants men to do her bidding by speaking. There goes my idea to lend a hand," He sighed, and I saw Steve smirk.

"He's got it bad," He whispered and I had to stifle a giggle. It was funny to watch my protégé trying to keep his tough guy act on, when he was a little lovesick for my granddaughter.

"And so does she," I replied, looking back at Rumlow.
That night, Steve and I hung onto each other, relishing the closeness after weeks apart. He told me that everyone still asked about me, confused to why I up and left. I guess Hydra was getting a little sloppy in their intelligence gathering, because most of STRIKE kept asking if Steve had heard from me. Steve just said to them that I had done this before, left for five years after the war and he was giving me my space. That was the 'fight' we had for the listening devices in the apartment. Nat knew not to bring it up, but still asked after me, slipping Steve or Rumlow a note for me, mainly that she missed me. She had been asking after Fitz, and at first my eyebrows shot up into my hairline, because it wasn't about weapon design.

She liked him. More she liked how she felt around him, how his actions towards her such as stuttering and flushed cheeks, made her feel desired as a woman. It was still an interesting notion for me, knowing Nat was fond of someone. She refused to call it love, and Clint and I were the only ones that knew why. She had loved someone, a mark she had, and the Red Room made her kill him or be killed herself for weakness.

Anytime someone mentioned love, she would repeat, "Love is for children," either in her head or under her breath. It was a habit she had to break, like handcuffing herself to her bedframe at night. That one took a few years, and it was not pretty. But since Clint had opened up to her, and I'd been working with her, she started to open up herself. She loved Cooper and Lila, Clint's kids, and Laura was like a sister to her. It was getting easier for her to share more of her heart, and she believed she had found someone who she could grow to love one day.

Daisy says that whenever Natasha's name or even codename is mentioned, Fitz blushes and tries to concentrate on the conversation a bit more. She asked him about their conversation back at the Triskelion and he said she was kind and knew exactly what she wanted, didn't treat him like any other engineer. Nat did favor an accent, as was obvious by all the Gerard Butler movies we would watch.

"I think we should wait."

Steve looked at me bleary eyed the next morning, "What?"

"I think we should wait until Bucky's ready... for anything intimate. He's going to be going through so much, I don't want him feeling left out if we were having sex without him," I had already been up for an hour, overthinking.

"But wouldn't that make him feel pressured? To... say yes before he's ready because he thinks we want it?" He asked, rubbing his eyes.

"No, because we all are practicing some abstinence. We don't think Hydra has... touched him or done anything to him. But there is a good chance he will have issues with any physical contact, unsure of what his body wants and what his mind needs. He'll hopefully be grateful that we are all sexually frustrated. Me more than most, because I'll have to wait after the baby is born," I huffed, rubbing my belly.

"How long?" He asked, curious.

"Usually 6 weeks. That more to give your uterus a breather to go back to normal size. But I don't think I'll need that I'll snap back like a rubber band the next day. We need to think about birth control then, until we are ready for another one."

"Doll, we haven't even set up her room yet," Steve gestured to the wall of our room. Just beyond it was the bathroom and then the baby's room.
"I didn't want to get much until we knew Hydra was gone from SHIELD. It's already suspicious to the service that delivers my groceries here. The building looks empty from the outside, and a delivery van is already pushing it. Besides, I'd get yelled at for lifting a box more than 25 lbs," I teased him, running my fingers over his chest.

"If you want to wait, you better stop doing that," He smiled teasingly.

"Maybe one last time, just to commemorate this last time together, before we are reunited?" I smiled coyly.

"What did you have in mind?" He asked, and I chuckled, "Well, I can get on my knees...

"Mmm, yeah?" He said, leaning forward to kiss me.

"And then I can get you on your knees after," I whispered, biting his ear. He shuddered, "O-okay."

"Don't be shy," I teased, "You certainly knew what you wanted when you brought it up."

He blushed as we both remembered the day.

Steve was quiet. It had been about two weeks since we found out Bucky was alive, and that Hydra had him. With our plans for Insight waiting until the launch day, Steve was getting very antsy. I was too, but I masked it better. I just wanted Bucky back between us. But Steve would look over at me several times during our strategy meeting with Rumlow and Fury. They both didn't notice his confused looks, but once they had left, I rounded on him.

"Okay, what's wrong?" I asked, worried.

"Nothing. Could we go up to our place, to talk?" He asked, nervously. I eyed him, wondering why we couldn't talk about it in the conference room, but didn't fight it.

The elevator ride was quiet, as I watched Steve's eyebrows furrow in thought. We stepped out and I said, "Okay, we aren't anywhere in earshot of Brock and Nick, so what's so-"

"Just, please," He asked, and I sighed, "Alright."

He closed the door behind us when we got there and I saw a bag on the end of the bed.

"Were we staying here tonight?" I teased.

"I'd..." He stopped, letting out a breath slowly and looking away for a second. He locked eyes with me once more and said, "It's been awhile."

"What's been?" I asked, sitting down on the end of the bed.

"Since we were last all together. Since... since I was last with Bucky."

"It hit me like a ton of bricks, and I relaxed as I exclaimed, "Oh! Okay, but why the- there's something in here, isn't there?"

"Yes. I... I used the alias you set up for me," He explained, "And bought something. I just... Even if we hadn't found... found out about Bucky being alive, it was on my mind."

"Well, you've already got me hooked. Reel me in," I encouraged him to continue.

"Now that I know you're okay with..."
"What, anal?" I teased, "The word doesn't phase me, Steve. Continue."

"Yes, anal," He rolled his eyes at me teasing, "But I was wondering if you'd... do the same..."

I unzipped the bag as he was talking, and pulled out the toy he had purchased.

"Ah, just about Bucky's length and girth," I nodded, "You'd like me to prepare you for when we get him back. But isn't foreplay half the fun?"

"You don't have to-," He blushed as I cut in.

"Yes, I think this might be fun too," I smiled.

"You do?" He asked, shoulders sagging in relief.

"Steve, I'd do just about anything you'd ask. Ask me to call you Daddy? Sure. Ask me if you can fuck my ass? Sure. But at one point, I'd like to have you both, at the same time," I whispered seductively as I got up and moved closer to him, "And if this helps ease some of your... longings, I'm more than up to the task."

"Both of us? How?" He asked, looking confused for a moment, before blushing.

"Yeah, it's called double penetration," I smiled.

"I'd read about that briefly," He admitted, still blushing slightly.

"You aren't the only one who has been reading up. But I think you need to tell me what you would like me to do with this, Captain," I smirked, bringing the strap on up to rest against my cheek suggestively.

"For someone who enjoyed it as much as I did, you sure like to tease me about it," I smiled, bringing me out of the memory.

"Oh, quit sulking. I do like it," I smiled starting to strip myself out of my sleep clothes, "Now, hurry up. You've got to get home to Zeus before 'Kate' has to 'go to work'. Where did you tell her you were going?"

"I told Kate I was on an assignment for work, but I slipped her a flash paper saying I was meeting you. She misses you by the way. SHIELD thinks I was taking a day to myself. Did my run, my normal routine and then slipped out of sight with a new face," He shrugged as he pulled off his shirt.

"Alright. Well, are we going to continue talking, or are you going to fuck me?" I challenged.

And before we knew it, the launch was almost upon us. The satellite was up in orbit, and we awaited our merc, George Batroc, to commandeer the ship within a day or two. I watched Steve go on his normal morning run, through surveillance cameras around the National Mall. It was my way of being with him and watching out for him. He knew it and would purposefully wear his tightest running shirts for me. Rumlow sent me the alert that Batroc had made it onto the ship and we were awaiting SHIELD to move and assemble STRIKE.

I watched through a traffic monitor as Steve stopped and approached another man he had been overtaking. Steve found enjoyment in trolling people as we ran, and I couldn't deny him the simple joys in life. I loved watching his smile as this guy sat collapsed against a tree, and quickly starting the lip reading software so I could see what they were saying.
"Need a medic?"

"I need a new set of lungs. Dude, you just ran thirteen miles in 30 minutes."

"Guess I got a late start," Steve quipped, making me smile. We were usually up earlier, but he was trying to give the impression of grief by delaying his runs by 45 minutes or so.

"Really? You should be ashamed of yourself. You should run another lap. Did you just take it? I assume you just took it," The man said as I ran facial recognition on him. Got a DMV and a US Military ID hit, as Steve said, "What unit were you in?"

"58th Pararescue. But now I'm working down at the VA. Sam Wilson," He said, holding out his hand, as I went through Sam's military career. Steve replied as he pulled the man up, "Steve Rogers."

"EXO-FALCON, impressive," I said, noting that it was a piece of Stark tech. Tony didn't explore it any further after one of the test pilots had been knocked out of the sky with an RPG. I'd have to ask him to look back into it in the future. After my lightsaber was finished, of course. I was so ready to be training again. Treadmill walks were not my idea of fun.

"Yeah, I kinda put that together. Must have freaked you out, coming home after the whole defrosting thing."

"Takes some getting used to. Good to meet you Sam," I heard as I looked up his bank records and any information that could link him to Hydra. I wanted Steve to have friends, don't get me wrong, but I wasn't about to let him get too close to someone who could be a plant.

"It's your bed right?" Sam asked and I turned back to the video feed.

"What's that?" Steve asked.

"Your bed, it's too soft. When I was over there I used to sleep on the ground. Use rock for pillows, like a caveman. Now I'm home and it feels like..."

"Like lying on a marshmallow. Feel like I'm gonna sink right to the floor," He said, before asking, "How long?"

"Two tours. You must miss the good ol' days huh?"

"Things aren't so bad. Food's a lot better; we used to boil everything, and my wife's cooking, never thought I'd get that again... Though that's been a few months for me... No polio is good. Internet, so helpful. Been reading that a lot trying to catch up. My wife, the Colonel, she was helping me for awhile."

"She working on a base somewhere, or doing some Avenging?"

"Neither. She took some time off... from me. I hurt her when I put the plane in the ice. She didn't really get over it, and I just acted like nothing changed. I did give her about 70 years to stew in her anger, so I'm just giving her the space she needs. It's something she did after I 'died'. Took off for Greece for about 5 years, rarely contacted anyone from what she told me. I'm sure she's on a beach, somewhere warm. I just wish I could be with her," Steve said, looking at his feet. The was an awkward beat.

"Marvin Gaye, 1972 Troubleman soundtrack. Everything you missed jammed into one hour."

"I'll put it on the list. I'm pretty sure I've heard the name though. Elizabeth's music taste it... all over
the place," Steve said as he pulled out his little notebook I had bought him. He was still going through a lot, but doing well. He could keep up with some of my pop culture references. Despite being 96 years old, I still felt 25 at heart. And when I looked in the mirror.

"How so?"

"Try listening to Big Band music from the 40's and the next song being death metal. It's... unnerving how fast she switches from the Elizabeth I knew, to a... what do they call them now? Millennial? She once told me that the internet is a deep dark hole and if you are not careful, you'll get sucked up to the dark side with cat videos and... meemeees," He said, and I knew damn well he knew how to pronounce it. My husband is the biggest troll when he wants to throw people off.

"It's memes," Sam laughed heartily, "But I can agree with that. The internet is not a place for the faint of heart."

"Well Sam, it was good to meet you. Thanks for the run, if that's what you want to call 'running'," Steve teased him as he read and put away his phone, holding out a hand for Sam who took it.

"Oh that's how it is?" Sam sassed.

"That's how it is," Steve chuckled as they shook hands.

"Anytime you want to drop by the VA, make me look awesome in front of the girl at the front desk, just let me know," Sam said as I saw Nat's car approaching.

"Alright, time to focus up," I said to myself, looking into Sam a bit further. He was clean, hell of a soldier, and I would keep him in mind as a recruit. For the Avengers or SHIELD, I didn't know quite yet. He would be a good foot soldier for STRIKE, or he'd be an aerial asset for the Avengers.

It was later that day that I got a text from Steve on the encrypted line that he was going to see Peggy and wanted to know what to tell her if she asked about me. I hated lying to her, but it had to seem real, our separation. I sent him a message back to keep up the façade and that I needed his honest opinion of her the next time I saw him. He'd gotten back from the Lemurian Star unscathed, and our bait was in place.

We both knew that it might be days or hours, depending on how Hydra reacted to Nick reaching out to Steve for shelter. They would try to pin it on him, not outright but by saying that he was keeping information from 'SHIELD'. It would allow them to hunt him, and Dr. Fine was on standby with the Tetrodotoxin B. Bruce was very confused as to why I asked for it, but gave it up when I said it was a matter of life and death.

I hated keeping the plan from Tony, but he wasn't stealthy. Challenging the Mandarin basically solidified my resolve that he should be left out. Thor was another reason it was imperative that we keep them out of this, as he was not subtle either. Bruce couldn't mind, because while he didn't like SHIELD, he also didn't like having to bring the Big Guy out if he didn't have to. They could be mad I didn't ask them after we brought Hydra to its knees. And Clint was on a mission until right before the launch; it would look too suspicious if he suddenly left to come back to DC. So instead, I was sending him to help on the Iliad. Gonzalez, Hartley and Morse could use the help. Robert was only given the clue that certain members of his team might be double agents and he would know when they turned.

Maria and Dr. Fine wheeled Nick in just a few hours after I had my breakfast the next morning. While Maria had to get back to SHIELD for appearance sake, I aided Dr. Fine in trying to fix Nick up. He woke with a start, and I looked up from my tablet, where I had tapped into the Triskelion's
security feeds. Steve had already been to Pierce and battled Rumlow and STRIKE in the elevator. I had seen the moment Rumlow gave Steve to knock him out, without it being obvious.

"Welcome back," I said softly and he winced before taking a few more deep breaths.

"Where are we?" Nick asked groggily, and I knew he didn't mean location wise.

"Nat and Steve are leading them to the mall. Nice suggestion on her part to use an Apple Store, make it look like we have no idea what's actually going on," I said, monitoring Pierce. Rumlow made contact that they were enroute to the mall, and would try to angle his body cam away.

"Pierce?"

"Moving ahead with the launch. I've already told Steve about a safe house where they can lay low. Even has an ally for us," I said, showing him Sam Wilson's military record and flight suit.

"After this is over, you're taking the damn job," he grunted as he tried to adjust his head.

"Don't move. You've got a lacerated spinal column, cracked sternum, shattered collarbone, a collapsed lung and a perforated liver. You are staying in this damn bed until Fine gets back and tells you otherwise."

"Any particular meds for me Colonel? Other than deflection."

"Yeah, rest, sarcasm and morphine," I said adjusting the IV drip, "Lots of rest. It will be tomorrow evening at least before we see them, so just go to sleep. I'll wake you when it's time."

"You better," he slurred as the morphine kicked in.

"I will," I said as my phone beeped again.

*Good luck Grams. - D*

You too sweet girl. Keep your head up and remember it's almost over. Anything you have to do survive, do it without hesitation. I will see you soon, and hide the phone in the thigh holster I gave you.

Fine came back and checked over Nick once before checking on me, asking how I was doing stress wise. I just raised an eyebrow at him and he smirked. He took my blood pressure, checked the baby's heart rate and a fetal movement test. By the time that was done, I needed a nap. While Phil wasn't talking to me, I still want to keep him informed of the plan. So I sent Daisy a message that our plan was in place and to expect Hydra to come out of the shadows two mornings from now.

The next morning I sent Nat directions for the safe house. They had made it back from New Jersey overnight, stealing another car as I inspected the aerial view of the mess at Camp Lehigh. Not that I had been there since the war, but it was my first home away from home. At least Zola was dead now, and we led the missile right to him.

Natasha's number came up signaling a call and I answered, tapping the mic on the phone twice, to signal that it was me.

"Elle?"

"Oh thank god," I sighed, "You made it out in time."
"Just about didn't. What's the next play?"

"Sitwell is our weak link. Grab him, make him talk and be sure to be seen when you transport him. Bucky will be sent to take him out, so be prepared. He could come out of thin air. Rumlow will be close by to capture you, and Maria will get you out. Look convincing, and don't tell Wilson. He's got to act convincing too and we don't know how good his acting is."

"So you approve? I was surprised when he opened the door. Didn't think you'd trust someone I just met."

"Nat, Brock and I can't be your only friends. He's clean Steve, which is more than I can say for half of SHIELD right now. Just wait until he offers his help. He's not a super-soldier, but he's got a few party tricks that will come in handy."

"Alright. How's Fury?"

"Sleeping like a drugged baby right now. I'll ease up on the morphine so he'll be conscious later tonight. Fine was coming by anyways to check up on him. How's Nat?"

"Shaken a bit. It's unnerving to see her like this."

"Well, when the organization you've been working with for years turned out to be a neo-Nazi organization, that now wants to silence you forever, it takes a toll on you. She signed herself up after New York, because she wanted to help. She wants to do what's right, and she's prepared. When we are done here, hand her the phone, please?"

"Of course. How is she?"

"Kicking up a storm. I think she is excited that she will see you tonight. Or at least hear you," I smiled, before frowning, "Steve, remember when you see Bucky, he won't let anyone come in between him and his target. He isn't Bucky in that instance, and you need to be prepared to fight back," I cautioned him.

"I know. It's..."

"It's going to be hard, but you can't hesitate."

"You wouldn't hesitate, even a little?"

"If the choice came down between not fighting Bucky and protecting myself until I could help him, I wouldn't. But that may still change. Ask me again after... after we bring him home," I said, closing my eyes to will away the moisture gathering in them.

"Alright, no new intel?"

"No. Stick to the mission Captain, and come home safely," I said sternly.

"Yes Ma'am," He chuckled, "I love you."

"I love you too, you wanted fugitive," I teased.

"Here's Nat," He chuckled again at my joke, before I heard the phone passed.

"Lizzie," She said teasingly, and I smiled, "Widow."

"So, how's our boy?" I asked, and she sighed, "Stubborn as ever. He's a good kisser though, I'll give
"That was quick thinking on your part. Don't tell him I know, I think it would be funny to have him explain it. He's always been stubborn, but just make him stick to the plan. No going off book and everything will work out," I explained before adding in Russian, "Remember that they will fall."

"Be safe," She replied in her native tongue, and I smiled, "I'm not the one facing the Winter Soldier. Again."

"Yeah, I'll try not to exact an eye for an eye over our last meeting," She said and I chuckled.

"Thank you. Just try not to shock him. We don't know if that makes it worse, the conditioning that is."

"Will try," She said, "Gotta go. Your husband is looking broody."

"He's a mother hen. Let him fuss," I laughed, before we said goodbye.

The hours didn't pass by easily. I watched the footage from SHIELD body cams and from the news chopper. I tried to follow Bucky as he returned to wherever Hydra was keeping him, losing him twice, before catching him entering a building. I should have known to look under buildings Pierce owned. I'd at least be able to tell Steve when Bucky was on the move tomorrow.

I saw Maria over the monitors, driving up to the entrance. I opened the garage door for her and did a quick override to the security measures, so that the automatic machine gun in the wall wouldn't aim for Sam's head.

I was sitting next to Nick, who was resting as I heard their voices getting louder. I looked up as the curtain around the bed was pulled back, seeing Steve and Nat looking at Nick and then me. I stood up and touched Nick's shoulder to wake him.

Nick stirred a little, eyes focusing on the three new arrivals before he said, "About damn time."

"Sorry, we got caught up a little," Nat joked a little as Wilson set her down in a chair.

"Captain," I smirked to him as he ran to me, hugging me as best as he could around my belly.

"Everything alright?" He asked, laying a hand on the belly.

"Perfect, as always. She hasn't even kept me up the last couple nights, when I really needed to rest," I said, as Sam looked a little confused.

"It's a girl?" Natasha smiled, despite Dr. Fine probing her wound.

"It is, godmother," I said, grabbing her uninjured shoulder to squeeze.

"Wilson, good work today," I said, holding out a hand to him.

"Colonel Rogers, Ma'am," He said, standing a little straighter as he recognized me.

"You're one hell of a soldier Wilson. Thank you, for offering to help. I can't be out there with the Captain right now. A little reason I'm not supposed to be on active duty," I quipped, gesturing to my belly.

"I wondered when Cap here didn't mention if you had been taken. He did mention you'd taken off though," He said as Dr. Fine started to work on Nat.
"I've been AWOL from SHIELD for about three months now. After I started showing more, we had to make it look like I had left, due to a fight, go off the grid. From your service record, I believed you could be a potential ally, so welcome to Olympus, our secret base."

"It's not too shabby," He smiled, as Steve's arm wound around my waist.

"I'm sorry I had to keep this from you. We didn't know how good your acting skills were, and we've been trying to keep Hydra in the dark about our counter strike."

"How long has this been in the works?"

"Don't even get me started, but since about the time Captain Rogers came out of the ice. My inside man finally found out the bug in my organization, my baby, was Hydra. I'd had suspicions for years but now I finally had proof. So we've been planning in secret, for about 9 months."

"So, what's the damage?" Steve asked Nick.

"Lacerated spinal column, cracked sternum, shattered collarbone, perforated liver and one hell of a headache," Nick said before Dr. Fine said, "Don't forget your collapsed lung."

"Let's not forget that," He said sarcastically, "But otherwise I'm good."

"They cut you open, your heart stopped," Nat said, "I thought it didn't work."

"Tetrodotoxin B slows the pulse to one beat a minute. Banner developed it for stress. It almost didn't work from what the good doctor here tells me."

"Any attempt on the Director's life had to look successful," Maria said and I nodded, "Can't kill you if you are already dead."

"Wait, you all planned this?" Wilson said and I nodded, "I've had a gut feeling Hydra didn't die after the war. I warned Director Carter and my brother to not trust Arnim Zola, but they did and Hydra latched onto SHIELD like a parasite. I suspected even more after my brother was killed. I had no proof until my man on the inside gave me a dead drop of information the day Steve came out of the ice. Since then, I've been figuring out who I can trust, and how to stop them."

"But if you suspected back when your brother was killed ma'am, why didn't you point it out?"

"Like I told Steve when I let him know, I had no proof until April of last year. Everything was speculation until my eyes inside started getting more information himself. They recruited him, within the organization, and he was able to get us so much more than I could have ever dreamed. They had my brother killed, they plan to kill millions, just to show the earth that they can't govern themselves. I won't rest until they are burnt to a crisp," I said, and Steve took my hand.

An alert pinged on my phone, and I looked down seeing Rumlow's contact number.

_Hack my bodycam, NOW. Record._

Fingers flying over the screen, I pulled up his STRIKE body cam, seeing Pierce walking ahead of him. I immediately started recording it, knowing it would help.

"Bucky," I breathed, feeling Steve watching over my shoulder. I saw at least five STRIKE guys with their guns trained on him, from where he sat on an awful looking chair. It must be the one they used to wipe him.
"Mission report."

"Mission report, now," Pierce demanded again.

Bucky remained unfazed by his presence. Pierce knelt down, before striking Bucky across the cheek. He moved with the blow, but it didn't seem to register to him.

"The man on the bridge, who was he?" He asked brokenly, and I started crying. His voice was so broken, but after 70 years without him, it was like music to my ears.

"You met him earlier this week on another assignment."

"I knew him," Bucky said softly, and I cried, "His programming is breaking down. He recognized you."

"Your work has been a gift to mankind. You shaped the century, and I need you to do it one more time. Society is at a tipping point between order and chaos. Tomorrow morning we're gonna give it a push. But you don't do your part, I can't do mine, and Hydra can't give the world the freedom it deserves."

"But I knew him," Bucky said, the emotion of confusion and fright clear in his voice. Pierce stood up silently, looking hard at Bucky.

"Prep him," He ordered, and I watched Bucky's eyes glisten, as if knowing what was about to happen.

"He's been out of cryo freeze too long," Some technician argued.

"Then wipe him," Pierce said, as Steve's hand tightened around me. Bucky looked petrified, but resigned to his fate, as he was pushed back into the chair. He bared his teeth as one of the technician's put a mouthguard in. The machine whirled a bit, a clamp holding down his arms. Seeing the machine bring panels down over parts of his face, I could hear the crackling of electricity before his screams started. He was still screaming as Rumlow followed Pierce out. I cut the feed and said, "I'm gonna need a moment."

I pushed myself out of Steve's arms and towards the closest bathroom, throwing my head over the bowl as my stomach contents forced their way up. It was Maria's soft hands that came to keep my hair back a minute later, and rub my back soothingly as she said, "We'll get him back."

"I know. Hearing from Rumlow versus hearing and seeing it for myself? I think I could have lived my whole life with never seeing that."

"You've known much more brutal forms of torture Colonel," Maria replied gently. I nodded, "Yes, but those were done to me. Or I inflicted it upon someone who deserved it. Bucky... he was an innocent bystander when this all started. He is the victim, and he is someone I love. Could you say you wouldn't break if it was your loved one, and you had to watch it happen, or even imagine what they were doing to elicit such screams?"

"I guess you're right. But he will understand, when you get him back."

"I hope that is the last time I will ever have to see that, and that he never goes through that again."

"You ready for our final play?" She asked as I rinsed my mouth out. I nodded, looking up at her, "Thank you María. I know we couldn't have got this far without you."
"I'm just a piece of the puzzle," She shrugged, "My contribution and battle scars don't carry the same weight as yours or Cap's."

"Still doubting yourself," I smirked into the mirror, "Who do you think pushed for your promotion? Someone who understood everything you had to go through in the military, who knew what is was like to start from the bottom on a food chain of men."

Her face showed her confusion before I added, "Your battle scars and contribution as you put it, are worth more to me than all the money in the world. Your loyalty was why I personally asked Fury to make you Deputy."

"And God should fear girls with battle scars, knives hidden in their smiles, blood red lips and poison painted nails. They've been to the gates of hell, and the devil sent them back, armed and ready to fight," I said and I saw her smirk back at me.

"Damn straight," She responded.

"Now, I'm ready to fight back. Let's make sure they are too," I said, as we started walking.

"After this... I need a more low key assignment."

"How about liason to the Avengers? Not that it has ever been low key assignment," I snorted, "I need someone to keep an eye on Tony."

"Honestly, it sounds perfect," She laughed. We walked into the conference room, where Sam and Steve stood towards one end. Natasha and Nick were the injured parties, taking other seats. Hill sat beside Fury, and I beside Natasha.

"This man, declined a Nobel Peace Prize. He said, "Peace wasn't an accomplishment, it's a responsibility." You see, it's things like this that give me trust issues," Nick sassed.

"We've known for months that Alexander was the head of Hydra. Are we still on this?" I quipped. He raised an eyebrow at me and I sighed, "You know I'm sorry."

"Yeah, well, be glad you're still on my list. It's when you aren't on that list you want to be worried," He muttered.

"Alright, so we know they are launching tomorrow. Steve, did you get a chance to bring Wilson up to speed?"

"He's... uh," Wilson said, and I nodded, seeing Steve's focus wasn't on the conversation. I sighed, "Captain."

Steve's gaze floated towards my own and I said, "If you need a walk, take a walk. But you give this your full attention or you get out of my strategy meeting."

He nodded as he refocused, knowing I wasn't being harsh. I needed him, and we could mourn later. It's what we've always done. The job comes first, and our feelings last.

I kept going as I opened a case, "So three Hydra Helicarrier are launching tomorrow."

"What do they do?" Sam asked, referring to the targeting blades in the case.

"Once the Helicarriers reach 3000 feet they'll triangulate with INSIGHT satellites, making them fully weaponized," Maria said, flipping a computer around with the digital plans to show Sam.
"We breach the carriers, and replace their targeting blades with our own," Nick explained to Sam.

"One or two won't cut it. If even one of those ships remains operational," I said, pausing, "Over 20 million on the Eastern Seaboard are going to die. And it will continue until the world is only full of sheep for Hydra, who won't fight back."

"We have to assume everyone on board those carriers is Hydra," Nick started, "We get on board, get past them and insert these server blades. Once we have, Maria takes over at a computer inside of SHIELD, turning their guns on each other. If their positioning is correct, it will come down on the Triskelion. My inside man knows he has to get the ships launched and then evacuate."

"We've got trusted agents at other SHIELD bases, ready to fight their way out and get as many of our people to safety as possible," Nick said, "We had time to get names of people marked for elimination, and give them a basic warning. Anything else would have tipped off Hydra."

"We've got Natasha impersonating one of the Security council members. I'd be down there, but I'm flying the chopper," I shrugged, "Doctor advises I shouldn't fight."

Wilson nodded in understanding, before I asked, "What do you say?"

"I do what he does, just slower," He quipped, gesturing his head in Steve's direction. I smirked, "That's what I was counting on."

Chapter End Notes

Someone on Fanfiction was wondering about 'the strap on conversation', and I wrote it the other day as I imagined our big tough Captain would. It was quite funny imagining it.
Chapter Thirty Two

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers. second chapter for today. I hope you like it, because we are approaching the moment we've been waiting almost 25 chapters for.

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

After we worked out who had which carrier and how we were going to work around Bucky, without hurting him, we went to bed. I slept fitfully, in and out for a few hours, nervous about our next steps. Steve was gone when I woke early the next morning. I followed HERMES's directions to where Steve was outside, taking care on the steps to the lookout point.

"You know we really aren't supposed to be out here. They had aerial reconnaissance looking for you, last Brock told me," I teased. He looked at me and pulled me under his arm.

"What's got you thinking so hard?" I asked softly.

"Thinking about the night before we left to capture Zola," He said, and I nodded, feeling tears come to my eyes at the memory.

"Beth, Beth, come on. Just one little kiss," Bucky teased, following me as I shrieked, I had walked into the bathroom to see him shaving. I teased that he shouldn't get it on my hair, as I had just set my curls for the next day.

"Buck, leave her alone," Steve laughed as I hid behind him, still giggling.

"She challenged me though! She's a tease," Bucky laughed as he chase me around Steve, who just smirked, "You are acting like children."

"We don't care!" I laughed, before shrieking as Bucky grabbed me, pushing his face against my cheek, getting the cream in my hair.

"Bucky," I laughed, "My curls!"

"You look better with your hair down. God, I could die tomorrow and the last thing I'd envision would be the two of you, and you specifically with your hair splayed out over the pillow. Like it was last night as I made love to you," He said, giving me those lustful eyes I couldn't resist.

"Don't talk like that. I already hate that I won't be with you, but-"

"Beth, it's always a possibility. There is always a chance," He answered me honestly.

"I know, I'm just really emotional right now," I sighed, wiping my eyes. Steve's hand came up from behind me to rest on my abdomen.

"Like Buck said the other day, we'll come home to you."

"I am yours, and you are mine," I said taking their hands gently.
"We're with you till the end of the line Beth. Just remember that," Bucky promised, before kissing me softly, making me sputter as he got shaving cream on my face.

"And I'm with you," I laughed, giving them a watery smile, "Always."

"You know he's gonna be there," Sam's voice said, pulling me out of the memory.

"I know," Steve said.

"Whoever he used to be and the guy he is now… I don't think he's the kind you save, he's the kind you stop."

"I don't think we can do that," Steve said and I nodded in agreement.

"He was brainwashed Wilson. Tortured for years. He's a POW and we have a responsibility to save him. We leave no man behind," I responded, as Steve took a deep breath.

"He might not give you the choice. He doesn't know you," Sam argued, and I replied, "He will. Even if we have to wait years."

"Alright, gear up. It's time," Steve said, kissing my temple softly before walking away.

"You going like that?" Sam asked him as Steve got closer to the door.

"You're gonna fight a war, you've got to wear a uniform," He quoted me over his shoulder, and I smiled, "Grab mine too. If it fits, that is. Howard didn't make them stretchy."

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"We're in," Maria said over comms as Nick and I stood in Olympus's hangar, opening the doors. Natasha had tapped her comm once to signal she was in position as well, and I said, "Alright, give 'em hell people."

"Attention all SHIELD agents, this is Steve Rogers," I heard over my comm, feeling that almost tangible presence that was Steve's 'Captain' voice.

"You've heard a lot about me over the last few days. Some of you were even ordered to hunt me down. Colonel Rogers and I think it's time you know the truth. SHIELD is not what we thought it was. It's has been taken over by Hydra and they've been in it since Arnim Zola was brought into the fold. Alexander Pierce is their leader. Strike and Insight crew are Hydra as well. I don't know how many more, but I know that they are in the building. They could be standing right next to you. They almost have what they want, absolute control. They shot Nick Fury, they had my brother-in-law Howard Stark murdered, both for getting too close."

"But it won't end there," Steve continued, as I sent out a threat alert to the CIA, FBI and Homeland. They'd surround the island and take our agents into custody until I could organize their release.

"If you launch those helicarriers today, Hydra will be able to kill anyone that stands in their way, unless we stop them. I know I'm asking a lot. The price of freedom has always been high, always has been. But it's a price I'm willing to pay. And if I'm the only one, then so be it. But I'm willing to bet I'm not."

Fury and I waited for after Steve's speech to get into the helicopter, where I started my own broadcast, one I had pre-recorded a week previous that would take over every computer.

"Has he always been that dramatic?" Nick teased, and I full belly laughed, "Yes, very much so."
"To my true SHIELD agents. Show them what we are made of. And if you make it out, surrender yourself to the authorities as a show of good faith. I will make sure you are freed and if you chose to come back to SHIELD, you will be welcomed. You have my word."

"To my enemy, did you really think I wasn't aware you were still around? That you were planting yourself inside of SHIELD? But why cry that there was a wolf in the hen house, when I can watch you burn? Today, I'm not the Colonel you've known. I'm a sister, whose brother was cut down for getting too close to the truth. I'm a wife, whose husband chose to lay his life down to end you. I'm a friend, who has too many people I care about that are on your little 'list'. Because you made one fatal mistake on your quest for world domination, you messed with my baby. The organization named for my husband's bravery. I've been here long before you, and I will be here long after you. You'll see first hand why my fury is legend and why you don't cross a Stark. I'm the Goddess of War, and I'm coming for you. Are you ready?"

"Nice touch Colonel," Maria replied over comms, "Did you practice that?"

"Just spoke from the heart," I laughed. Natasha's link was still open so we had further recorded proof of Pierce. I was monitoring the situation in there, but also keeping an ear out for Wilson and Steve.

"Hey Cap, I think I found those bad guys you mentioned," Wilson said, to which Steve replied, "You alright?"

"Not dead yet."

"That's the spirit Wilson. We'll make an Avenger out of you yet," I teased as I flew Nick and I straight towards the Triskelion, "HERMES, activate the SHIELD beacon. And alert Agents Sam and Billy Koenig to be prepared for visitors needing a questioning in the Chair. Send the signal to Phil's team about Providence and alert Agent Eric Koenig about their arrival."

"Yes Ma'am."

"Still can't believe Romanoff almost beat that thing. I designed it mind to make it unbeatable," Nick muttered as a song broadcasted over SHIELD's frequencies, "It was one thing when you beat it."

"Oh hush, I've had even more years experience than her. It shows what a great spy she is. I hate the Red Room for what they did to her, but I'm grateful in an odd sense. I would never have had her as a friend and loyal agent if they hadn't trained her. Barton might have been even more unbearable without her."

"Ain't that the truth," Nick chuckled as I heard Natasha reveal herself, "I'm sorry, did I step on your moment?"

"Alright Cap, I'm in," Wilson said, before a soft, "Sh-"

Nick and I could see the helicarriers and I sighed, "That's gonna be a bitch to clean up."

"You Stark's," He sighed, "Never do things halfway though."

"Damn straight. Don't just join the army, become the first female Major in history, then the first female Colonel. Fall in love with one man? How about two instead? Make a spy organization and burn it to the ground because Hydra had infested it. This feels like a Tuesday to me."

"Dramatic like your husband."
"I'll have you know, I was dramatic before I got married," I teased, feeling my little girl kick, "And this one will be too. I feel it."

"She will be nothing less than dramatic with yours and Captain Rogers' personalities," He deadpanned.

"Eight minutes Cap," Maria said, to which Steve replied, "Working on it."

"Your cue it imminent," I said, listening to Natasha goad Pierce as she gathered Hydra's secrets for a dump onto the internet.

"Alpha locked," Steve said, and I smiled, "Good job Captain."

"Falcon, where are you?" Maria asked.

"Had to take a detour," He said over the wind whipping past his comm. A minute later we heard, "I'm in. Bravo locked."

"Two down, one to go," Maria sounded off.

"Your sling secured?" I asked Nick as we approached the helipad.

"I'm fine Colonel. You just keep yourself safe in this bird."

"I'll be out as soon as Pierce is ready to be caught off guard," I smiled.

As I dropped us, Nick got out, first striding in the door dramatically, trench coat flying out behind him like a cape.

"Did you get my flowers?" Pierce's voice asked over the comm, "I'm glad you're here Nick."

"Really, because I thought you had me killed."

"No, you know how the game works."

"Why make me head of SHIELD?"

"Because you are the best, and the most ruthless person I ever met. And Colonel Rogers didn't want it after we had Howard killed. Good thing too, or she'd have set fire to the building."

"I did what I did to protect people. So did Howard Stark. You seem to underestimate the Colonel; she has restraint."

"Our enemies are your enemies. Disorder, war... It's just a matter of time before a dirty bomb goes off in Moscow or an EMP fries Chicago. Diplomacy? Holding action, bandaid. Your beloved Colonel knows that. You know where I learned that? Bogota. You didn't ask, you just did what had to be done. I can bring order to the lives of 7 billion people, by sacrificing 20 million. It's the next step Nick, if you have the courage to take it."

"No, I have the courage not to," Nick said, as I watched him guiding Pierce up to the interactive wall.

"You don't think we wiped your clearance form the system?"

"I know you erased my passwords, probably deleted my retinal scan. But if you want to stay ahead of me Mr. Secretary, you need to keep both eyes open," He growled, flipping up his eyepatch, and
pushing Alexander to look at the interactive wall again.

"Who's the dramatic one?" I teased Nick over comms, though I was grateful for him sticking up for me.

"We've got our information dumping. Charlie carrier is 45 degrees off the port bow. Six minutes," Maria said with gunfire over her comm, and I heard Steve and Sam bickering for a few minutes while I monitored the information dump from my tablet, directing it towards the CIA, Homeland and the FBI.

"Rumlow," I said over a hacked comm, "Time to turn."

"Already on it Colonel," he said, as I heard gunfire in the background, "Coming up to you."

"Sharon believed you?"

"She asked for the passcode, I gave the appropriate one back. She's taking as many of ours as she can."

"Rumlow, no survivors. Buildings coming down, and I want these bugs squashed."

"Yes ma'am!"

Above us, I could just make out a figure before I saw Sam falling hard. His parachute deployed in time for him to hit the roof.

"Cap, Cap, come in, Are you okay?"

"I'm still on the Helicarrier. Where are you?"

"I'm grounded, suit's down. Sorry Cap," Wilson apologized.

"Don't worry, I got it. Athena, Bucky's on Insight 1," Steve shouted over the sound of engines and wind.

"Subdue him as long as you can. Wilson!" I said to him over his comm link, "Get over to the chopper. Rumlow's on his way."

"Want me to take him out?" He asked confused.

"He's my inside man. Don't know how fast he's gonna get here though," I said as Maria confirmed, "He's on his way to you Colonel. Taking out strays as he goes."

"Perfect, get in the chopper Sam," I heard as Natasha whispered, "Anytime now Athena. Pierce just took out the council."

"Fuck. On my way," I said, walking in, gun at the ready. I had wanted to avoid losing them, their testimonies would have been gold, but I knew Pierce wasn't going to leave a trace if he couldn't get his way today.

"Lt, how much longer?" Pierce asked as I hugged the wall.

"65 seconds to satellite link."

"Targeting grid engaged, lowering weapons array," Another voice said over the communication link. Nick saw me and drew Pierce's line of vision away from the interactive glass wall. I heard
someone over the open comm link counting down and just before they got to one, I heard Steve's voice over my own link.

"Charlie locked," I heard Steve pant.

"Where are the targets?" Someone asked over the Hydra communication line a moment later.

"Okay Cap, get out of there," Maria's voice said in my ear.

"Fire now," Steve said, sounding pained.

"But Steve."

"Do it! Do it now!" Steve commanded, and I heard the sound in the distance of gunfire a moment later.

"And now for the musical styling of The Beastie Boys, a shoutout from Colonel Rogers to Hydra," HERMES's voice came over the system as Sabotage started playing. I had wired that to start once Maria hit the button, smiling internally at the thought of all those rats getting my "Fuck you" message before they died or were arrested. I could see the Helicarriers destroying each other and my heart soared in relief. We had done it. Pierce turned to look out the window and muttered, "What a waste."

"Are you still on the fence about Rogers chances?" Nat quipped.

"Alexander," I said, gun trained on him. He turned to me, surprised as he took in my belly and smirked, "You're looking fat Elizabeth."

"Yeah, I put on a little weight. I'm eating for two these days. She's got her Dad's appetite already," I said, as I eyed the phone in his hand and the way Nat shook her head, slipping a Stinger out of her pocket.

"How long have you been planning this?" He asked, knowingly.

"Give or take 22 years," I snarled, feeling smug, "But I've known since Zola was brought in on SHIELD that a rat didn't go down with the ship. This one brought the plague with him."

"You better drop that. Or your favorite redhead will die," He said, holding up the phone to gesture to the rest of the council on the floor.

"You think I'm stupid don't you? She your bargaining chip, and without her there is nothing stopping me from putting a bullet between your eyes. I don't have favourites, I have family. Lucky for you, I had a feeling you'd try something like this. After you had my brother killed, I knew I couldn't trust you, or a word out of your mouth. You were as slippery as they came, and I knew that power is what you craved. It's what they all craved. It's what brought their downfall too."

"Hydra won't die with me. Zola's algorithm had a purpose. You know the saying, cut off one head, two more will grow in its place," He smiled, finger still hovering over the screen.

"It's a good thing I know how to cauterize you at your core. Rumlow has been a wealth of information. You barely even suspected him. I knew I had the right man put in your path," I smiled, "And you're wrong about one thing. I won't kill you. For what Zola did, for the way you continuously abused and tortured one of the loves of my life, you'll spend the rest of your life contemplating how you could fall so low. Hydra is a poison, a disease, and I'm here to eradicate you. Hail this you bastard," I bit out, as Nat activated the Stinger. She dropped to the floor, seizing as it electrocuted her. Pierce tried to reboot the weaponized ID tag through his phone, but looked up as
my gun cocked, and I sent the cartridge right between his eyes. He dropped like a sack of potatoes through the interactive wall and I felt my shoulders sag in relief.

Nick was rousing Natasha from her self induced mini sleep, and helping her to her feet as I heard footsteps approaching. I sheathed the gun after flipping the safety on and said, "We've got to go."

"Remind me to kiss Fitz the next time I see him," Natasha muttered as she got to her feet, "Or yell at him for amping the voltage up so high."

"Colonel?" Brock's voice said as he rounded the corner, and I turned to smile at him, "Just in time. Cuff him, and lift him. Did you do as I asked?"

"Only secrets that were spilled were Hydra's," Nat nodded, knowing we played Pierce.

"Good. Brock, you fly," I said, as I looked up out the window to see the helicarriers falling, "Now!"

Nat helped me run, as we could tell the Helicarriers were going to be falling in our path. I got strapped in and Brock lifted us off the pad, flying us out of the destruction path.

"Maria, evacuate now. Surrender yourself to the authorities and carry out as planned."

"Yes Ma'am."

"After everything you told me, I didn't think you'd just ICER him," Brock said, keeping an eye on the falling carriers as we lifted off.

"What do you and Hill have planned?" Nick asked, raising a brow.

"Later. Brock, did Sharon get what I meant about helping other bases?" I asked him over the headset, ignoring his question.

"She's rounded up as many agents as she could and will head out for the Iliad, and other SHIELD bases. Distress calls were sent out so they know where to go, and then where to meet up with the beacon. They grabbed a few Quinjets from the yard after Barnes headed up and will be there in 45 minutes or so."

"Good," I said, thinking about the information Brock had given me earlier in the month. Hydra wanted the Monolith for something, but what I hadn't discovered yet.

As we watched the carriers come down on the Triskelion, I bid good riddance to the building. It was cathartic to watch it burn, but I knew a lot of innocent lives had been taken in the process of bringing down Hydra. My life's work had been ensuring a central base of operations for SHIELD, and being close to the Capital made that work. Only I knew the Triskelion was too out in the open, too exposed. It was a phallic testament to my brothers ego. He'd understand why I had to bring it down.

"You were born for war. I've never seen you more comfortable and more yourself than in the middle of a battle. You never doubt the choices you make, because you know you're fighting the good fight. I'm proud to have you as a sister, as my moral compass," He had said to me after Kaesong, "You'll save the world more than I will in my lifetime."

"It's done, you are avenged. And I did it the right way," I thought, sending it heavenward for Howard.

"Hill, where's Steve? Do you have a twenty on Rogers before we lost contact?" Natasha asked as I saw something familiar fall out of the last Helicarrier.
"Negative. Lost contact after the firing started. He last stated to the Colonel that he was on Insight I," She said, as we hovered on the edge of the destruction zone.

"That's his shield!" I said, pointing out the window.

"Shall we dump Pierce?" Sam asked and I shook my head, "Well dump him on the President's lawn or something later. Right now we need to locate Steve, and-" I stopped as I saw his body fall, looking unconscious before plunging into the water. Brock, Sam and Nick had to hold me back from jumping out of the chopper as he didn't resurface. But someone else jumped in after him.

"That's Barnes," Brock said as Bucky dropped into the water. Less than a minute later he resurfaced, pulling Steve's lifeless body along after him through the wreckage. I saw the direction he seemed to be going and guessed which place they'd end up.

"There, that bank!" I said, pointing to it, "Bucky will try to disappear and the thick forest trees will allow him to gain more ground, before anyone comes looking over there."

As Brock landed, Pierce started to stir. I gave him another ICER to the heart and a punch to the face for good measure. Okay, so maybe that was a bit more cathartic. I was out before anyone could stop me, with Natasha going to corner him on the other side in case he bolted.

I watched from behind a tree as Bucky dragged Steve's body to shore, before stopping and raising a gun in my direction. I held out my hands, to show him I wasn't armed, before I emerged. His face didn't change expression, but his eyes did. They were alight with recognition, and a faint hint of confusion.

"Bucky," I whispered, feeling my eyes well up without permission, "It's me. It's Elizabeth."

He didn't say anything, but moved to back away, and I shook my head, "Bucky, please wait!"

As he continued to turn away from me, I barked out desperately trying to stop him, "Sergeant Barnes!"

It stopped him in his tracks, turning to look at me with wide, confused eyes.

"I know you don't remember me, or maybe you do just a little, but there is someone I can take you to, that will help you remember. He will help you break free and help you take control of your mind back," I said as he walked towards me slowly. I smiled at him, "Only if you want to though. We won't force it on you."

"Colonel?" Brock's voice came from behind me, and I waved a hand that I was fine, never breaking eye contact from Bucky. He was in arms reach of me now, and I put my hands down slowly. I didn't have time to react as his metal arm shot out to constrict around my throat. I gasped in shock, trying to pull it off as I heard Brock's gun cock.

"Release her," He barked to Bucky.

"Bucky," I gasped, tears leaking out as I felt my lungs burning, "I'm pregnant."

His eyes dropped down, and seemingly just noticed my belly. I saw recognition in his eyes as he released me and backed away a few steps, staring in horror at his metal hand. I coughed, gaining my breath back, as Brock came up beside me.

"I'm fine," I convinced him, already feeling the injuries around my neck fading.
"Orders," Bucky said to Brock in Russian.

"No orders. English," Brock replied in Russian, before continuing in English, "I'm a triple agent, I'm not Hydra. The Colonel, you loved her, you loved the Captain. They want you to come in, and we'll help you. You won't go back in the chair, or cryo. You can trust them."

Bucky looked down at Steve.

"Who am I?" He asked himself.

"Someone who was under Hydra's control, but you won't be ever again," I promised as I saw Nat approach Bucky from behind.

"Stand down Widow," I ordered clearly, as Bucky dropped to his knees, barely recognizing the threat at his back.

"Ready to comply," He muttered in defeat, hanging his head.

"Into the chopper," Brock commanded, giving me a look and a shrug. *Baby steps*, I thought as Bucky got to his feet and moved to get in the transport chopper. I'm glad I swung for the 8 seater instead of the five today.

"We need to get Steve to a hospital," I started, as Nat and I tried to lift him. Sam came to take my place, saying, "Your husband weighs too much."

"He's almost 300 lbs of pure muscle. What did you expect?" I said dryly.
Chapter Thirty Three

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! Sorry this is so late in the day. My child was being a butt today. Didn't nap as long as he usually did and it threw everything off. So, here we go... enjoy!

A special thank you to everyone who commented on the last few chapters! I really appreciate the encouragement and knowing you like the story. Lots of love to you!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

While Steve was taken to a hospital, Brock checked in with Daisy. We dumped Pierce on the bridge, handcuffed to a barricade for the CIA to take him into custody and hightailed it back to Olympus to hide Bucky. He willingly walked into a holding cell, until we could get Andrew here to evaluate him. When Fury had the BUS designed, he had based the Cage on the Retreat's structure. And this cell was based on it as well. Able to withstand Hulk's fist for awhile, it would keep us safe in case his programming reverted itself.

I called the President myself to explain what had gone on, and that I would attend any Senate hearing they wanted, as long as they cleaned up house first. Giving them a list of people within the government who were known to be Hydra was the simple part. The next part, of actually cleaning up the agencies was going to be tough.

Daisy sent me a message that Garrett had been arrested at the HUB, but I knew in my gut this wasn't over. Hand had asked Ward to come along to escort Garrett to the Fridge, and Daisy couldn't give anything away that Ward was Hydra too, because there wasn't much proof. Phil couldn't warn Hand without tipping off Ward, so they hoped she would survive. They had no idea what Centipede's plan was, but Daisy kept me updated, that they had found Providence and they knew the Fridge had fallen.

Ward was on his way to Providence and Daisy was ready to act to get us Centipede's end game. If Ward had gotten away, and was playing up the fact that he killed Garrett, then Hand was surely dead. The lives lost on our side outweighed Hydra's losses, but they didn't get what could be potentially dangerous weapons in their hands.

Several of SHIELD's facilities were saved, and due to the countless efforts of my family, the HUB was among them. But with Garrett and Ward in the wind, there wasn't much I could do to help them. They had to bait Ward by going to Providence. Brock wanted to go to Daisy, but he was needed here for Bucky. He trusted that she could handle herself, just like I did.

Tony called me only to applaud me for the mess we made. He flew out briefly the first night, when I asked him to retrieve Steve's shield from the bottom of the Potomac. *He handed it to me, and smirked, "Another cousin?"

"Yes, just keep that under your hat for a few more days," I sassed, a hand to my belly.

"Just make sure he doesn't lose it again," Tony teased back, gesturing to the shield.
"I'm sure you've got a few ideas. Electromagnets maybe? Hey, where is my lightsaber?" I asked, putting the shield in the front seat of the Land Rover.

"Still working on some kinks. I haven't been swamped with work, but I haven't been taking on Hydra in the shadows," He spoke tensely, looking pissed.

"Tony," I spoke softly, "You know why I didn't call you, right?"

"I'm too much of a team player?" He sassed.

"I didn't want you getting hurt over my war. I... I needed stealth. If not, I would have called the whole team together. Too many moving parts for Thor or the Hulk's touch. Clint wasn't even here, I had him elsewhere. You weren't the only one left out."

"I get it," He nodded, "Just... Bruce and I want to help next time. I'm sure Thor would love to as well, if we could get him to actually use a cellphone."

"Bruce said that or are you speaking for him?" I teased, folding my arms across my chest.

"More, he knows why SHIELD never sat right with him."

"SHIELD still exists, but we've eradicated the virus within it. We are doing things my way, finally."

He looked confused, "You took up in Fury's place."

"Again, keep it under your hat, but Fury isn't dead. He'll just work better on assignment when people don't expect him. And even Fury knew I was still running SHIELD through him. At points he was a figurehead, and I was moving the strings behind the scenes."

"Sounds like you," Tony sighed, coming up to hug me, "Got to get back. Pep's expecting me for dinner."

"Tell her I'm okay. And of course you can tell her," I motioned to my belly, in lieu of finishing the sentence.

"Of course, I'd be in the doghouse forever if I didn't," He chuckled once, before looking serious, "Aunt Liz..."

"What's up Ton?" I asked softly. He shook his head and smiled, "Nothing. Just stay safe."

"It's kind of hard to kill me, but I will. You understand why I keep things from you? It's to protect you or for your own good," I spoke sincerely, "It's never to hurt you."

"I know. It's just hard to trust someone who keeps so many secrets."

Sometimes I wish I could tell you everything. But I have people that depend on me to keep these secrets. Some... some wanted them to be kept until a certain time and I have to respect that."

"That was oddly specific. But I won't bite. You've never steered me wrong," He nodded.

"If you believe nothing else, believe that. And remember that in the future," I stressed.

"You are making me curious," He narrowed his eyes at me.

"Bye Tony. Safe flight home," I smiled, redirecting him as I walked to the driver's side. He rolled his eyes and sighed, "Fine, bye. Tell Capsicle to feel better soon. No more Sleeping Beauty stints."
"As soon as he wakes up, I will," I replied, opening my door. Tony's visor slipped down and he began to jet off.

It had only been two days since the Triskelion fell and I was already called to Capitol Hill for the next day along with Natasha. Steve had woken up yesterday, and Sam was with him this afternoon. I pulled morning shifts, so that my afternoons could be used working to rebuild SHIELD and monitor Bucky. Maria went to aid Phil after Ward had taken Daisy. And thankfully they had gotten her out, but she had to give up the harddrive to work her Trojan on Centipede.

But right now, Andrew was sitting outside Bucky's cell, as I stood in the shadows, and Brock behind Andrew. He said that it would be good for Bucky to see me at one point, to help him gauge how much he was remembering, and how bad the brainwashing went as far as triggers. He had barely eaten over the last day, staring at the food we brought him but never eating more than a few bites before Brock told him to eat more. Brock explained Hydra rarely fed him, only enough to get him to the next freeze. We only gave bland foods, so his stomach didn't reject them. It was starting to worry me, as I knew how it felt when my body was needing the calories. If he had a version of the super soldier serum, his cells were probably crying out for energy, but Hydra had him so brainwashed he couldn't even eat without an order.

"Good morning, my name is Dr. Garner. I am a friend of the Colonel's and a psychiatrist. I'm here to help you. What can I call you? James? Bucky? Sergeant Barnes?" Andrew asked. Bucky stared back, unsure.

"I guess... Bucky," He spoke softly.

"Alright then, Bucky. How are you today?"

"Confused," Came his tenuous reply.

"What are you confused about?"

"Who I am."

"The true version or the Hydra version?"

"Who I really am. I thought..." He started, but seeing Brock nod that it was okay behind Andrew's head he continued, "I wasn't allowed to have memories. But... the man on the bridge... and the carrier, I knew him. And her... I knew her too. The name she called me... Bucky... Sergeant Barnes. I've heard them before."

"Would you like to hear your past, or read it yourself?" Andrew asked, holding up a file. Bucky paused, staring at the folder, looking pained.

"I... I don't want to hurt anyone."

"You won't," I promised, stepping out of the shadows.

"Colonel Rogers," Andrew sighed, and I shook my head, "I need him to hear this."

As I turned to Bucky I could see the slight confusion on his face as he took in my belly again.

"I saw you," He voiced, confusion colouring his words, "You looked different. You asked me to pass the baby. I think you meant butter."

I smiled sadly, "The night I told you and Steve I was pregnant, I was so nervous I said baby instead
of butter. And a week later, I lost you… and the baby."

"Did I cause that?"

"No. Not advertently. I might have been exhibiting symptoms, but we were all under a lot of stress. London was being bombed and you were trying to capture Zola. When they told me over the radio that you were gone, I miscarried. Whether it was due to grief or stress, I'm not sure."

He looked sad briefly, before giving one nod.

"You could never hurt either of us. Steve and I, we're resilient. All we want is for you to feel safe and loved. You don't need to look at that file until you want to. We just want you to be able to choose your path for yourself. Hydra told you who you were and now you get to decide who you are," I said, putting a hand on the glass, as I felt tears fall gently from my eyes.

"Seeing you cry… I've seen it before," He said, walking towards me.

"Plenty of times," I smiled, "I wasn't always strong during the war."

"Something… something I did," He said softly, "You, you walked out of a room, and we followed you."

"That would have been our first night together. I thought you were saying no to our... proposition. So I walked out so neither of you saw me cry," I flushed, remembering Brock and Andrew were behind me.

"You were wearing… a purple dress, and your hair… was different from the other memory."

"I used to curl it, but that night I brushed them out," I smiled at him.

"You… you trained me," He spoke softly, shaking his head a little, "At the beginning."

"I trained you for the army," I nodded, "My best sniper. Brock's a close second, and your granddaughter wants to learn."

"I… I... have a child? I thought…" He asked, confused.

"I had miscarried that child. Well, it's confusing, but back during the war there were samples taken from Steve to test fertility after the serum. They were kept in a type of cryo and 19 years after I lost you both, I gave birth to yours and Steve's son. Our son," I smiled, pulling up a photo of Phil smiling on my phone.

"His name is Phillip James Rogers-Barnes. But he has gone by Phillip Coulson most of his life, so no one knew he was my son. He was so proud to be named after you," I beamed.

"But if he's… Steve's-

"I know what you are thinking. But we decided during the war, when I got pregnant the first time, that any children from either of you would be all of ours. So, this little girl is yours as well. But to the world she'll be only known as Rogers," I explained, putting a hand on my belly.

"A girl?" He looked down in contemplation at my belly.

"Yes," I spoke softly, not wanting to startle him.

"To the end of the line, I am yours and you are mine. We will be whatever you need. If you need
space, we'll make ourselves scarce. If you need to talk, you have our ears and rapt attention. If you just want to listen to what our lives were like, we'll gladly tell you anything you'd like to hear," I promised, looking back at Andrew. He nodded; giving a soft smile that this was the right approach. Though I knew I was gonna get a stern talking to later about interfering.

He frowned, turning away from me suddenly. He lifted a hand to his cheek in confusion, pulling it away to look at his fingers.

"I… I haven't cried before… that I remember," He muttered confused, looking back at me with watery eyes.

"The last time I saw you cry, was before… the train… I fell," He continued, looking confused as he stared at the ground.

"I know this must be painful, but what do you remember?" Andrew said suddenly, making me look back.

"I was dragged, by some soviet soldiers that found me. I woke up with a new arm, tried to kill the scientist… and then saw Zola," He said, and I felt my throat tighten at the sound of the rat's name, "He told them to put me on ice."

"All I knew was training, wiping and killing. Then they'd lock me in a freezer. And then the cycle would repeat. Each time a new target, new technology to learn. People would age, I'd stay the same," He said, looking down at his arm.

"They wouldn't let me see your face," He stated, looking up at me.

"Me?" I asked, as Andrew leaned forward in intrigue.

"You were on the news. And… I saw your face… I killed twenty people before they tranquilized me. They wouldn't let me see you again," He answered and I softened.

"You must have recognized me, even under their control," I guessed, as he studied my face.

"Beth," He whispered softly, and I saw the softness in his eyes.

"Yes," I smiled, as I cried happy tears, "That's what you called me."

"You love me," He said, placing his palm against the glass, mirroring my own.

"I do, I do. I love you Bucky," I cried, "I love you enough to let you chose me, to chose Steve and I for yourself. We want you to want us because you do, not because we say you should."

"I… I do… want you," He said, "At least I think I should."

"You might never be who you were when I knew you, but you don't have to be their killer anymore. You are your own man. If you decide you need some time away, you can go. All we ask is that you find us when you are ready, and not a minute before," I said, wiping my eyes.

"It hurts me… when you cry," He frowned, looking at me with curious eyes, "I don't want to see you cry."

"It comes with being pregnant," I smiled, "I'm a weepy mess when normally I'm a rock."

"Colonel has always been a hard ass, face like stone. She loves you, it's why she's crying," Brock spoke up behind me and I smirked at him, before looking back at Bucky.
"We're the same age, but… Steve is younger?" He questioned.

"Yes."

"You're... a twin," He stated and I nodded, seeing his face pale as he must have remembered Howard.

"Bucky, I know what they asked you to do… to my brother," I spoke gently, keeping my hand up on the glass.

His eyes barely met mine, before looking down at the ground.

"I blame Hydra, not you. They made you do it, and they will pay. I forgive you, because you had no choice," I reasoned as he looked back up at me, "They would have killed him either way. He knew too much."

"He… he recognized me," He said, and I felt my throat tighten again.

"He knew that I loved you. He knew about us. He probably thought he could bring you home to me," I voiced, closing my eyes, missing my brother.

"I'm sorry," He said, as I shook my head.

"No, you were the Winter Soldier then, not yourself. You never would have done that," I spoke sternly.

"The man you knew wouldn't have."

"The man I knew and the man you are now, free of Hydra's hold on you, I see them as the same person just with a few more scars. I've changed from what you remember, from the war. I carry emotional scars, just like you. I have to live with the decisions I've made and the things I had to do to survive, to protect our world. It's how I use my past to shape a better future, that defines me," I said, quickly entering the code on the door lock. Brock yelled for me to stop, but I had already opened it. Bucky backed against the wall, and I slowed my movements for him.

"It's been 70 years since I last saw you smile, since the last time I kissed you, since the last time I ran my fingers through your hair," I said, waiting for him to relax. When I stopped moving, he adjusted himself to stand, and waited for me to move. I stayed still as he understood what I was doing; I was letting him approach me on his own time. Well, I had waited so patiently these last few months, I decided to give him a little push this way.

It was a minute before he moved forward, and I could hear my own heart thundering in my chest as he reached out to me. His right hand gently traced the back of my hand at my side, looking up quickly to my face for confirmation that this was okay. I gave him a gentle smile as Brock hovered by the door. He wanted to be within reach in case Bucky reverted suddenly.

I closed my eyes as his fingers ghosted up my arm. It moved quickly to reverently touch my belly. I smiled as my little girl kicked against where his fingers were. He startled a little bit but I smiled, "It's okay. She is saying hello. Or stretching."

"Does it feel odd?" He asked, and I nodded, "The first time I felt Phil kick it did. But it still amazes me when she pushes as hard as she can."

He reached up to cradle my cheek as I finished speaking, and I held my breath. His touch was soft and warm, making me close my eyes briefly at the memories it resurfaced, as I leaned into his touch.
His thumb caressed over my cheek in a gentle brush, and I swallowed the sob of pure relief at the gesture, that bubbled up from my chest.

"I'm sorry," He said, moving to back up, misinterpreting the look on my face as distress. I gently took his left hand, looking down when I remembered it was metal. I laced my fingers through his and looked up at him, showing him I wasn't afraid.

"Don't be sorry," I said as I heard raised voices approaching.

"Elle?" Steve asked, worried as he walked into the outer room to see me inside Bucky's room.

"Steve, lower your voice please," I spoke softly, trying not to spook Bucky. He looked down to see my fingers laced with Bucky's metal arm and relaxed.

"You're Steve," Bucky spoke softly, as Steve replaced Rumlow in the doorway.

"Yes," Steve answered, unsure if Bucky was just stating what we had told him, or what he remembered.

"You were smaller," He stated, making Steve smirk.

"I used to be," He nodded.

"You're a punk," Bucky voiced, and my eyes widened, as Steve looked at him in shock.

"Don't look at me," I answered, shaking my head, "I didn't tell him that."

Steve turned back to Bucky and replied, "Jerk."

Bucky tried to smile, and I felt my heart burst at the little quirk of his mouth. Steve reached for him, but I quickly tugged his arm down and explained, "His pace."

Steve waited patiently, as Bucky's right arm reached out to touch Steve's hand. Steve turned his hand slightly to allow Bucky to trace his palm before clasping their hands together.

"I never thought I would be with either of you, ever again. I certainly couldn't imagine the way it came about, but nonetheless, I am so happy to be right here with you. It doesn't matter what we had to do to get here, the things we had to go through, because this is what matters the most; being together."

"The Three Musketeers," Steve voiced softly, making Bucky look up, "I'm sorry for shooting you."

"It's alright Buck. Almost healed," Steve offered, lifting his shirt to show him.

"Put your shirt down, you're making me horny," I whispered, and Bucky's lips quirked again. Steve chuckled saying, "Sorry."

"Isn't that okay?" Bucky asked, confused.

"Not right now. Steve and I decided we'd wait until after you are ready and the baby is born, and then you have to wait almost two months after that to be intimate again. I'm supposed to be on bed rest right now," I explained, "But we have a few things to deal with. Remains of Hydra that didn't go down with the ship. We have to help our son and his team."

"Do… do you want me… to help?" He asked, confused again.
"No, not if you don't want to. Dr. Garner says that you should have a few months to mellow out, get your memories back. We will give you time, just like I said we would. We won't ask you to help. You can offer it if and when you feel ready," I implied softly, "You won't feel better overnight. Honestly, this is a miracle. I was expecting another few months at least."

"My programming breaks down the longer I'm out of cryo," He stated, furrowing his eyebrows at himself.

"So, it might not be months," Andrew spoke up, standing up, "But for now, we'll proceed with caution. There might be triggers you don't know about, so we will have to go over everything at one point, everything you remember."

"There are words," He spoke softly, looking at Andrew, "Words to… make me comply."

"I know them," Brock nodded, looking at Bucky, "But we'll break their control over you, I promise."

"Thank you Brock," I smiled, hearing an alert on my phone. I looked down to see Nat telling me that SciTech, the communications academy and the Iliad are secure, and any precious cargo is enroute to our hiding place for all the things we took from the Fridge.

"Beautiful. Everything is falling into place," I smiled, "Now all we have to do is go take down Garrett and Ward, talk to the Senate… I have a long week ahead, and my feet already hurt."

"One day at a time, just like Bucky here. Do you feel in control enough to stay in a room of your own, not a cell?" Steve asked, as Andrew nodded his agreement of the idea.

"I'm not sure. I haven't… I haven't slept in so long. It might be safer for me to be in here."

"Alright, but you can ask at any point to be let out. You can eat with us, work out in the gym, wander the base… Whatever you'd like. Just, you can't go out until we explain what happened to you to the government."

"Elle, they'll persecute him," Steve whispered, confused as to why I would give Bucky up like that.

"I'm not saying I'm not fighting like hell to keep him here, but they need to know. He's the longest standing POW, ever in our history. Brainwashing, torture, cryo freezings? The government will take that into account. If not, we go to ground and disappear, just the three of us. Like we were going to after the war," I reminded him, as Bucky's eyes looked at me, "I won't lose you again, and I would give up everything to make sure you were safe."

"Raise a whole brood, right?" He asked and his eyes brightened.

"I will fight for you. I will be your voice, your defender. I promise."
A/N: Second chapter for tonight! Hope you all enjoy it. We'll be getting more Bucky in the next chapters, but for now, let's see what the aftermath of Hydra brings the Rogers family.

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

I strode into the Senate meeting the next day with Natasha and Brock by my side, murmurs and whispers surrounding us. Everyone took in my presence, as I had been absent from the media surrounding the events on the Potomac. Brock pulled out my chair as I took in the cameras and sighed internally.

A woman came forward with a Bible and I didn't hesitate to put my hand on it, holding up my right hand as she asked, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, so help you God?"

"I do."

After she repeated the same process with Nat and Brock, we sat down as the committee leader spoke up, "Please state your rank, name and affiliation for the record."

"Colonel Elizabeth Hermione Rogers, US Army, SHIELD."

"Agent Natasha Romanoff, SHIELD," Nat stated when they looked at her.

"Commander Brock Rumlow, SHIELD," Brock said evenly.

"Colonel Rogers, Agent Romanoff, Commander Rumlow, for this proceeding you'll be asked a series of questions related to the events that transpired and lead up to April 4th, 2013."

"Understood," I said, nodding.

"Colonel Rogers, when was your first indication that Hydra was inside of SHIELD?"

"You really don't want me to answer that," I began, "But you want the truth, so... my first indication was Project Paperclip."

"Your first indication was in 1945 and you didn't speak up?"

"I did, passionately. Dr. Arnim Zola was in custody, and Former Director Margaret Carter and my brother Howard Stark wanted to bring him in on SHIELD. My second indication was the day after my brother was killed."

"And what transpired on this day?"

"Alexander Pierce shut down further explorations for Captain Rogers. Until that point, my brother was fronting the money."

"That's not a reason to suspect Hydra."
"You didn't let me finish. And in the same breath said they were restarting Project Rebirth, demanding blood samples from me. I refused, passionately. I had liked Pierce, but after a hostage situation in Bogota, where his daughter was almost killed when diplomacy failed, he changed. Didn't trust the system anymore and found his peace of mind with Hydra. Or his downfall in this case."

"If you knew about Hydra, why did you not speak up in that instance?"

"I would have been crying wolf with no proof. To get proof, I had to play the long game, even going as far to insert my own man inside their ranks."

"Does this inside man have a name?"

"Commander Brock Rumlow," I stated, looking to my left.

"Commander Rumlow, you've been working for Colonel Rogers inside of Hydra. For how long?"

"Five years, but I only had proof it was Hydra last year when Captain Rogers was thawed from the ice," He said honestly, "They knew that the Colonel was their only way to recreate the serum, so they wanted me to seduce her for capture. They would apply the Faustus method, a form of hypnotism and brainwashing, that would have her under their control. It's used on those that couldn't be persuaded to turn willingly. A team was standing by with restraints that may or may not have held her back."

I looked at Brock in shock, he hadn't told me that.

"Colonel Rogers, were you aware of this?" One committee member said, noticing my surprise.

"No, I can honestly say I was not," I answered, turning back to the committee. Yet another tally mark of why I hated Hydra. They were dumb enough to think that might work. The only thing that made me turn was Loki's staff... that had not been accounted for when we wiped the Fridge clean.

"How did the events of April 4th come about?"

"Commander Rumlow had discovered that Arnim Zola's consciousness was active, in an underground bunker at Camp Lehigh, the training camp I taught at during WWII. It was underneath an earlier version of a SHIELD base. They had developed an algorithm that targeted people based on their past, their SAT scores, their affiliations, predicting if they would be a problem for Hydra in the future. The algorithm would kill more the 20 million people, and that was just on the East Coast, by using Insight Helicarriers. We had been planning on messing up the launch, but the only way to stop Hydra was to destroy the ships. And to destroy the ships, they had to first launch. What goes up, must come down."

"There was no other way you could have avoided dropping them on a building and into the Potomac?" One member asked a bit sarcastically.

"I would have liked to have stopped this before the Helicarriers were even started, but as I said, crying wolf would have gotten me killed. It's what Hydra does. They silenced my brother because he was getting too close. They killed Nick Fury because he got in their way," I lied easily. Keeping Nick 'dead' was helping us work certain angles. He was going hunting and it was better if the enemy didn't see him coming.

"And Captain Rogers, why have we not heard from him?"

"He is recovering at the moment," Natasha sassed, "He took a beating and then fell almost 1000 feet into the Potomac. Even super soldiers need their rest after battle."
From what the CIA had gleaned from reports of what transpired that day, is that there was an assassin of theirs on the Hydra Helicarriers. Is this true?

"Yes. But that is not what it seems," Brock spoke up.

"And what would it actually be, Commander Rumlow?"

"The assassin is one James Buchanan 'Bucky' Barnes. After his fall from the train in 1945 where he was presumed KIA, he was captured by soviet forces that had been part of Hydra, and tortured. It took twenty years of torture, brainwashing and cryo freezings, before he was used as their killer. He was turned into the Winter Soldier. I have all the information from Hydra here, as well as video evidence of their methods," Brock explained, gesturing to the stack of files he had brought. Natasha had contributed to the pile from a KGB contact she had. Thank god I made sure she didn't burn all her bridges in Russia, even if I technically burned them. Saved our asses a few times.

"And do you know the location of this assassin?"

"He's being deprogrammed and given psychiatric treatment at one of our offsite facilities," I supplied.

"You do understand that you don't get to decide who doesn't receive punishment and who does Colonel?"

"I do understand, but he is unstable right now. If the CIA or the FBI were to try and arrest him at the moment, he may end up hurting more people. That kind of brainwashing is damaging to a person's psyche and even the slightest movement towards them in aggression could cause the subject to lash out. You will receive all video recording of his sessions and case notes from Dr. Andrew Garner, his psychiatrist," I informed them, "And once he's stable, he can give you all the dirt on Hydra you want, in exchange for a full pardon."

"He's a killer, they don't get special treatment or handouts like that."

"He is the longest POW in our history as a nation. 70 years. He was brainwashed, submitted to shock torture and the Faustus method Commander Rumlow mentioned earlier. He spent his life taking orders, putting down Hydra's enemies with a muzzle over his mouth and programming that made it quite difficult to resist, lest he be punished for doing so. The man I knew, would have never have done those things. Not even with a gun to his head. They tried to break him, and like a mustang, he kept fighting for 20 years," I argued, "At one point the human brain gives over in self preservation, whether your spirit wants to or not."

"Colonel, you have left this country without a key part of its intelligence and global security apparatus. What do you expect us to do?"

"I haven't," I smiled, watching the members look at each other and then me in confusion.

"SHIELD is gone."

"SHIELD lives, just as it always has. If you looked very closely at the information dump, you'll recognize that most of those secrets were only Hydra's. Some of SHIELD's secrets couldn't be avoided, but SHIELD lives. Nick Fury and I personally secured most SHIELD intel at our off site facility, before the information dump, deleting the records from the server. We secured over half of our facilities around the world, arresting Hydra forces, and as of right now," I declared, looking at my watch, "They should be rolling up to Guantanamo Bay right now."

"You expect this committee to believe you will continue to run SHIELD as if nothing happened?"
"Of course something happened, something I had seen coming. Lives were lost in the effort to rid ourselves of Hydra and I have them on my conscience, forever. But the world needs us. It needs SHIELD to protect it, from forces like Hydra, who would rather rule through fear and chaos. We give people normalcy, protecting them from dictators, alien technology, enhanced weaponry and beings that don't care for human lives. The fact that Hydra nearly got what they wanted, were milliseconds away from killing 20 million people on April the 4th, proves that you need us," I spoke passionately into the microphone.

"What makes you think we won't arrest you?"

"Arrest a decorated WWII veteran? That will be headline news, especially given the fact I was already saving lives when your father was no more than a gleam in your grandfather's eye," I growled, watching Nat look at me like I was crazy. She touched my shoulder and I breathed out slowly. She was reminding me not to stress out.

"Colonel, you've known about Hydra for months and are just now are disclosing this information to the government. This committee is seriously doubting your ability to run SHIELD."

"It's funny you should say that, because Director Carter wasn't the first person offered the job. And then Nick Fury was a second pick again. Both times I was offered the position, and now I'm taking it," I said, watching them look confused.

"You were only spotted towards the end, after giving a video message before the launch. Why were you not more involved in the fight?"

"For one," I said, standing up and pulling the photostatic veil off my midsection, as gasps ran out across the room, "And for two, Hydra would have no problem ripping my child from my dead body to raise as their own. I'm supposed to be on bed rest right now, but I'm here dealing with you."

"Gentlemen," Natasha said, bringing their attention to her, "You aren't going to arrest us."

"And why is that?"

"Because you still need us," Brock said, "You still need SHIELD."

"We aren't spitting in your faces. We will be held accountable, but until the world stops turning, we will fight for it, even if you tell us no. Like a Phoenix rising from the ashes, we will come back stronger than before, hunting down every last Hydra stronghold. Because our fight isn't with you. It's with those who would halt the wheel of democracy, crushing underfoot those they think are weaker. Hydra isn't about freedom. It chooses the weapon of fear, to render its victims helpless and submissive while it takes all the power for itself. As my husband once said, "I don't want to kill anybody. I don't like bullies, I don't care where they come from." And make no mistake, my war has always been against bullies, on my side of the battlefield and against me," I said, getting up. Nat and Brock did as well, as cameras flashed and reporters yelled questions at us. I looked down at my phone, seeing an alert for Daisy.

Grams, Leo and Jemma are missing. They managed to get the tracker on the BUS, and we don't know if they are alive. They haven't checked in since Miami. But we're on our way after Garrett. Cybertek facility in New Mexico. 20 minutes east of Alamogordo.

"We've got to go," I stated, walking faster.

"Colonel," Brock questioned my haste, "What is it?"

"Garrett," I answered and he helped me waddle out to the car park.
Natasha had covers to work on, so I didn't bother asking for her help. Nick had already received a SHIELD frequency off the coast of Miami, and I had a feeling that was Jemma and Fitz. Nick had headed out to help them, as the frequency was coming from the middle of the ocean. Steve saw my face and immediately went to grab his shield. Rumlow flew us out to New Mexico as fast as the Quinjet would push us.

As I heard back from Daisy that they were storming the facility soon, I explained the plan to Steve.

"They are luring all the Centipede soldiers back to Garrett. Daisy's Trojan worked like a charm. Damn, that girl got Howard's smarts," I sighed, making Steve smile before saying seriously, "Hey, you're not going in there."

"I'm not here for the airline food, I'm here to protect my family," I argued, loading my ICER into my side holster and my shock sticks to the holsters on my thighs. A very special weapon was slipped into my waistband, with only one intended target in mind.

"I've got her back Cap," Brock said from the pilot's seat, and I rolled my eyes.

"Honestly, it's like I can't take care of myself," I sighed, as Nick texted me that Jemma was all right. Fitz went without oxygen for a bit trying to free them from the med pod, and he was in critical condition. But he had a med team with him, and Dr. Fine was waiting to receive them at Olympus. Nick had detached his own bird from the rescue plane and was already here. How did he beat us?

"Alright, let's go," I ordered as the Quinjet touched down and the ramp opened. Brock put it in cloaking mode, while Steve went after Phil.

"Brock, stop that van," I smiled, seeing Quinn in the passenger seat of said van passing us.

"With pleasure," He replied, shooting out the tires. I opened the back of the Quinjet, handing him a couple extra handcuffs and said, "Collect our prisoners please. We'll turn them over to the MP's until the CIA get here to handle them."

"Yes ma'am," He said, heading out to grab Quinn. As he was distracted, I started making my way into the facility, catching sight of Ward ahead of me. I followed silently and made it to where he stopped, seeing Daisy as she held up a phone, in the middle of a large office space.

"She's not gonna kill you," Ward said, announcing himself as he kept his gun trained at Daisy, "She had a chance to kill me before and wouldn't do it. And she hates me."

"I feel sorry for you, betraying the people who gave you the chance at being a decent human being. Fitz was a hero because he still wanted to give you that chance after everything. But some people are just born evil I guess."

"Yeah, maybe they are. I've learned things about you Skye, history. Things you'll want to know. You and I aren't that different," He said suavely.

"I was told not to believe a word that comes out of your mouth. I'm glad I listened to that advice. What you think you want to tell me, like who my parents are? Too late on that Ward, my family found me before I stepped foot on the BUS. And you'd be surprised at the kind of power we pull," She taunted him. He cocked his head, "Is that so? So you know then, the evil I'm talking about."

"You think the evil I was referring to was- No, Garrett is evil, you're just... weak. Doing anything you're told? I hope Garrett orders you to walk into traffic," She said, briefly looking past Ward to me. Brock was approaching me as well, but I couldn't take my sights off of Ward. As he walked up
beside me, I nodded my head forward. I held the door for him, as he crept up on Ward.

"You're right, I am weak. You woke up a weakness inside me, and for the first time in awhile I've wanted something for myself. Maybe I'll take what I want, wake up something inside of you."

"I'm not afraid of you," Daisy smiled at him, "Because I know who I am, and I know who loves me. I'm a SHIELD legacy, since birth, and I have something you'll never have. A heart."

"I know you won't use the bomb, you'd go too."

"I've got a weapon much better than a bomb that will absolutely destroy you. And I'll just sit back and watch. Get some popcorn, because it will be highly entertaining to see you snivel and beg like a little girl," She snarked and I held back a chuckle.

"Listen here, you're going to come with me, and I'm taking what I want. You'll be taught to comply," Ward said, and a fury burned throughout my body. If he thought he was going to brainwash her, he had another thing coming.

"That's no way to talk to a lady, you bastard," Brock said, cocking his gun as I locked eyes with May, shaking my head that I had this.

"Well, Commander Rumlow. If it isn't the traitor," Ward said, seeing Brock's reflection in the sign on the back wall, "Where do you fit into all of this? I thought you were Colonel Rogers attack dog."

"He's my man," Daisy smiled past Ward to Brock, who, if I could see him, was probably wearing a matching smirk of his own at how she had claimed him.

"Then that's too bad. Because I know you won't set off the bomb with him here," Ward said, attempting to turn and shoot Brock. I gave him one ICER between the eyes like I had for Pierce, knowing he didn't see me as I crept along the side of the room, behind a cubicle to set up my shot.

"Well, he's got issues," I chuckled.

"Grams," Daisy said, as May came out of the shadows behind me, giving me a quick nod.

"Sweet girl, what's the play here?" I acknowledged Daisy had the floor.

"Looking for the incentives program," She said softly, as Brock handcuffed Ward around a column. She briefly met his eyes and flushed, "Later."

"Yes, ma'am," He chuckled once as she set to work, grabbing the man she had duct taped a backpack to, and lifting him out of the chair. Brock took over the rough handling and they moved out of the room.

"Let's go help your husband," I smiled to May, who held up a finger. She pulled Ward's head up by his hair, punching him in the throat.

"I don't want him able to talk to her again," She said, as we moved.

"I would be insulted if you didn't," I snarked. We made it in time to see Steve walking over to Garrett, Mike Peterson breathing hard and lowering his arm from Garrett's direction. Steve punched him repeatedly, "You. Don't. Mess. With. My. Son."

"Son?" Garrett coughed out as Steve sent him sprawling to my feet.

"Anything you'd like to say Elle?" Steve said as I brought my Glock out from where it was tucked
"Yes," I said, putting a bullet between Garrett's eyes. A little blood splattered back on me, and I smiled down on Garrett's corpse saying, "You don't mess with a Rogers."

"Mom," Phil said and I looked back to see him looking at me warily.

"Hi sweetheart," I smiled sweetly, knowing I probably looked a little frightening, as I looked to see Trip walking in with the Peruvian 0-8-4.

"Aunt Liz! Hill told me to deliver this to you when we saw her last. Said you'd know what to do," He said, handing it to me.

"Thank you my boy," I smiled at Gabe's grandson, "Now stand back."

With a quick shot, Garrett's body disintegrated into pink mist. I wiped a bit away from my eyes dramatically.

"Give my regards to the devil," I smirked, powering down the weapon, "I'm coming for him next."

"Why'd you do that?" Nick smirked, clearly amused.

"Didn't have a knife. You've got to cut off the head, remember? Maybe I should get a sword," I smiled to Steve, "You're the shield, I'm the sword? I guess the lightsaber Tony's making me would be like a sword. It could be my own Longclaw! Damn, now I want an actual sword. I'll drop a hint to Clint for next Christmas."

"Let's get you home," He smiled, and I rolled my eyes.

"Shall we?" I smiled, as Trip said, "There's a whole lot of military dudes locked in the basement by the way."

"Lead the way Antoine," I teased, "Maybe this meeting of the brass will go over better than Capitol Hill's did."

"Aunt Liz," Trip grumbled as I had used his first name.

"Don't 'Aunt Liz' me, young man," I laughed, pinching his cheek in jest.

After we docked the Quinjet to the now reclaimed BUS, we were almost ready to head back to Olympus. Nick would be in the wind, tracking down Hydra leads for us in Europe. Trip was with us, wanting to follow in Gabe's footsteps and help us destroy Hydra. He was currently was securing our prisoners with military police, who would be escorting them to CIA custody. Ward did of course have a fractured larynx from Melinda's punch to his throat, so we were all amused at his silent shock seeing Steve and I among Phil's group. Daisy was our best bet at tracking Hydra, and she didn't want to leave us after we all found each other, so I knew she was coming back with us. And Brock planned on staying where she was, so he was staying with SHIELD. Not that I ever imagined he would leave. I saw them sneak off to her bunk for a minute, but quickly distracted Phil and Mel by suggesting we all talk in Phil's office.

And of course I knew that meant hearing Phil get loud about his resurrection.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid. And cruel, and very stupid!"

"Clearly you've made your point," Nick sassed as I sighed. I had a dramatic husband and a dramatic
son. This baby may be a wild card in disposition.

"Why did you even bring me back in the first place? I warned you about people losing their minds," He yelled at both of us, "Did you not care that I might?"

"Of course we cared. Enough to make sure you were monitored closely even after your treatment was over. Melinda was asked to stay on top of the situation and she says you're fine. Aren't you?" I asked, as Mel nodded. Phil just shrugged a little as Nick said, "It was a 'break glass in case of emergency' situation."

"Yes, but that situation was supposed to be the fall of an Avenger," Phil scolded, as I stood up and smiled, "Exactly."

"Before the Helicarriers went down and Hydra was brought out of the woodwork, guys like you were the heart of SHIELD. You're a legacy, son of the two strongest moralled people I know. When you want to build something, you've got to have a firm foundation. You know how few people I trust Rogers," Nick said, as Phil answered, "You can count them on one hand."

"And I'm not afraid to cut off fingers. The principal SHIELD was founded on was pure," Nick answered, as I supplied, "Protection."

"Protection. One word," Nick confirmed, pointing at me before continuing, "Sometimes to protect one man against himself, other times to protect the planet from alien invasion from another universe. It's a broad job description."

"You don't have to tell me," Phil quipped.

"But the belief is the same. Whether its one man, or all mankind," I spoke softly, as Phil looked over at me.

"That they are worth saving," He finished my thought with sad eyes.

"And that truth lives inside you Phil," Nick added softly.

"I am sorry for what we had to do to protect you from the symptoms and from the trauma. It was cruel. But I will never apologize for saving you. You are my son, and the moment I held you in my arms, I knew I would burn down the world to keep you safe. You will never know how much it killed me to see the light leave your eyes, to tell your father..." I stopped, feeling my eyes well up.

"I'm sorry Mom," He said, "I'm sorry I've been distant."

"I understood why. I hurt you, betrayed your trust. But now we have to be better. We are stronger together. We're rebuilding from the ground up, and I need you with me Phil. You are everything SHIELD stands for. I need my Deputy Director," I smiled, watching his eyes bug out.

"What? What about Maria?"

"She's keeping an eye on Tony for me. Wanted a quieter life," I admitted, as I felt the baby kick, "So I'm gonna need an answer. At one point, I'll need a little time to focus on your sister."
"A sister?" He smiled softly, joy in his eyes.

"Yes. If you had been talking to me," I teased lightly, "But we'll talk about a brother in a year or two."

"Don't really want to think about that," Phil muttered in disgust, making Steve laugh, clapping our son on his shoulder.

"And you Sir? Where are you heading now?" Mel asked as Nick got up.

"I'm trading in my bird's eye view, for two solid feet on the ground, much like Hill. This is the last time you'll be seeing me for a stretch. Considering I'm dead," Nick sassed, "And I have your man to thank for that."

"He said he's sorry," Steve smirked lightly, making Phil turn to him confused.

"Sorry, who?"

"We got him back, your Dad," I answered, "He's back at Olympus. Andrew is working with him, and we're doing well on breaking his programming."

"This is surreal," Phil sighed, shaking his head.

"No, this is our lives. Messy, but never a dull moment," Nick laughed, holding a hand out to Phil, who shook it and said, "Thank you Sir."

"Thank you Phil. Just listen to your mother Rogers," Nick teased, before looking at me, "I'll be seeing you soon."

"Just keep me informed of who we need to take down over there," I smirked, quirking an eyebrow.

"Expect a dead drop in Amsterdam in a month," He nodded, holding a hand out to me. I shook it and said, "Thank you Nick. You are a dedicated soldier and it been a pleasure working with you. I look forward to seeing how you work beyond the grave."

"You as well Colonel. It's been an honor, and you know me, I've always got both eyes open," He smirked, pulling his shades down to punctuate the joke.

"Do you mind stopping in Queens for me? My CI out there needs a new way to contact me," I explained, pulling another encrypted phone out of my bag.

"I'll make sure he gets is," Nick nodded, knowing who I meant.

He shook Steve's hand as well, "Pleasure Captain. I'll be seeing you in the future."

"Thanks for the heads up," Steve smiled, "And thank you, for everything you sacrificed."

"Just another day at the office, according to the Colonel," Nick laughed.

"Melinda, keep him in line," He nodded to Mel, who smiled and nodded back. And with that, Nick left, taking the Quinjet that was docked to the BUS.

"Why doesn't everyone think I can't be kept in line?" Phil asked Steve, before realizing, "Oh... right."

"Because you Rogers' boys never followed a rule in your life," I joked, as they rolled their eyes at
"So, you ready?" I asked Phil.

"When do we start?" He questioned back, with a smirk.
Chapter Thirty Five

A/N: Hello my faithful readers! We are finally, finally, getting more interaction between Steve, Elizabeth and Bucky. Now, I'm having a tough time deciding a ship name. So I would like everyone's opinions on a few here, or submit your own ideas :) StuckyGoddess, StuckyBeth, Stabethy (weirdest one on the name generator, but my husband pointed out it sounded like stab-ethy lol) CaptainAthenaWinter... I kind of give up. Please either gift me with suggestions for a 'poll' (of sorts) on next week's chapters, or tell me which of the provided ones you like best. And as always, enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

Songs used in this chapter are Safe and Sound by Taylor Swift and The Civil Wars, and I Won't Give Up by Jason Mraz.

As we made it back to base with the BUS, I was surprised to find Clint waiting for us as the ramp lowered, an anxious Jemma by his side.

"Have you forgiven me for your Christmas present?" I teased as I walked down, with Steve and Phil close by. Daisy was already down and hugging Jemma tightly.

"Give me another year, and a chance to get you back," He smiled at me, greeting me with a hug. "Way to say 'Suck it' to Capitol Hill by the way."

"Ah, that was on my bucket list anyways," I shrugged, before reaching for Jemma. She was quite surprised when I hugged her but accepted my comfort, relaxing at my touch.

"I'm sorry. I'm just glad Fury got to you in time" I said, giving her an extra squeeze.

"It wasn't your fault," She said as I pulled back.

"But I could have warned you earlier. We didn't know how well you could lie to Ward if you had known."

"Known before... before Skye warned us?" She asked, not understanding. I sighed before gesturing for everyone to follow me, "Let's move to the lounge. It's a long story. HERMES, update from the Playground."

"Welcome home Ma'am. Remaining agents have been processed through the Chair, and are being housed for the evening at the remaining bases. Tomorrow they will be sent out to their new assigned bases, receiving their assignments tonight following your addressment. The Beacon was successful, with all undercover abroad agents directed to your safehouses, where they received instructions to wait for rescue teams. I believe your intention was for them to be sent out tomorrow following the base shuffling.

"That's the plan. Where is Agent Romanoff?"

"Agent Romanoff has gone to secure the delivered items in the Cerberus Vault."
"Good. Has Dr. Garner left for the day?"

"He has Ma'am. Agent Romanoff escorted him out on her way."

"And what is our guest up to?" I asked, looking back at Steve. He nodded, branching off from the group to go see Bucky. Brock wasn't needed for telling the story, so he followed Steve as back up, giving Daisy a parting wink as we all piled in the elevator.

"Pacing, Ma'am. And writing occasionally. Dr. Garner recommended writing down any memory he remembers. He also recommended soothing music and I have given him access to your personal music library."

"Concentrate on music from 1925 to 1944 please, unless he requests otherwise. Have we gathered the final numbers of casualties?" I asked softly.

"With the reinforcements, the number remains under 500. Without our precautionary agent placements, I estimate it would have been closer to 2000."

"Alright, please have Dr. Fine update me on Dr. Fitz's condition, should it change."

"Yes Ma'am," The AI said as we walked out of the elevator and towards the lounge. I sighed, gesturing for everyone to take a seat while I started the holographic projector for visual aids.

"Okay, why was I never allowed to play with that Grams?" Daisy asked jokingly, before all the color drained from her face.

"Well, I suppose we will start there," I chuckled to Phil. He smiled, "I'd rather not lie to them anymore."

"Lie?" Jemma asked confused. Trip looked between Phil, Daisy and I for a moment and said, "Damn, how did I not notice that before?"

"Notice what?" Jemma asked.

"Phil is mine and Captain Rogers, son."

She looked between us for a moment, seeing what Trip noticed and exclaimed, "I can't believe I didn't notice that."  

"I used a sample of Captain Roger's sperm that was collected after the serum was administered. It kept well in a freezer for almost 20 years, and its how I got Phil. And through Phil, I got Melinda."

"Not all of SHIELD knows this, but we were married just a year out of the academy. Still are," She spoke up, watching Jemma and Trip's shocked faces as Phil wrapped an arm around her.

"And from their union, came my beautiful granddaughter, Daisy Rogers," I said, looking over at Daisy. She scrunched her nose in disgust saying, "That's a gross way of putting it, thanks Grams. My whole life story is true. I was orphaned, but I had been kidnapped by Hydra when I was five months old. Then SHIELD was sent to pick me up in China and I was placed in an orphanage in Orangeburg. Mom and Grams only found me around 9 months ago. Dad met me a month later, after Grams had trained me a bit. She wanted me on Dad's team to survey Ward."

"You knew he was Hydra?" Trip asked confused.

"Let's start at the beginning. I knew Hydra didn't die with Schmidt back during the war, but I had no
proof. Zola was brought in on SHIELD in its earliest stages of infancy, and the parasite began to
grow. I was not going to cry wolf, as I've told many people. I wanted proof before I started a war.
And it took me 61 years to get it. When I had it, the next step was to figure out their end game:
Insight. So my inside man, Commander Rumlow, was giving me dead drops of who was on the list
for elimination and the plans for the Helicarriers. It's how we knew to link the three to take each
other out. Coincidentally, those that weren't on the list were guaranteed to be Hydra or would be
sheep. Ward was the wild card as I knew he was loyal to Garrett. And as we know, Garrett had other
aspirations than following Hydra. They were a means to an end."

"We planted good people at SHIELD bases, knowing that it wouldn't be just the Triskelion that
came under fire. But we knew if we put more on your team, it might cause Ward to do something
drastic. So, I was the one that recommended you to Agent May, to recommend to Deputy Director
Rogers."

"Congrats on the promotion," Trip smiled at Phil, "Cousin."

"Cousin," Phil smiled back.

"Easy Antoine," I teased, "Not in front of the other agents. Got it? He's still your superior."

"All good Aunt Liz."

"Alright, and another thing we discovered only a few months ago, was that..." I stopped, wondering
if they needed to know. But Jemma might be able to help us understand the serum Bucky was given,
and Trip was practically family.

"Mom, it's okay," Phil said softly. Clint nodded for me to continue, knowing why I was hesitating.

"During the war, Sergeant Barnes wasn't just Captain Rogers childhood best friend. He was our
lover," I coughed once nervously, watching Trip's eye twitch in confusion as I continued, "And
when he fell from the train during the mission to capture Dr. Zola, he didn't die from the fall. He
didn't die, period. He was taken by the soviets, turned into the Winter Soldier. Kept in cryo in
between missions."

"Who?" Jemma asked.

"A brainwashed assassin with over 24 confirmed kills in 50 years. A ghost story, but then again, the
three of us are ghosts of who we once were. Anyways, during the Triskelion battle, we were able to
get him to come back here to receive psychiatric treatment."

"He's here?" Trip asked.

"Yes," I confirmed, "It's why Captain Rogers left us on our way up here."

"So, that's about the gist of it. Phil is my son, Melinda my daughter in law, Daisy my granddaughter
and my other soulmate is recovering from 70 years of brainwashing and torture. Any questions?"

"You have an AI?" Jemma asked, changing the subject to a lighter note.

"Yes. Both this base and the Playground are run by HERMES. I'm working on having him installed
at Providence. Couldn't give Ward any clues there. And Agent Koenig walked into that situation
with full knowledge of our plan. He knew the risks, and he was prepared to face them. He's a patriot
in my book."

"I wasn't told what this base was called," She asked searchingly.
"Olympus."

"Ah that makes sense. Goddess of War and all. How is your pregnancy Colonel?" She asked nervously and I chuckled, "It's good. We are expecting a little girl."

"Congrats Aunt Liz," Trip smiled, getting up to hug me.

"Thank you Trip," I smiled into his shoulder. Damn, I hated that this kid was taller than me. As he released me, he said, "I'd like to meet him when he's ready."

"It's up to him, but I'll see if I can get him up for dinner tomorrow night or even breakfast. We are going at his pace and when he's ready to be out of the cell, he'll approach you."

"Yes Ma'am."

"Wow, I'm still waiting for the other shoe to drop," I sighed to Phil, "One day, someone is gonna be disgusted."

"People might not understand it, but the world is a more open place than during the war," He shrugged.

"You're damn right about that. Unfortunately, anyone can walk into SHIELD and say they aren't Hydra. I know you aren't, but if I don't put you into the Chair again, the Koenigs will just nag," I sighed, turning back to Jemma and Trip.

"Koenig's?" Trip asked worried as I walked out of the lounge, "There's more than one?"

They both passed the Lie Detector Chair easily, and Clint managed to hug Phil when he thought no one was looking.

"I'm glad you are okay."

"Well, okay is a vague word. Ask me again in a week," Phil joked, making Clint laugh. While I had Daisy show Jemma and Trip around, Mel and Phil stayed with Clint in the lounge to catch up. I had an announcement I had to give to the Playground, the Hub and Providence. I walked back to my office, wanting to put my feet up. I groaned as I plopped down in my chair, gazing out the window at the early evening sky. I felt a little kick and sighed to my bump, "Still not sleepy? You had a big day."

"Alright," I laughed, resting my hands over the bump as she kicked again, "Let me give this announcement and then you get your song."

Standing up to rest against the front of my desk, I asked HERMES, "Are we ready for the addressment?"

"Yes Ma'am. Shall I open up a line?"

"Please."

The wall of screens in my office lit up as I took in the remaining agents gathered at the Playground, Providence and the HUB, and even the lounge on Level 10.

"Good evening. I know a lot of you are concerned with our safety now; for yourselves, your families and your fellow agents. I would like to take this opportunity to apologize for those lives we lost, and to those of you who feel I made a bad call, in not raising the alarm sooner. I've been where you are.
The first bad call someone made for me, cost the lives of twenty good men, who I was unable to save because of bad intel. Every angle we came at the problem, seemed to risk more lives instead of less. Tip them off, and everyone would have been massacred. It was a hard choice to make. My acceptable number of casualties has always been zero, and it will never be anything but that. I alerted as many as I could, to keep Hydra thinking they had the upper hand, while giving us a chance to fight back in equal measure. I will live with knowing the call I made cost us good people. But there was no other choice that seemed favourable."

"A few days ago, I was holed up in this base, wondering if we were going to make it. As an organization, and as human beings. Had we failed so much in letting them gain access to us? If some unknown variable came up, could we counter it in time? But we survived, because they underestimated us. Our enemy keeps making the same mistake, assuming that when it gets too much, we will surrender."

"Surrender has never been a part of my vocabulary. Maybe that's a flaw I have, because I've been able to put myself on the line instead of risking others lives. In this circumstance I chose to sit out, because I felt I would have not given my brother the justice he deserved, but vengeance. Everyone of them would be dead, but there would be no meaning. No satisfaction. It's why Captain Rogers and I chose to grow our family, to keep me from being tempted in slaughtering every Hydra agent that got in my way."

"We lost good people, in the Triskelion, the HUB, the FRIDGE, and at every other SHIELD base and academy. Sometimes you do the best you can with the information you are given. I feel I could have done better, for all of you. And maybe I could have, but I can't travel back in time to kill Dr. Zola, however much I've dreamt of the idea. I just want to give you all the security you deserve now. Both times I was offered this job, I was grieving. First my husband and best friend, and then my brother. I wasn't in the right headspace to lead, but I still wanted to fight, to work for our world's betterment and protection. If you feel that I am not the woman for the job, you are more than welcome to seek out a new way to protect your country. Because now that I've got my feet in my grave, I'm not leaving. My stand is here and now, against Hydra. Against any threat to our intelligence gathering, to our country's security, and to our world's."

"Those of you that are willing to stay and fight, will be welcomed gladly. Because the other day was just the beginning. They aren't going to stop. They will keep inducting new members and planning their next move. Ours is building trust within our team again. And to start off on a good foot, I will lay all my cards out on the table now."

I took a deep breath, seeing a familiar head of blonde in the audience at the HUB and smiled knowing at least one agent would understand.

"Today, I was aiding my son's team, in taking down the Cybertek division of Hydra and along with them, John Garrett. As you can probably conclude from the blood splatter," I explained, hearing a few murmurs from my audience, rubbing a bit of dried blood off of my face.

"My son, Phillip James Rogers, better known to you all as Phil Coulson, had been revived by an alien drug after the Battle of New York. The drug no longer exists, and I would be hesitant to use it on any of our dead. I demanded Fury use it in my grief, uncaring of the side effects. He was kept a secret his whole life, due to Hydra and because the biological sample I used from a cryo storage of Captain Rogers'... well, technically it was government property. But as the official head of the project, as everyone else abandoned it, I claimed it."

"The lies and the secrets stop there. We all have aspects of our lives that we want kept personal and not as gossip for the water cooler, as do I. But anything to do with your fellow agents, your own
security and if your missions and assignments might endanger your life, will not be kept from you. As always, some things are too classified for more than a few to know. But as of right now, I am getting rid of Levels," My voice echoed across the room, as everyone sat in silence, shocked most likely.

"All academy students, you will be taken on as temporary agents until we can secure your respective schools. Please use this time to learn from those around you. The knowledge and wisdom they possess might just save your life."

"We are mourning, all of us. We lost friends, partners, SO's and CO's, either by Hydra's hand or to Hydra's side. But I refuse to let them win. I will fight for those we lost, this past week and over our history. Their deaths were not in vain. We are stronger together, and Hydra knows this. It's why those Helicarriers were seconds away from taking out anyone they thought might rise up against them."

"After I lost Captain Rogers during the War, I wondered if my life had a purpose, meaning. Not many know this, but I tried to take my own life. 53 times actually. Everytime I woke up, I wondered why I was still alive. But everything I have gone through has led me to this moment, where I stand up and fight back. Compromise where you can, and where you can't, don't. Even if the whole world is telling you that something wrong is something right... it is your duty to plant yourself like a tree and say "No, you move." And I'm not one to shy away from an advancing army. Because I know that even if I'm alone, my death, or defeat will not be in vain. My fight- our fight, is not in vain or in the spirit of vengeance. It is our right as Americans to stand up for ourselves, to bear arms and protect our country from those whose ideals oppose our constitution. Whose ideals threaten our way of life and our freedom."

"Hydra believes that fear is the path to 'world peace', or for them, world domination. I don't agree. I say that the path to world peace leads to their downfall, and the continued protection against forces that seek war and death for personal gain. So," I smiled, wrapping up my speech, "Who's with me?"

I watched as the rooms stood slowly, before seeing an injured Robert Gonzales get to his feet and get to the front of the screen in the HUB.

"We're with you Colonel," He replied for the room and I gave him a nod, "Thank you. All of you. Your bravery and sacrifice inspire me." 

"Agent Koenig," I asked, seeing Billy and Sam raise their hands at my request quickly at their separate locations. I chuckled at their confused looks on the monitor, wondering who was called, "Yes, both of you."

"As I assume most of you know one of the brothers by now, they will be taking their jobs of assigning you to a base very seriously. We're going to revamp a lot of our protocols, and how things are done. If you are patient with us, we'll have you settled in no time. We are taking into account your strengths in the agency, and where you will be most suited as we rebuild. Agent Gonzales," I addressed, picking out Robert from the crowd.

"I would like you to personally oversee the HUB, as your base of operations." Robert looked floored as a fair many clapped at his promotion.

"There will be many more leadership changes in the days to come, but for now, we need to rest. In the morning, you'll head to your respective bases that the Koenigs have assigned you to. Most will be at the Playground, Providence and the HUB. A select few will be working from my base of operations, Olympus. We are currently housing the Winter Soldier, better known as Sergeant James Barnes. The very same one, if you hadn't gotten a chance to see me tell off Capitol Hill. He was a
prisoner under Hydra for 70 years, and the brainwashing they used on him is breaking down. But I would suggest a wide berth until he feels himself again. Fair warning, I won't tolerate anyone saying he shouldn't be given a second chance, or anyone who interferes with his de-programming and treatment. We all got a second chance after the events of the past week, and it's how we use that chance that defines us. And I promise you, you will be answering to me if you cause him intentional distress," I spoke plainly, but apparently my point was made.

"What do we do now Colonel?" An agent asked after a moment of silence.

"We move forward, as best we can," I said, before my office door opened. Steve's smiling face popped through, as I held up a hand to wait.

"Get a good night sleep, all of you. Everything will look better in the light of day. Because we still have hope. We don't need Gods or magic to defeat them. Our hope and will alone, are stronger than anything they can throw at us. Thank you. I'll see you soon."

The feed cut out as an excited woof came from the other side of the door. The dog pushed past Steve to barrel towards my legs.

"Zeusy, come here baby!" I smiled, doing my best to squat down to greet my excited pitbull.

"Natasha picked him up for us from the daycare. She just got in," Steve explained coming further into my office.

"That's good. It means we are still secured at Cerberus. Mommy missed you, yes I did," I baby talked to my cuddly pitbull, as he soaked up my love. He licked my face, sniffed it and sneezed, making me laugh.

"Sorry boy, forgot to wash the blood of the enemy off," I smiled, looking for something to wipe my face with.

Bucky stepped out from behind Steve as I tried to get up, only to lose my balance, yelping as I fell on my butt. I caught myself on my hands, feeling two sets of hands gently pulling me up. Only one was colder and metallic.

"Wow, this baby is making me clumsy," I smiled, as Bucky quickly dropped his hands.

"Thank you," I spoke softly, giving Bucky a smile. He nodded, as Zeus gave him a warning growl, getting in between us.

"Zeus, no. Family," I pointed to Bucky. And much like he had with Steve, he sniffed at his fingers, both flesh and metal, before huffing and going to lie down on his bed.

"He's very protective of Elle," Steve explained, "He came from a bad situation, where he was used to fight...Anyways, she rescued him."

Steve must have drawn a parallel, much like I had with the words he used, and Bucky followed.

"Is that a past time? Picking up strays?" He asked, looking around.

"Actually, it is. Natasha, Clint, Nick, Brock... oh and Tevan. I've got to check in tomorrow before everyone starts arriving. Ah, yes, I should give you a warning. Now that we've got our SHIELD agents gathered, a fair number will be stationed here."

"Do they know I'm here?" He asked in a small voice.
"I assume they would draw that conclusion, when I announced this morning that you were at an
offsite SHIELD facility. I did also tell the agents I was just speaking to that you'd be here. If you
would rather not be around people just yet, we have a room set up on one of the accommodations
floors. It will be your space, to get away from people or to relax. It will be a safe spot for you, not a
cell."

"I don't know if that's safe."

"For you or others?" Steve asked softly as I gestured for us to sit down.

"I haven't... I haven't slept in so long. I don't remember the last time I did. I was strapped down, or in
cryo... I think."

"But that isn't a restful sleep," I nodded, wincing as I put my feet up.

"Are you okay?" Steve asked as I settled back against the cushions.

"Long day. Long life actually. Could you get me a glass of water, please? And maybe a cloth to
wipe my face off. I still have Garrett spray on me," I asked him sweetly.

"Of course Elle. Would you like some water Buck?"

"Uh..." Bucky's eyebrows furrowed as he thought of his answer, "Sure?"

"When did you last eat, like we've been feeding you? Full meals?" I asked him gently, opening the
drawer on the coffee table to reveal a variety of snacks.

"They never really gave me anything but protein bars. Pre-made stuff for my metabolism," He
muttered as Steve placed a glass of water in front of him.

"Thank you Darling," I smiled at Steve, who gave me my water first, and gently wiped my face
clean with a wet towel, before looking at Bucky, "I'll ask Dr. Fine and Jemma their opinion on how
to get you back on normal food. Steve and I eat insane amounts for our metabolism, so it's not that
much of a stretch to add your own to the grocery list. It's about to multiply exponentially with our
arrivals tomorrow anyways. Did you want something from here?"

"The uh... the green packaged thing?" He asked after looking over. Steve picked one up, and passing
it to Bucky as he said, "Elle reintroduced me to food when I came out of the ice. Her taste buds are a
little more refined, but these are basic. About five for me is considered a snack."

"I would advise small bites, just to test how it sits in your stomach," I nodded, as he unwrapped it.
He took his first tentative bite, face softening at the flavors of the oat bar. I took a long drink of
water, holding my glass over to Steve sheepishly. He chuckled, getting up to refill mine as Bucky
said, "How..."

I waited for him to finish thinking, giving him an encouraging smile as he finished, "How are you
both here? And looking so young? Dr. Garner told me what year it was, and when I fell it was
almost 70 years ago... you should be old by now."

"Uh, I am old buddy," I teased.

"Well, after we lost you, we went to fight Schmidt. I crashed the plane headed for the East coast, and
froze in the glacier temperatures. My serum kept me in a constant state of regeneration, much like
cryo freezings for you. I was still alive, but frozen. They thawed me out after finding me last year,
still looking like I did when I went in," Steve explained.
"But, what about you? How do you look so young?" He asked me, taking another bite of the bar.

"My serum was a little different to yours and Steve's. I didn't get the VitaRay stimulation, so mine keeps me in a constant state of regeneration as well. I age extremely slowly. I've maybe aged five years? It's hard to tell, but if I kept going at my current rate, I'd live another 300 or so before I looked 80ish or kicking the bucket. We've been working with a few scientists to reverse that part of my serum, so I can age normally again."

"You were... alone," Bucky stated sadly.

"We all were," I reasoned.

"You thought we were dead though, right?" He asked.

"Otherwise, I would have... Nevermind."

"What? You'd what?" Bucky asked confused, as Steve ducked his head slightly before explaining what I meant, "I chose to put the plane down, because I was mourning you. And Elle felt she had no other option but to try and join us in death."

"You... tried to kill yourself?"

"53 times. Most of them were normal. Drowning, slit wrists, bullet to the brain... But as I realized nothing was working I tried some weird ones, like cliff jumping. Carbon monoxide poisoning was the last attempt, but I mainly just hallucinated before Howard found me in the garage and dragged me outside for fresh air. It was nice to see you again, even though in my hallucination you were telling me to wake up, both of you. When I stopped trying, Howard had my cells tested and figured out I was healing so fast I was barely aging. Aging is just the cells dying off once they reach a certain age. Steve is aging now but-"

"You tried to kill yourself, because this idiot tried to join me when I wasn't even dead?" He interrupted me, sounding less like the soldier and more like Bucky.

"Bucky, he loved you so much before I ever was in the picture. I understand now how much pain-"

"NO! How could you do that to her?" He cut me off again and shouted at Steve. Steve wasn't expecting the sudden outburst, shocked into silence. Zeus was up, on edge until I put my hand out for him to stand down.

"I didn't let him off the hook right away, when he came back," I explained, trying to keep him calm with my voice, "He worked for my trust again. We are okay now, I've forgiven him."

"How? If he had done that to me... left me alone..." For a fraction of a second, I saw Bucky shining through, before the wall went up again.

"Bucky, I wasn't okay, for many many years. I was furious, and yes, lonely. I had Phil, but I knew that part of my soul was missing, the parts that you both filled. I became a very cruel person, in many ways greater than the Winter Soldier. I cared about my missions, training and nothing else. I felt like I had almost gotten past it and then he walked into my training room as I addressed my recruits. I was so angry, and confused. But after I had a few hours to think about it, I realized I felt alive again, after so long of simply existing," I cried.

"And when we found out you were alive, I felt like I could breathe again. That all that loneliness had a purpose, so we could be together again, now. A fresh start, a second chance. In no way did I want you to be subjected to anything Hydra did, or Steve to being frozen alive for 70 years, but if the
Soviets hadn't found you..."

"We wouldn't be together now," He nodded, giving me a smile. I smiled brightly back at him, touched at the smile he gave me. His eyes softened as he looked at me, as if he was seeing some memory.

"I hurt her, and I will spend the rest of my life making it up to her. You have my word on that, Buck," Steve promised.

"You better. Just means I have to be around to make sure you don't do anything stupid," Bucky said, making a face. "I feel like... I've said that before."

"You did. In the Enlistment office at the World of Tomorrow Expo. You told Steve to not to anything stupid while you were gone and he-"

"Said "How can I, you're taking all the stupid with you,"" Steve smiled. Bucky gave a responding smile, "You did something stupid. You let the army experiment on you, stole a plane, crashed a plane... what else?"

"He jumped on a dummy grenade at camp, before the serum. He didn't know it was a dud," I smirked at Steve, who narrowed his eyes on me as he said, "I thought you promised not to tell him that!"

"I lied. It was just a matter of time, and I'm not going to lie to him anymore. And speaking of the truth, Bucky, we won't be hurt if you need time away from us, if you think you're being smothered. Just tell us, please. You aren't a bother if you come to our door in the middle of the night, or if you need help with technology. We want to help you, but you set the boundaries. Does that sound fair, you being honest and us respecting your boundaries?" I asked, knowing all Steve and I wanted to do was hold him close and never let go.

He nodded, "Dr. Garner... he said something about telling you if I was feeling like that."

"We aren't here to get you back to being 'our' Bucky. We want you to figure out who you are now, and we learn to love him. Steve and I, aren't who we were during the war either. Our seventy years of being separated changed all of us. It's not a secret that we'd like you to get to a point where we can all be together again, like we were. But only if you want us. Please, don't feel pressured to be with us or hesitant because of guilt. We will love you regardless, in any capacity you'll allow."

"As the Soldier... I had moments, where I could feel something missing." He started, taking a drink of the water in front of him, "I think it was muscle memory. Like I knew my arms would wrap perfectly around someone's waist, but I couldn't place who."

"From when we were together?" Steve asked intrigued.

"I'd hold you when it was cold, keep you warm," Bucky wondered, looking to Steve as he nodded, "I got sick a lot and our apartment didn't have a lot of heat. Blankets could only keep the pneumonia away for so long."

"I like to think that you were too stubborn to die. The Grim Reaper could come to take you away and you'd fight him. Probably win," I teased, making Steve laugh. Bucky gave a chuckle as well, and finished off his oat bar. Seeing him like this, not like during the war but so different from the cold soldier he was last week, lifted my spirits. We'd been through hell and came out relatively unscathed. Well, in my case relatively unscathed.

"I knew someone's name would fall from my lips... when they put me in the chair the first few times."
"Probably you again," I smirked slightly to Steve, not jealous in the slightest. They'd been together most of their lives, I was only here the last two before we were separated.

"I think it was you," Bucky spoke softly, looking at me, "Your voice would tell me to hold on. That you would find me..."

"I'm sorry it took so long," I cried, wiping my eyes, "But they will never get you again. I promise you that. Over my dead body will they take you back and make you do anything."

"And she's kind of hard to kill, so you've got a guarantee," Steve joked, making me scoff and smack his shoulder. Bucky only nodded, looking relieved and apprehensive at the same time.

A faint kick in my belly reminded me, "Oh."

"What?" Bucky asked.

"I promised her a song, and then she is falling asleep," I said to my belly, where I felt a little kick. Steve chuckled, rubbing the spot he saw movement at.

"Isn't even born yet, and already has us wrapped around her finger," Steve smiled to Bucky, who was watching us.

"Did you want to feel her kick again?" I asked, seeing his confused and jealous gaze. He softened a bit, and shrugged, "If you're sure."

"I am. She loves to chase fingers," I smiled, as he got up to come sit beside me. He started to reach, before pulling back, realizing he was using his left.

"Would you like to switch sides Buck?" Steve asked. Bucky nodded once, getting up as Steve did. Steve let Bucky set the distance as they moved around. Bucky's hand grabbed Steve's arm, stopping him as they crossed paths. I watched Steve wait patiently for Bucky to look up at him.

"It wasn't your fault," He said finally looking up at Steve. I saw the drooping of Steve's face before his shoulders shook once with a silent sob. My own lips pressed together to hold back a sob, as tears began to stream down Steve's face.

"I couldn't get to you in time. That was my fault," Steve said softly, a tear falling over his cheek.

"You did what you could. I remember that much. I followed you for a reason," He said in reply, before glancing over at me. He released Steve's arm as I beckoned them both over. Steve sat down, drying his eyes, Bucky sitting on my right side. He turned his knees to face me so he could gently reach for my belly. I gently directed his fingers to a spot she had just been kicking and took a deep breath.

I just couldn't remember whose...

I remember tears streaming down your face
When I said, "I'll never let you go."
When all those shadows almost killed your light
I remember you said, "Don't leave me here alone,"
But all that's dead and gone and passed tonight

Just close your eyes
The sun is going down
You'll be alright
No one can hurt you now
Come morning light
You and I'll be safe and sound

Don't you dare look out your window,
Darling, everything's on fire
The war outside our door keeps raging on
Hold onto this lullaby
Even when the music's gone
Gone

Just close your eyes
The sun is going down
You'll be alright
No one can hurt you now
Come morning light
You and I'll be safe and sound

Just close your eyes
You'll be alright
Come morning light,
You and I'll be safe and sound...

"She stopped moving," Bucky observed, still holding a hand to my stomach. I sighed in relief, "Finally. Usually takes a few more to get her to settle down."

"Must sense her Daddies," Steve smiled, and I chuckled. Bucky withdrew his hand slowly, sitting back against the couch.

"What's on your mind?" I asked softly.

"It's only been a few days, but this feels like a dream. One they made."

"What would you like us to do to prove its real?" Steve inquired. Bucky thought for a moment, before saying, "Do either of you have a knife?"

"Can I ask what you want it for?" Steve asked concerned at the turn in Bucky's train of thought, but I said, "I know why."

Directing Bucky over to the desk, he found my throwing knives strapped to the underside of the desk, pulling one out and quickly making a small cut on his arm. His wince of pain was the confirmation I needed before I said, "I did that a lot. Even after I stopped attempting suicide, it reminded me that my reality was final, that I wasn't dreaming. You aren't either Bucky."

He looked up, tears in his eyes, the cut still bleeding. I got up, grabbing something to stop the blood, saying, "It's okay to be afraid. I was afraid when Steve came back. I'd wake up every night, wondering why there was another body beside me and then terrified when he wasn't there, that it had all been a dream. We'd wake each other up with nightmares, and when I couldn't sleep, I either hit the gym to beat the crap out of a punching bag or sit and watch the stars. The latter usually was accompanied by a glass of wine and my guitar."

"She'd sing to you," Steve spoke up as he brought a small first aid kit to me.

"You did?" Bucky asked, voice still thick with emotion.
"Well, technically, I'd sing to the stars, imagining you were up there looking down on us," I blushed, "It was more of a comfort for me."

"What would you sing?" He asked, as I began bandaging his arm. I looked up at him. Something in his expression reminded me of the teasing smile he would give me, a million years ago. His eyes intrigued but almost flirty, mouth set with one side pulling up into a faint smirk.

"Something from a few years ago, about missing you."

"What would you sing now that I'm here?" He asked as I finished. I thought about it for a moment, looking up at him as I whispered, "Something asking you to stay. To hold on. Because Steve and I won't give up on you. But I know that's not fair, to ask you to stay if you want to go."

He nodded, looking back over at the little living room setting in my office, head tilting as he saw something.

"Sing it anyways?" He asked quietly.

"Are you sure?" I asked unsure of my song choice now. He nodded, "My mind feels clearer, hearing your voice. Please."

I pursed my lips, knowing I wouldn't deny him clarity of mind, if that's what he really wanted. I walked over to my guitar, gently pick it up off the stand. As I sat down, settling the guitar to rest against my stomach in the most comfortable position possible. I began picking slowly, seeing Steve recognize the song with a bright smile.

"You'll like this one."

*When I look into your eyes  
It's like watching the night sky  
Or a beautiful sunrise  
Well, there's so much they hold  
And just like them old stars  
I see that you've come so far  
To be right where you are  
How old is your soul?

Well, I won't give up on us  
Even if the skies get rough  
I'm giving you all my love  
I'm still looking up

And when you're needing your space  
To do some navigating  
I'll be here patiently waiting  
To see what you find

'Cause even the stars they burn  
Some even fall to the earth  
We've got a lot to learn  
God knows we're worth it  
No, I won't give up

I don't wanna be someone who walks away so easily*
I'm here to stay and make the difference that I can make
Our differences they do a lot to teach us how to use
The tools and gifts we got, yeah, we got a lot at stake
And in the end, you're still my friend at least we did intend
For us to work we didn't break, we didn't burn
We had to learn how to bend without the world caving in
I had to learn what I've got, and what I'm not, and who I am

I won't give up on us
Even if the skies get rough
I'm giving you all my love
I'm still looking up, I'm still looking up.

Well, I won't give up on us (no I'm not giving up)
God knows I'm tough enough (I am tough, I am loved)
We've got a lot to learn (we're alive, we are loved)
God knows we're worth it (and we're worth it)

I won't give up on us
Even if the skies get rough
I'm giving you all my love
I'm still looking up

When I did look up, Steve's hand had been taken by Bucky's, who was glassy eyed. His eyes met mine as he said, "I'll stay."

"You shouldn't feel pressured by us," I argued.

"I don't. The muscle memory, of having you close? It's more than that. I feel... lighter in your presence. Like I know I'm supposed to be here. Being close to you," He said adjusting in his seat embarrassed.

"Did they ever let you have a release?" I asked softly, knowing why he shifted his leg.

"No," He mumbled ducking his head at my question.

"Nothing has to happen until you are ready," Steve addressed the pink elephant in the room, "We wouldn't want to pressure you like that."

"But you'll still... you're married and you can..."

"Like I said the other day, I'm not supposed to be intimate since I'm technically on bedrest. And after the baby is born, it's recommended to wait 6 weeks to give your body a rest. We can talk about it closer to that time, alright? Only if you are feeling up to it. And if you and Steve, before then, I won't be jealous. Just like we were during the war, any time we get with all of us or just another person, wasn't a bad thing."

"Didn't you call it 'boys time'?" He smirked.

"More for when the Commandos all got together, but something like that. More, if you and Steve wanted to be intimate without me one day in the future, I'd understand and enthusiastically approve. Rather than throw you in the deep end, just get your feet wet," I smiled as Bucky chuckled. Steve put the guitar away, before I saw the time.

"It's late."
"Elle, if you want to sleep, I can stay up with Buck, until he's ready himself to sleep," Steve said, giving Bucky's hand a squeeze.

"Sure. The other agents will start arriving here in the morning around 9ish. HERMES is the bases AI, and he can direct you anywhere you need to go. Just ask aloud in your room or a hallway. There is a room down the hall from us that's made up. Second to last door, beside Brock's room. Ours is the other end."

"He really never was Hydra?" Bucky asked, still unsure of his former handler.

"Never. He played the part well, but he has always been loyal to me, to SHIELD," I assured him, "And as soon as he found out about you, he alerted me right away. He, like the rest of the world, believed you to be my best friend, besides Peggy. He didn't want me thinking you were dead. And we knew he would be able to bring you in if we didn't get to you after the Helicarriers went down."

"So, you trust him?" He asked, and I nodded, "With my life, with our families. But you need to trust him for yourself, not because we do."

"I'd kiss you goodnight, but that'd have to be something you'd be okay with. Maybe once you're feeling ready," I smiled, as I stood up. He nodded, looking almost sad. I watched him a moment more, before forgetting my own words, leaning down to kiss his cheek softly.

"Good night Bucky."

"Goodnight... Beth," He breathed when I pulled back.

"I'd like to introduce you to a few people at breakfast, before the other agents get here. If that's alright with you. You can say no, or change your mind in the morning." I spoke softly as I leaned down to kiss Steve good night. Bucky nodded, "Can't avoid everyone forever."

I fell asleep that night, still thinking of his confused blush at my gesture, and how his stubble tickled my lips.
I woke to Steve getting up for his run. I’d convinced him to wait a few days before going back to the National Mall for a run. I think he wanted to catch up with Sam, and I asked him to say hi for me and offer him a job. I pulled myself up, putting on my own running capris and a snug t-shirt, before walking down to the gym. Daisy, Mel, Phil, and Brock were already up, waving to me in greeting as I walked in. I picked a treadmill as I said, "So, before everyone gets here around 9am, I want to introduce you to Bucky.”

"Is that a good sign, that he's ready to meet us?" Daisy asked the room, and Mel replied, "It is if he agreed to it. Did Andrew suggest it?"

"No, but he didn't discourage it. Actually he doesn't know, so I'm going off book on this one," I smiled, setting a brisk walking pace.

"You're gonna have the book thrown at you later," Mel chuckled.

"How did he seem yesterday?" Phil asked. I hummed and hawed, "He seemed okay. We had a long talk in my office after my addressment. He's remembering things, but others, like the trust he once had in us, might take time. He's much like Zeus was."

"How was that?" Daisy asked, going to greet the pitbull as he laid on the mat, "Good boy Zeusy. Who's a good boy?"

"Much like any victim of abuse would be. Hesitant to believe someone was showing them affection, worried it might be a trap. Zeus took a month to convince I wasn't going to hit him, or command him to do something he didn't want to do, like hurt someone. He was always worried when Nat or Clint came over."

"Bit my ass too," Clint said coming in, looking like he had already been working out on the range.

"Well, you did provoke him by shooting me with the nerf gun," I smirked, making Mel laugh loudly, "Only you Clint."

"She wouldn't let me search for the peaches."

"Are they here?" Daisy asked seriously.

"Seriously, you two have an addiction," I sighed.

"It's your fault," Clint accused me, "They are too delicious for their own good."
"How am I the last one?" Trip asked, as he walked in, noticing us.

"Oh, you've gotta be quicker than that Triplett," Brock smirked as he continued his lateral pulls.

"I got lost," He shrugged, setting his waterbottle down to stretch.

"There is an AI, and you got lost?" Daisy teased.

"I don't rely on tech, cousin," He sassed back, making her laugh.

"Wow, never thought about having cousins. I guess I have a lot then, through you Grams."

"That you do. All in all... roughly 100?"

"102," Phil chimed in from his own treadmill.

"Math was never my strong suit," I shrugged.

"And yet every year, you buy just enough Christmas presents. How do you do that if you can't remember the number?" Phil teased.

"Phil," I asked, getting his attention as I walked, "How would you like KP for a month?"

He blanched and I smirked, "Don't back talk your mother."

Daisy and Clint were sniggering by the mats as Daisy stretched, when rip spoke up again.

"So, what's the story behind this AI? I know Stark has one but why did this base need it?"

"Well, because I wasn't always here. Having a computer monitor defences and on top of things made more sense when I was in New York. I've only had him maybe... 5 years. Around the time Rumlow started undercover. Helped having an eye in the sky we could trust."

"Did Tony let you pick the voice or did he just make that one?" Trip questioned.

"Ah, he didn't 'make' it per say. We used several recordings to give HERMES a vocabulary. Some were made by JARVIS to sound like the reco."

"So, how much do you like Firefly?" Daisy teased, and I rolled my eyes.

"It was honestly not even a deciding factor. Sort of. I just liked his voice!"

"Nathan Fillion is quite handsome," Daisy smiled.

"Yeah, but it's more his charisma."

A familiar head of red hair walked in, "Well, this is a weird training session. Talking about HERMES voice inspiration."

"Not really training, more gabbing," Mel smiled, coming over to hug Nat. Phil stopped his own machine, to walk up to them as they released each other.

"Rogers," Nat teased, making Phil smile as she pulled him in for a hug.

"Is it weird to hug a dead man?" He teased.

"You aren't the first 'dead man' I've hugged," She smirked, "But I'm glad you're here. Your mother
got a little frantic after we lost you. I was surprised when she didn't want to slap the cuffs on Loki herself."

"If I had gone up with you guys to capture Loki at the end, he would have been dead. Alien drug revival or not," I pointed out.

"Eh, I would have looked the other way," She smiled, before introducing herself to Daisy, "Hi, I'm Natasha. It's nice to finally meet you Daisy, officially."

"You as well, Agent Romanoff."

"As your mother knows she won't be as objective as you need, and your Grandmother is technically on Mat leave," Nat said with a pointed look, to which I rolled my eyes, "She's asked me to take over your training."

"Holy shit, are you serious?" Daisy asked, looking back and forth between Nat and I.

"Oh she is very serious. Natasha here knows a few techniques that will be perfect for you, for PT and spycraft. If you are still up for it, Agent Rogers?" I smiled in teasing.

"Yes, I am very much up to the challenge," Daisy nodded, "When do we start?"

"Right now," Nat smirked, moving to attack her. I turned off my machine and nodded to the group, "Well, my fifteen minutes is up."

"You think throwing her in the deep end is a good idea?" Brock asked, seeing Daisy almost struggling to keep up with Nat's attacks.

"Yes. It's how she learns. She gets things pretty quick, you just have to challenge her."

"Definitely a Rogers," Mel teased, squaring up with Phil. Brock called over to Trip, "Need a sparring partner?"

"I feel like you'll beat my ass sir, but I'm willing to give it a try."

"I will see you all in the kitchen in an hour," I smiled as I walked towards the door of the training room, as Jemma walked in.

"Good morning Colonel," She smiled.

"Morning Jemma. You better be there too."

"Mom, you making scones?" Phil asked, blocking a hit from Mel and countering it.

"Maybe tomorrow, already had today's menu set last night," I shrugged as I continued walking out, "But if I do make them, someone is grabbing groceries from the truck this afternoon!"

I left them to their workouts, heading back to our rooms to shower and dress for the day. I fluffed my curls today, pulling it back into a ponytail with some strays framing my face. I pulled on a white polka-dotted navy sundress, with a light grey cardigan, and slipped my feet into a cute pair of gold gladiator heels. As I quickly swiped on some make up, I asked HERMES, "Is Sergeant Barnes awake?"

"He is Ma'am."

I walked out, wondering when Steve would get back. Knocking softly on Bucky's door, I called out,
"Good morning Bucky. I just wondered if you wanted to walk down to the kitchen with me."

"If you want to back out of meeting the team, I understand. Don't feel you have to," I called, not getting any answer.

Silence again.

"HERMES can direct you if you decide to come," I said, hoping he would accept my offer, moving back down towards the lounge kitchen. I started my music up, humming along to the beat as I started on dough for the scones. Making my morning tea as the dough rested, I mentally counted how many people would be eating and how much food I should make. Shrugging, knowing it was always a better idea to have more food, I grabbed my pans and bowls, starting bacon and sausages and mixing pancake batter together. I stared at the container of blueberries in the fridge, wondering if I was pushing too much and perhaps getting my own hopes up. But I shook my head and added them anyway, keeping a bowl aside for fruit salad.

"Mmm, smells good," Steve's voice appeared beside my ear, and I laughed. He kissed my cheek as I prepared the fruit salad.

"How was it?"

"Looped Sam about... seven times today?" He laughed, grabbing an apple from the bowl as a snack, "He says hi back, and that he'll think about the job offer. Private security wasn't really his fall back, but he doesn't feel he'd do a good a job as an Avenger."

"Don't fill up yet. And if I didn't think he was good enough, I wouldn't have offered. I only pick the best," I teased, popping a grape into my mouth.

"You're making enough for an army," Steve teased.

"Yeah, well, blame my metabolism. And our family's. Man, do we eat a lot. I'd rather have leftovers and this is going to end once the other agents show up. The Cafeteria will be a priority to set up. Or everyone cooks for themselves."

"Couldn't they just go home for their meals?"

"Yes, but Olympus is special. We can't be letting too many people come and go that Hydra knows are SHIELD. It's why people have small kitchens in their rooms. We'll just be ordering a lot of food."

"Have you seen him this morning?" I asked, worried.

"I let him know I was going for a run. But he looked like he didn't sleep much."

"HERMES?" I asked the ceiling.

"Yes Ma'am?"

"Please alert us if Sergeant Barnes experiences any night terrors or if he is in distress during the night."

"Yes Ma'am," The AI obeyed. I sighed, going back to cutting the fruit. Steve held me from behind and kissed the back of my head, "We'll get there."

"I can't be impatient. It's not fair to him," I spoke softly, holding back my tears, "He's going through
so much. I just wish...

"That he could tell us. I know, I do too. One day he will. Last night was pretty big, maybe he's just feeling vulnerable," Steve offered, making me sigh and nod.

"You're right. He'll tell us when he's ready. It's one thing to hear it from Brock or to read it on his file. But we'll know he trusts us when he can tell us what he did. What he was forced to do."

"Does he know about-" Steve stopped, looking to be wording his thoughts carefully in his head, "Howard and Maria."

"Yes, he remembered, and we spoke about it before you came back from the hospital. I forgave him, even though it wasn't his fault. I want him at ease, not on edge all the time. It breaks my heart to see him so unsure of himself," I sobbed.

"Was Zeus like that?" Steve asked as the dog lifted his head from his bed.

"Yes, but I'm not comparing Bucky to a dog. That's degrading," I sighed.

"He was abused by people who trained him, who told him to kill and fight. It's hard not to draw that parallel."

"Yeah, I guess. You should go shower," I re-directed the conversation, "Everyone will be arriving soon."

Steve sighed and nodded, before looking up slightly.

"HERMES, play something happy for the Colonel."

"I know her collection of assorted movie soundtracks always put her in a jovial mood. Particularly Disney, with a concentration on recent releases of the last five years. Her Punk collection is the more favored choice though, for mornings. She tends to dance."

"Alright, go ahead HERMES. Put it all on shuffle," I smiled softly at Steve. He kissed me once more and said, "I'll bring him down if he's willing."

"Go shower!" I laughed, pushing him away, before I washed my hands. I was enjoying the Disney music, a change from the melancholy tunes I had been listening to earlier. I danced around the kitchen as I worked, singing along to some Paramore when I noticed something in my peripheral vision.

"Oh!" I jumped, seeing Bucky in the doorway, before smiling at him as I addressed my AI, "HERMES, cut the music."

"Yes Ma'am. Shall I tell the group in the training rooms to prepare themselves for breakfast?"

"If they don't leave in the next five minutes, yes. Thank you HERMES," I said, before addressing Bucky, "You scared me a bit."

"Sorry," He spoke softly, looking around the room.

"It's hard to sneak up on me, so A+ for stealth. You don't have to stand in the doorway. Would you like something before everyone gets here?" I asked, moving to get him a glass of water. He sat down on a bar stool, accepting the glass of water across the island counter.

"Thank you," He nodded, taking a drink, "Are there more bars?"
"Yes, but I'd like to see if you could maybe eat some real food. Maybe some toast?" I offered, grabbing two cartons of eggs from the fridge.

"Okay."

"Did you want to try something on it?" I asked, "We've got peanut butter, honey, some different jams and jellies, brown sugar and cinnamon... What sounds appealing?"

"What kind of jams?" He asked, and I pulled out a couple from the fridge.

"Spiced peach jelly, strawberry rhubarb, plum, blackberry and raspberry jam. I went a little crazy this year with the variety."

"Maybe... the peach?" He asked unsure.

"It's a crowd favorite," I nodded, putting four slices of bread into the dual toaster, "Try a bit, see if you like it."

I handed him a spoon and opened the jar. He took a small scoop, lifting it to his nose first before carefully tasting it. His face was thoughtful for a second, softening.

"That's... I don't remember the last time I had anything that sweet."

"Maybe we'll just give you a little bit. Don't want you to get an upset stomach," I smiled, as he nodded, "It's good though, really good."

"Well, maybe I'll have another addict of my spiced peaches. I'll show you where I hide them. If I don't, Daisy and Clint would be scarfing them down in one sitting," I chuckled, as the toaster popped.

I hummed as I spread the jelly over his toast, after buttering it, all in plain view. I could tell he appreciated it, unsure if what I was feeding him was poisoned or drugged. As I slid the plate over, he took a bite, as I moved to start the pancakes. I heard a small moan emit from his mouth and I tried not to imagine how deprived he had been of simple joys while he was with Hydra. Food, human contact that wasn't torture, being sung to, or an orgasm for crying out loud. But then again, Hydra wasn't known for their compassion.

I continued to move the pancakes over to a plate, popping them into a warming drawer, and glancing back at him. He was watching me work over the flat top.

"You used to cook for us," He said slowly, and I nodded, "You always said you burned water, and Steve wasn't much better."

"I remember blueberry pancakes," He whispered, "And stealing some from a bowl."

"I smacked your hand with my spoon but you were determined," I chuckled, smiling at the fond memory. It was bittersweet memory now, and with having him back, it didn't hurt to think of anymore.

"We were leaving in a few days... To capture someone... Zola?" He asked, making me nod.

"Buck, there you are," Steve's voice said from the doorway. I smiled over at him, "Feel better? Less cabin fever?"

"I will once I have some actual food. Where is everyone?" He asked, confused as I started the eggs.
"I'm hoping they are on their way," I said, flipping one last pancake onto the plate in the warming drawer.

"Did you like your toast?" Steve asked Bucky, pouring himself a cup of coffee.

"Yeah, it was good."

"Uh oh, just good? I think you are losing your touch Elle," Steve smiled at me.

"It's toast, not an authentic Greek dinner. Hush up Rogers, or you aren't getting fed," I stuck my tongue out at him teasingly.

"She always this snarky?" Bucky said, giving us a small smile.

"It's usually worse. She is a Stark after all," Steve smirked as I chased him away by swatting his backside with a wooden spoon. He laughed rubbing his bottom lightly.

"Sit down and stay out of my kitchen," I pointed to the bar stool beside Bucky.

"Fine by me," Steve smiled as he looked up, "Morning Daisy, Brock."

"Morning Gramps," She smiled, as they slowly came into view. Brock nodded to me again, seeing how relaxed Bucky seemed compared to a week ago.

"Morning Cap," Brock smiled, grabbing his own cup of coffee. Daisy stopped in front of Bucky, giving a small wave, "Hi, I'm Daisy."

"This is Phil's daughter," Steve introduced them as Bucky got off his stool to face her.

"Hi," He responded, unsure of what else to say. Brock was watching with me, seeing how he reacted to a new face.

"Um, so, one day, I'd like a hug. I'm not demanding it now, just want to give you time to decide when. When you're ready," She babbled nervously, "I didn't grow up with affection, mainly because Hydra kidnapped me. But when Grams found me, I figured out how much I liked being hugged and how much I missed that affection. Well, can't really miss something you never had... What I'm saying is, anytime you might want a hug, I'm more than willing to give."

"Deep breath, Sweet girl," I reminded her softly, and she followed my instruction. Bucky looked at her and asked, "When did they take you?"

"I was around five months old, right Grams?" She asked me for confirmation.

"Yes. We found her last August. She'd been in an orphanage and foster care her whole life, not with Hydra," I clarified for him as I watched Phil and Melinda came down the hallway. Phil saw Bucky and stopped briefly. Bucky looked nervous as Phil entered, still looking at him.

"Morning Dad," He smiled softly to Steve before looking at Bucky, "Hi Dad."

"Morning son," Steve said as I slowly pulled the prepared food out to set the table.

"You're Phil," Bucky said awkwardly.

"Yes. It's nice to meet you," Phil replied, sensing he wouldn't get much more.

"Yeah, uh, you too," Bucky said, nodding. Bucky looked down at his hand and offered it to Phil.
Phil smiled and shook it once, "Has Mom fed you?"

"A little bit, but… I'm not sure if my body will handle any of this," Bucky answered, noticing the spread on the table.

"I'm Melinda," She spoke up when Bucky looked back at her, "I'm Phil's wife."

"Hi," He nodded to her.

"Why wouldn't you be able to eat it? Allergies? I thought the serums wiped those out?" Daisy asked, grabbing plates and cutlery for me.

"Hydra didn't give me food. Some food bar they came up with. I was never out of cryo long enough for more than a few meals."

"They made those to keep you on a leash. Suggestive drugs were put into them; kept you pliant to their commands. Nothing here is going to have anything in it. We'll eat it first so you can see," Brock said softly. Bucky nodded, satisfied with that as Jemma and Trip came in.

"Oh, hello," Jemma smiled brightly, "You must be James."

Bucky's nose crinkled slightly and I chuckled, "He doesn't like going by James. Never has."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I'm Jemma. Biochem and the team's medical advisor," She smiled, giving a small awkward wave as Natasha and Clint walked in, with Clint asking, "Where are my peaches Liz?"

"None today Clinton. You'll get fat," I teased, setting the last of the condiments on the table.

"But I want them," Clint muttered under his breath.

"There," I said, setting the spiced peach jelly on the table, "Next best thing."

"You were my target," Bucky said to Nat. She nodded, "That's three times you've shot me. It's a good thing Liz here likes you, or we'd be having words Barnes. My name is Natasha by the way, and this is Clint."

"Hey. We can trade brainwashing stories with Liz when you're better," He smirked, as I face palmed.

"You were brainwashed?" Bucky asked, and I sighed, "Yes. It was a total of a day and nothing like what you went through."

"Except the part where he made you spill SHIELD secrets," Phil said, like it was obviously pretty bad.

"And you attacked me," Steve added.

"And Tony had to break your neck to get you to stop," Nat chimed in as we sat down.

"Or how about that he wanted you to be his freaking Queen?" Clint said around a mouthful of toast.

"I'll admit, it sucked, but it wasn't 70 years worth," I said, gesturing for everyone to dig in. Bucky was quiet throughout the meal, taking small amounts of food to start. Jemma commented that it was a good way to retrain his body, and relearn the signals of when he was full.

Trip spoke up when he noticed Bucky's gaze on him, "My name is Trip. I'm Gabe's grandson."
"You look like him," Bucky observed.

"It's what Aunt Liz here tells me," He smiled.

"Aunt Liz?" He questioned, "Don't you hate nicknames?"

"I'm Aunt Liz or Elizabeth to all of the Commandos kids, grandkids and greats. I'm the unofficial matriarch, and as such, I can't complain when they use 'Liz'. It's all Tony ever bothered learning, so I put up with it anyway."

"But I can call you Beth, right?" He asked me quietly. I nodded, "Always. It's been 70 years since you last have, and I've missed it. When Steve called me Elle, the day he came out of the ice, I didn't receive it well. But now I can't imagine life with hearing it at least once a day."

"Didn't receive it well?" Bucky asked for clarification.

"Oh! I know this story, she marched right up to him, socked him in the jaw and then Sparta kicked him in the chest. Sent him sliding across the floor too," Daisy chuckled, before turning to Steve, "Sorry Gramps."

"It's alright. I can see the humor in it now," Steve smiled, "I deserved a beating then."

"Isn't that weird? A girl your old size beating you up?" Bucky smiled, before it dropped suddenly, as if embarrassed that his joke might not be appreciated. But the table started laughing as I snorted

"That is pretty funny, considering how I used to pick fights with guys my current size," Steve laughed.

"If I wasn't pregnant right now, I could still take you Rogers," I teased him, making the table laugh when he responded, "Yes, you could."
Chapter Thirty Seven

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! I'm extending the 'submission period' for the unofficial poll. I got one really cool suggestion to add to the list. BEST ('B'ucky, 'E'elizabeth and 'St'eve) was submitted here on AO3. The others are still, StuckyGoddess, StuckyBeth, Stabesty or CaptainAthenaWinter. Let me know, but for now, enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

After breakfast, I showed Jemma to her new labs, and Daisy already knew where she would be set up, already running Face Trace programs on multiple Hydra agents that had not gone down with the Triskelion.

I got a call about the President wanting to meet around lunchtime, so I sent Steve with Brock to go handpick a new STRIKE team, to keep him from finding out until I was gone. For now, it was Steve, Brock, Nat and Clint, who was staying for another week and then heading home to see his family.

I was waiting for the last of the Quinjets to touch down in the hangar, before sending Steve off. He kissed my cheek goodbye, jogging to catch up with Brock. They were taking my Quinjet to the HUB and the Playground, and would return around 2pm, with a good idea of who should be recruited. The agents that disembarked the Quinjets looked over at me confused, walking over to stand in a rough formation.

"Good morning, and welcome to orientation. We are starting over. And with that, regardless of what department you were previously stationed in, it means ensuring we are stronger than the enemy. Depending on your shifts, you'll be training hard before your start times. All departments will be certified in weapons, as I know many in the Science's were not prepared for a fire fight. If I hear of any complaining, I will personally build the Absentee Father, by hand, adding modifications that will make you regret complaining about sparing, weight training, using the gun range and paintball course, or using a treadmill," I sassed, "Cause a paintball course is practically a luxury for this base. And you will get used to carrying a weapon at all times. No one will be left defenseless."

"There are rules to this particular base. Nobody leaves unless on a Quinjet or by authorized use of a Photostatic veil. Hydra knows you, they know your families' identities, and they won't hesitate to hunt you down if they think you are a threat. So, if you receive a threat, asking you to come forward in exchange for your family and friends outside of SHIELD, you come directly to me, and I will do everything humanly and inhumanly possible to get them to safety. Understood?"

"Yes Colonel," A few of them said, while the rest nodded.

"This base is primarily run by an AI, HERMES. It requires the lanyards you each received after your session in the Chair to access. Do not lose your lanyard, or you will be explaining yourself to the Koenig's. Trust me when I say they are so beyond 'by the book', that you will have to complete the Chair again for a replacement. Your free time is your own. Use of the Internet is to be used with caution. While our tech keeps us invisible to Hydra, use of social media will help them locate us very quickly. No selfies with Quinjets," I joked, seeing some of them chuckle.
"A delivery truck should be arriving here soon with a preliminary amount of food and general supplies for the next two days. Only take what you need, and we will be getting the cafeteria set up quickly. Each room has its own small kitchen, with basic appliances. If you would like a toaster or a microwave, you submit a requisition to the QM. You will have a roommate, but you will not have to share a room, only a bathroom and the kitchen. You'll see what I mean later."

"There are twelve floors, ten above ground, and the remaining two sub-basements. Level One is strictly training rooms and the cafeteria. Medical is on Level Two, and the Science labs on Level Three. Levels Four to Six are offices and conference rooms for debriefings, Communications and Operations. Levels Seven to Ten are accommodations. Level Ten however is reserved and off limits without express permission of a resident of that floor. You will be required to swipe your lanyard anyway, so don't try it."

"Sub Basement Level One is a holding floor for those bound for the FRIDGE or government lockup. Sub Basement Level Two is a weapons range. There are lounges on each accommodation floor, with larger kitchens, video game consoles and tech. Use them responsibly and please be considerate of others, who would like to enjoy those things instead of cleaning up after you."

"You aren't my private army, you are not toy soldiers. You are real people, with very real lives. I have never asked my men to sacrifice more than I was willing to myself. All I want is to keep you safe, and to keep the world safe while we are at it. Now, are there any questions?" I asked, waiting a moment while everyone digested what I had just said. A hand raised and I smiled in the agent's direction.

"Are you really expecting Colonel?" She asked, and I nodded, giving a small side view of my belly, "I am. If it's not obvious by the beach ball I swallowed."

That got a chuckle out of the crowd, breaking the tense atmosphere.

"Colonel?" A voice asked, and I saw Sharon's hand when I turned toward the voice, "Have we determined how many of ours are still waiting for rescue?"

"Roughly 200. One team will be going to assess the Sandbox and begin tracking down any escaped prisoners. As soon as your bags are in your room, you head out in teams to pick them up and deliver them to the Koenig's at the Playground and Providence for questioning. Just protocol," I held up my hands, as she nodded.

"You were mentioning our families. Should we be concerned they might be threatened?" Another asked.

"I would like to say that it would never happen, but that is a 'perfect world' situation. This is our real world, with a very real threat. Hydra is fractured, trying to stabilize themselves and when people don't feel secure, they can resort to drastic measures to gain their footing again."

"Ma'am, will our… will our fallen be given proper recognition? My friend, my partner…" One man asked, "He drew enemy fire to help the rest of my team escape at the HUB."

"Our fallen will be given a proper memorial. It is something I will be speaking to the President about today. And the Wall's of Valor still stands at most of our recaptured bases and academies. They will be added, I promise, if not given a separate memorial marker."

"Yes?" I said, seeing a young girl, probably one of the relocated academy students.

"I just want to say, thank you, for sending those Agents," She spoke softly.
"I don't leave anyone behind," I answered honestly.

"Anymore questions?" I asked after a moment of silence. When no one called out, or raised their hands I said, "Alright then. I have Agent Rogers and Agent Triplett over there, ready to give you your room assignment and tell you where you'll pick up your first week's schedule. HERMES will alert you when the food truck arrives and again, and take only what you'll need. I can always order more," I reminded them, checking my watch, "You've got 30 minutes before the food arrives and immediately after that you'll be designated to teams for rescue. Dismissed."

"Colonel Rogers," Sharon's voice called over the murmuring of the crowd, who were walking over to Daisy and Trip for their room assignments.

"Agent 13," I smiled, "What can I help you with?"

"You could start by please telling me whether it's a girl or a boy?" She whispered with a smile.

"A girl," I beamed, "We are excited, but trying to keep it down. A lot of people just went through a lot of trauma they weren't prepared for."

"Damn straight. Not upset, but why wasn't I brought in?" She asked, confused.

"Because we needed everything to be genuine for Hydra. Everyone's reactions, they had already predicted them, and I didn't want to tip them off more. They know you are a Carter, and I wouldn't give them anymore reason to take you out. I was trying to protect you."

"Thank you Aunt Liz. But next time, I want in."

"I know. I'm counting on you Share-bear," I teased and she groaned quietly, "Rumlow still had a moment to tease me about that, thank you very much."

"Well, I hope a promotion to Communications Department Head of this base might change your mind about hating me," I said as we walked.

"Are you serious?" She asked as she stopped in her tracks.

"I am. You get a secretary and everything," I smiled back.

"I accept, enthusiastically."

"Perfect. Don't bother going over for your room assignment. I have you across the hallway from Brock on the 10th floor."

"Are you guys going back to get stuff from the apartment? I need to grab a few things," She asked.

"I might send Brock and Steve tomorrow. You can catch a ride if you aren't still picking up our agents abroad."

"I may still need to speak to Daisy, so I will leave you here," She said, giving me a salute. I chuckled, "At ease soldier. Peggy will be so proud of you- Shit! I have to go see her after I see the President."

"Oh, good luck with that. Seriously, her temper increased since her Alzheimer's started, haven't you noticed?"

"Oh yes, I did. And I'm not looking forward to that."
President Ellis greeted me as I walked in to his office, where several members of the government were present.

"Colonel," He smiled to me, shaking my hand.

"Mr. President," I returned the smile, as he introduced me to the room; George Rider, Kevin Donaldson, and Jackson Decker. The Director of the CIA, FBI and Homeland respectively. Along with General Barker of the Army and Admiral Franklin of the Navy.

"Now, we called you here to discuss, privately, how things are going to proceed," He started, as I sat.

"With SHIELD still operating, we hope there is a more fool-proof vetting process," The Director of the CIA piped in.

"There is. A lie detector chair that measures 96 different variables, including galvanic skin response, oxygen consumption, pupil dilation, micro expressions biofeedback, brain waves, voice biometrics, etc."

"What?" I asked, noticing the looks on their faces, "Too much?"

"That's… very thorough."

"Well, it was designed to be something even Agent Romanoff couldn't beat."

"Did she?"

"No. I did however, but I've had more years than most to hone my skills."

"Can we borrow it?" Jackson asked, making the rest of us chuckle.

"Yes. I'd like to ask that you put your own people through it. It's one thing for them to have people in SHIELD and the government, but Rumlow tells me that they are even in senior positions of the army, navy, air force. It's very plausible that they are in your own agencies."

"Alright," Matthew said, directing the conversation back, "Where are we with tracking them?"

"Some hideouts were easy to find, other bases are in more dense areas, more likely to be civilian casualties if we storm the place," General Barker supplied.

"I have a lead on one in Chicago, but I'd like permission to implement one of my own undercover," I asked, "See what their security is like from the inside to determine how to attack and capture."

"I see no problem with that," George said, "But until things have settled down, we'd like to be apprised of operations, costs, overseas work and such."

"That's fair. I assume our funding will be monitored this way?"

"Just to ensure its being used for what you say it is," Matthew assured calmly.

"We had syphoned most of the money out of the accounts before everything went down. Right before they could do the same. I have a record of the transfer to the new account, and we can transfer that back to the account you set up for us."

"You are being quite… reasonable Colonel," Kevin commented, suspiciously.
"I'd rather we didn't get off on a bad foot. I may have given Senate the impression, but it was more for Hydra that I said those things. My confidence has always been in this government and how it conducts itself. I believed in what I fought for during the War, democracy and freedom. Freedom sometimes means following the rules of democracy, not running wild and putting other people at risk. We'll earn back your trust, even if it takes ten to twenty years."

"Elizabeth, thank you," Matthew said seriously, "I'm glad you took up the mantle."

"Director Carter and Director Fury are tough acts to follow, but I'm going to do my best. Now, I'd like to discuss proper memorials for our fallen. We can determine who was Hydra and true SHIELD, but my people want to honor their colleagues that gave their lives that day."

"As they were federal agents, I assume Arlington," George asked, and I shrugged, "I believe their families should be given the choice of where they are interred. My only request is a memorial for my people. Nothing quite as public as Memorial Day, or as extravagant. They deserved to be honored, not made a spectacle out of."

"Agreed. I would like to mention them come Memorial Day though. We could arrange for a candlelight vigil for the public, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Your people could have their own, to make it more personal," Matthew suggested.

"They'd like that. Once we secure the Academies, I'll arrange for our own."

"How secure is the FRIDGE?" Matthew asked.

"Not very at the moment. I only got a certain amount of the very dangerous items from it before I had to go off the grid. Hydra swept it clean, but I'm sure we can get it set up again, though not for storage. Strictly."

"So, when do you think you'll be able to get it secure?" George asked, "Because Gitmo is quite full now."

"I can make that priority one, once we've rescued and interrogated our overseas agents," I nodded, "Within the week."

"Sounds reasonable."

"What facilities are secure?"

"The HUB, Providence, the Playground and Olympus."

"Those three aren't listed on your previous list of facilities," Kevin said, looking over a paper.

"They were secret bases. Providence was Director Fury's, the Playground, Director Carter's and Olympus is mine. I've had it since the late 60's, but had it updated early 2000's, roughly 2003 I believe."

"Will we be able to see these facilities?"

"Talbot had previously secured the Playground last week, but after a short phone call, he released it back to us with the exception that his people oversaw us until the government gave us back full control. He withdrew his men this morning after your call Mr. President. Providence, the Playground and Olympus will remain secret to those outside of SHIELD and the government, but we are more than able to give you tours of the facilities and a run down on how they operate."
"Any other points we missed?" Matthew asked the group.

"I have one. I have information on your replacement candidate for Secretary of State. Please do not pick Ross," I pleaded, giving over my evidence against him. Kevin took it first, reading it in shock, "Is this true?"

"Every word of it. I actually recruited one of his men to SHIELD and he gave me the evidence. Ross distanced himself from Banner because he couldn't control the Hulk. He has lied several times to the government and yourself General Barker," I said as the evidence was passed to him. He read it carefully, nodding with pursed lips.

"Will you seize the RAFT?" He asked, and I sighed, "Only with the permission of the agencies. Or better yet, keep SHIELD out of it. Conflict of interest as Dr. Banner/Hulk is part of the Avengers Initiative."

"Is that where your interests lie? Keeping him on your side?" Admiral Franklin asked.

"No, my interest is in keeping a man like this out of power, where he could do more damage than good. He'd do anything to get the Hulk back and put him down. He sees him as a threat, and we see him as an ally. After New York, it would be hard to picture anything else. Dr. Banner has control over the Hulk and his transformations, unless provoked. I'd rather not give Ross a chance to provoke him. If we protect Dr. Banner from him, he'd try to take us down as well. This is a man that does not like to hear the word 'No', even going so far as threatening me for blood samples to help recreate the Super Soldier Serum."

"We're convinced," George spoke gently, after getting the nod from the rest of the group.

"Alright, he will be removed from our shortlist,"

"Thank you for the information Colonel. We'll deal with him," General Barker nodded.

"I think this is going to be the easiest transfer of leadership in the history of this government," Matthew teased, "Even with the mess in the Potomac."

"So, this Chair…" Jackson asked.

When I left the White House, I popped by to see Peggy, expecting her to be in the middle of an episode. I checked in with the head of security to ensure they had swept for bugs and to loan them a zapper to fry anything they found, or for regular sweeps.

"You absolute brat!" Peggy hollered when I appeared in her doorway, "Hydra? Pregnant? You disappear for months and didn't think to mention that? This is like Steve all over again. I had to learn about it from the bloody news report!"

"Well, to be fair, you didn't listen to my warning about Zola. Claimed my judgment on the matter of him was clouded by grief," I challenged back. She deflated against her pillow and huffed.

"I guess that was a low blow. You were hurting. But why wouldn't you speak up again?" She asked as I came to sit beside her.

"Because I wanted proof. Maybe if I had found it sooner, Howard might still have lived to be 90 himself."

"Eliza," Peggy crooned, taking my hand, "I am so sorry. If I had suspected for even a second-"
"It's okay. I knew I was right, and that was enough."

"You bore all of this, all these secrets alone."

"Not alone. Well, up until a year ago, I was alone save for my inside man. Nick was the one to approach me that he had a bad feeling, and Steve happened to be there when I laid my cards out."

"Oh dear, how did he take that?" Peggy sassed. I raised a brow at her, "Still not being fair to him either, are you?"

"No, I guess I'm not. He is a dramatic one though. But how did he take it?"

"Well, there wasn't yelling, like I assumed. It was a deadly low voice instead, but I just kept cracking jokes like I do in any uncomfortable situation."

"Typical you," she teased.

"And once I got it out, we came back to a discussion we had a few months earlier, of starting a family," I smiled as I laid a hand on my bump.

"My dear, you don't know how happy I am for you! I didn't see you pregnant with Phillip, or how you were as a mother, but I know you must have a natural instinct for it. I only hope I get to live long enough to meet this baby," She sniffled.

"You will," I smiled, "I promise."

She smiled a bit before asking, "Why start a family when you knew Hydra was still out there though?"

"Because I had waited long enough to actually live my life. I'd existed Peg, not really doing more than work, eat, sleep, and repeat. And I could never deny Steve something we both wanted. Something we had always talked about with Bucky. It was before we knew he was... even before we found out Hydra had him."

"I saw the news last night, after your Senate hearing. Barnes is alive?" Peggy asked softly and I looked back up at her, feeling tears roll down my cheeks, unable to hold back a sobbed, "Yes."

"You have either had a series of unfortunate events or a series of extremely lucky coincidences in your life. But this, everything has lead you back together," She smiled, "You have both of them back, after all these years."

"Almost," I smiled sadly, wiping my eyes.

"How bad was it?" She asked.

"Cryo freezing, shock torture, brainwashing... It's about as bad as inhumanely possible. He doesn't remember he can choose things for himself, or that he can refuse to do something he doesn't want to. They never gave him real food, just some weird ration bar formulated for his metabolism. He almost started crying this morning, having toast for the first time in we don't know how many years. I almost started crying!"

"Those bastards," She bit out, shaking her head, "I'd like to see them burn even further."

"They will. Rumlow was a wealth of information, and we've got good leads on their locations. Tony volunteered to help with some tech design and its stuff we know that couldn't have copied from
"How many did we lose?" She asked, and I wanted to smile at her use of 'we', like she hadn't been retired for over 20 years.

"537," I sighed.

"How many remain?" She asked, concerned.

"Around 2000," I estimated, "Rough count, as we are in the middle of rescuing undercover agents from abroad."

"And what is this going to set us back?" She asked.

"Over half our force was Hydra to begin with, but with Insight, we managed to take out half of theirs."

"Well, that's something," She smiled. I nodded, "It's going to even the playing field."

"Is there any word on the gender?" Peggy asked, smiling at the way I rubbed my bump.

"It's a girl," I answered, seeing her face light up.

"That is wonderful! I can't wait to meet her," She smiled, squeezing my hand.

"I can't wait either. I'd like to ask you something now, in case you mind…"

"What is it?" She asked.

"Steve and I were discussing names awhile back, but something I always wanted was to name my children after meaningful people in my life. Phil was named for Chester, and this little one is going to be named after my Mom, Sophia. But I wanted to use your name as a middle name, or even if I have another girl down the road."

"Peggy or Margaret?" She smiled.

"Either or. I just wondered if it was okay. My Mom isn't exactly here to say no, and-"

"Eliza, I would be honored. I may not make it to see another, but I am so touched that you would choose me."

"Are you kidding, you're the best friend a girl could have," I smiled through my tears. Her eyes seemed to go unfocused for a moment and I felt the shift as she asked, "Where is Steve taking you tonight? On this walk after the Public House?"

I took a deep breath, thinking back to the memory of Steve, Bucky's and mine first night together and what I had actually said to her. I knew I hadn't said anything more, so I started elaborating, "We are going around St. James Park. Hopefully we will be back before curfew."

"Those rowdy men will be in their cups by now. You watch yourself at the Public House," She warned and I smiled tightly thinking of my Commandos, "I will."

"Now, Howard told you to not break anyone's heart, but I think with this dress you'll break just the right amount. Give Captain Rogers my best. I think I'll get some rest. We have a big day tomorrow, planning and such."
"Don't wait up for me Peg. I love you," I smiled, leaning forward to kiss her cheek. She returned the gesture, laughing, "I love you too, daft girl. I haven't forgiven you for giving me a heart attack the other night. Jumping out of a bloody plane."

"I give your life adventure and excitement and you know it," I teased, getting up and saying, "Till tomorrow."

"Till tomorrow. Go knock them dead!" She called.

"I will," I winked at her, still smiling as I walked out of her door. As it closed, I couldn't help a few tears, steeling myself as I locked eyes with Melinda down the hall.

"Was it bad?" She asked as I dried my eyes lightly.

"It was okay. She just turned a minute ago," I sighed, as I caught Jeanette's eyes, "She's back during the War. A head's up."

"Thank you Colonel. And congratulations," She smiled at me.

"Thanks Jeanette. Have a good day. Sneak her something sweet later please," I asked as I started walking away from the nurse's station.

"I will, and you as well Colonel."

When we got outside, I took a deep breath, Mel a silent comfort by my side.

"Home?" She asked.

"Not Olympus yet. I need to drop in on someone. And then one more errand."

"Who?" Mel asked as we walked towards the car.
Chapter Thirty Eight

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers. Second chapter for today, enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

I heard him, as I walked towards the room Steve mentioned this morning. He sat with his chair turned around, straddling it as he asked another of the circle to share their story of grief and PTSD. I was silent at the doorway as a soldier spoke about losing his buddy, and his legs. Once he was finished, he looked up and noticed me, getting onto his prosthetic feet to salute me, the circle following when they realized who I was.

"At ease, please. I'd like to join you, if I'm welcome," I asked, seeing Sam's smile. He nodded, "We'd be honored Colonel."

"None of that here, please. Elizabeth," I asked the group, as one soldier brought a chair in for me.

"Thank you," I smiled at him, sitting down and huffing, "This is killer on the back."

"A super soldier baby? Sounds like it would be," Sam teased, making them laugh. I smiled, "We aren't sure if the babe will have our serum enhancements. But with how heavy Steve is, this kid will be solid."

"Damn straight, he's like a ton of bricks," Sam joked to the group. I could tell that my presence was appreciated, and Sam said, "Well, we have time for one more. Colonel, you up for it?"

"Wow, put on the spot," I laughed, "But yeah."

I cleared my throat and started, "Over my career, with the Army, with SHIELD, I'd never sought help. Not that I didn't need it, but because I couldn't trust anyone. My lack of trust turned into paranoia. I had weapons stashed all over my house and apartment. There were signal jammers set up, because I thought Hydra might be watching me."

"After Captain Rogers put the plane down, not that the Army or anyone but my brother knew this, I tried and failed to end my life over fifty times. Each time, I'd get up and walk away, feeling cursed to walk the earth, alone forever. Even that didn't seem as awful as some horrors I'd witnessed... and committed."

"What did change me, was a mission I had during the Korean War. My mission was to infiltrate a small camp with 20 of my men, where we'd subdue the enemy troops and gain access to their battle plans, gathering any intelligence and a look into their weaponry. What was supposed to be a small camp, turned out to have visiting soldiers from another unit."

"We surrounded them, but were soon outnumbered by the 50 soldiers in their camp. My men were shot down, and I was unable to save them. I watched the light leave the eyes of a man that looked like my husband, and I snapped When I returned to the air lift site with the last body of my men, I had their blood as well as every last North Korean soldier in that camp on my hands. Literally, and in my hair. I needed three showers to feel like I had scrubbed myself raw enough."
"I don't talk about it much, but I lost a little bit of what made me 'Lady Liberty'. The only thing I'd been able to do was shut out my emotions, get the mission done and feel something about it later. My emotions had made me a good soldier though. I can regrow skin and bones, but watching someone die changes you. And I let it change me so much that I lost the thing that made me human; emotional connection. Otherwise we are all just robots."

"What I'm saying is, I don't think I have to be ashamed of myself anymore, of the things I did in the name of peace. Some had it worse than me and have lead meaningful lives without seeking retribution. Vengeance isn't the right answer when we lose someone we care about. Anger isn't a healthy state to be in when we have lost something. And when I started connecting with my men and agents, I found something I had been denying myself; love."

"I pushed it away because I thought I was a monster for things I had done. Maybe I still am, but without it, I'd probably be worse than I was. They say it's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. I've lost a lot of good friends, but their memories and legacy give me the courage to get up everyday. They fought and died for something they believed in, and my legacy can be to tell their stories through my own life."

It was silent a moment as everyone nodded, before Sam smiled at me.

"Damn, I'm good," He joked, making the room laugh.

"Seriously, you've never sought help?" Sam asked me, "Because you just described the end result, acceptance. I've never seen someone go through all five stages of grief so fast."

"Well, I've had over 70 years to finally get it. I'm a little more stubborn than my husband, and he decided to be dramatic and not give me his coordinates," I smiled, as the group laughed again.

"That's what I want to get you to," He gestured to me, "You don't have to be perfect again; you don't even have to be who you were before. I want you to be okay with who you are now, and feel in your gut that you are better for knowing those you lost."

"Alright, that's all for this week. Have a good weekend guys," Sam said, letting them go. Most came over to introduce themselves, shake my hand and thank me for my share. It was touching to see the kind of people that came out the other side of a war, how they were able to talk about it, versus my generation who would tell you to bottle it up.

"Joshua Kent. Thank you Colonel," The soldier with the prosthetic legs, said genuinely.

"What did I say? I'm Elizabeth here. I'm a soldier, just like any of you," I emphasized, shaking his outstretched hand, "Thank you for your story Joshua."

"Thank you for listening. It's hard to get out, but if you can tell a room full of strangers, I can too."

"Again, I had 70 years to learn how to actually tell someone the whole story and my feelings. I think you'll do much better than I have," I encouraged.

"Thank you. Have a good day Col- Elizabeth," He nodded, catching his words when I gave him a look.

"You too Joshua."

When they had left, Sam shook his head and sighed, "I'm not getting rid of you Rogers', am I?"

"Yeah, you've got us for life when we decide you are worth it," I teased, sitting back down in a
chair. He sat across from me and said, "I already told Steve I'd think about your offer. I like what I do here, and I do miss being in the field."

"Yes, but that's only part of why I'm here. I actually want to know the reason you don't think you are Avengers material."

He nodded, "Okay, that's fair. I get that I helped you guys last week, and it's not a matter of risking my life or anything, I just don't see what I'd bring to the table. I'm a soldier, not a spy."

"Aerial support for one, tactical knowledge that three of our members do not have. Tony may be a genius, but he's a egotistical one that believes his plans of attack are better than people who have actually been in battles."

"Is that all?" He chuckled, "You could get the same thing from anyone in the Air Force."

"I'm more partial to the people who know loss and use that memory as their driving factor. They know compassion, they know pain, they think of others before themselves. Their focus is on civilians. And not many know how to handle those fancy wings like you do."

"Wouldn't Colonel Rhodes be a better fit? Less chance of his suit failing like mine did?"

"Yes, but I like your witty banter. And even Tony's tech isn't infalliable. So, personality, skill, psychologically sound, cool under pressure and battle wise? You check all my boxes Sam. So, why would SHIELD or the Avengers not check yours? What is holding you back?"

"I don't think I'm what you're looking for."

"I think you are. Look, I'm going to be out of commission for the team, and may not be able to join them if they are assembled again anytime soon. It's our latch ditch effort usually, but it's nice to know we have people if we need them," I shrugged, "But if you are serious about being an Agent, we'd be lucky to have you. I need good people I trust right now."

"You've known me a week," He smirked, and I nodded, "But in that week you've shown me all I need to know about you. First impressions say a lot about a person. You're loyal Sam, and loyalty is a trait I admire. Especially when it isn't easy to find these days. I know Steve could do with someone to watch his back on STRIKE, but again, that's up to you."

"I'll think about it. I really will, Colonel."

"Elizabeth," I teased, holding out a hand. He shook it, smiling, "Elizabeth."

"But you'll have to call me Colonel in front of other agents," I joked, "Wouldn't want them thinking they could do the same."

"Of course," He laughed. I made to leave, when he asked, "How is he?"

I turned back with a questioning glance, as he said, "Your boy, Barnes."

"He's better. Ish. He would like to apologize about your car by the way, when you see him again."

"Yeah, people ripping out the steering wheels through the windshield wasn't covered in my policy agreement," He deadpanned. I laughed, giving him a devious smile, "Well, you never know when a new car will come your way."

"Don't you even think about it," He smiled.
"Sorry, I can't hear you. My name is being called, down this hall," I spoke loudly as I walked out the door, "Bye Sam!"

I left quickly hearing his laugh follow me as I met up with Mel again. She gave a smile, "Now?"

"Almost. If we are lucky, Steve will think I haven't left base at all," I smiled deviously, hurrying my steps, only to hear his ringtone.

*America... FUCK YEAAAAH! Comin' to save the motherfucking day, yeah. America... FUCK YEAAAAH!*

"Busted," Mel smiled as we walked out.

"Oh hush," I breathed, answering the phone, "Hello Darling. I've been looking for you everywhere."

"Nice try. I've been back for an hour and HERMES told me you were out."

"Damn."

"Are you heading back soon?"

"Just need to stop by a car dealership and then we will be," I smiled as I got into the passenger seat of the SHIELD SUV. Mel gave me a look as Steve teased, "A new car? I didn't think that was a good idea until she was sixteen."

"No, it's for Sam," I laughed, "And I'm gonna ask them about fleet pricing. I might be able to wrangle some for SHIELD out of our current budget."

"Alright. Do you want me to pull something for dinner?"

"No, I already did. There is a roast in the oven waiting for three o'clock before it preheats."

"That sounds good. Anything you want prepped?"

"Don't you have agents to review for recruitment to STRIKE, Captain?" I teased.

"Yeah, it was just nice having a little bit of time off. And Bucky is still in with Dr. Garner."

"Okay, prep the potatoes. Leaving them in cold water will pull more starch out," I instructed, knowing he needed a distraction.

"Alright, I love you."

"Love you too. See you soon."

"See you soon."

After picking out a practical car, that seemed like something Sam might like, I had them deliver it to his house with a little note.

*Since your old one was collateral damage, I hope you might accept this one. Your loyalty is invaluable to us, but here's something that might sweeten the deal. JK, enjoy the new ride. You deserve it.*

I had signed it from 'The Rogers', but Sam would know anyways. Melinda and I grabbed a quick bite at a salad bar, before heading back. It was so weird to be out in public after months of hiding.
When I was pregnant with Phil, I had worn a wig and moved to a small town with less security surveillance until he was born. And then I freaked Howard out by coming home with a baby in my arms.

We drove into the garage, talking about how Mel had seen Daisy and Brock sneak off together after Cybertek.

"She's lucky Phil didn't notice," She said and I agreed, "Otherwise there would have been a battle royale."

"Do you think he's good enough for her?"

"I think he's good for her. No one is ever good enough, but he is better than most. Ah, and speaking of the devil," I smiled, as Brock was walking towards the garage.

"Where are you headed?" I asked.

"To get you. HERMES told em you were back. Fitz is up," He said, falling into step behind me.

"I was just about to relay the same information Colonel," HERMES said and I smiled.

"Alright, what's his condition HERMES?"

"Stable. He is quite confused by his surroundings and how Agent Simmons is, shall we say, smothering him."

"Agent Rogers tried to get her to give him some air, and Agent Romanoff is hovering at the door," Brock confirmed as we walked by a group of agents. I sighed, "Well, then, take us to Level Two."

"Yes Ma'am," HERMES replied as we got in the elevator.

"Running some errands?" Brock cheeked.

"Actually, paying bills," I laughed, "The big three want to watch over our finances for awhile, and I decided it's better not to fight them at this point. I just have money set aside for extravagant things. A savings account if you will."

"Level Two," HERMES announced as the doors opened.

"Please tell Captain Rogers I am back."

"Yes Ma'am."

I saw Natasha, making eye contact as she schooled her face. She didn't say anything, still leaning up against the opposite wall with a angled view into Fitz's room. I walked up to the door, opening it after a quick knock.

"May I come in?" I asked, peeking my head through.

"Colonel," Jemma smiled, "What a surprise. Isn't it Fitz?"

Daisy gave me a look as Fitz struggled to form words. He looked to be getting frustrated, so I asked, "Could you give me a few minutes with him?"

"Come on," Daisy agreed, pulling Jemma away from Fitz's side gently. Jemma floundered for an excuse to stay, but assured him, "I'll be back Fitz," as she was pulled out of the room. I made sure the
door was closed, before I sat down next to his bed. He was in full arm cast, a couple bumps and bruises, but not looking worse for wear. I, however, knew that his problems lied underneath.

"I would like to ask you a few questions Dr. Fitz. All I need are head nods for yes, and head shakes for no. Is that alright?"

He looked scared when I said questions but relaxed as he realized it was only yes or no questions. He nodded, blinking twice and taking a deep breath.

"Did you know I tried to drown myself once?" I asked. He shook his head and I smiled, "I made many attempts on my own life after the War. But drowning was one of the worst, so I can understand what you went through."

"Dr. Fine says you are likely to have some brain damage from the lack of oxygen. But that will only be temporary. Do you understand that?" I asked gently, to which he nodded.

"Did Jemma explain where we are?" Shake.

"Olympus is my secret base. Now, it's one of S.H.I.E.L.D's bases. We were able to salvage the HUB, Providence, and one other secret base, the Playground, in the aftermath. We have plans in place to retake the FRIDGE and secure it, along with the Sandbox and the Academies. I'd like you to head up the engineering department here, when you are better." He looked brighter at this, as I smiled.

"Until you are feeling better though, I've asked a good mechanic to come oversee things. We have gotten rid of levels however, so no more getting half the story," I smiled. His eyes drifted past me to the window. I looked behind me to see Natasha smiling at him, giving a little wave.

His heart rate monitor started climbing and I smiled as I turned back, "Do I need to send her away too?"

He shook his head, blushing a little.

"What you did in that Med Pod was very brave Fitz. And extremely quick thinking. You saved both of your lives, and figured out a way for us to find you. Is it something you regret, saving her life at the expense of your brain?" He frowned and shook his head vigorously.

"Then I hope you'll learn not to be harsh on yourself while you are healing, however long that takes."

He nodded bashfully as I said, "It's going to be a process, but I'm prepared to bring in a speech therapist for you, to make it easier. Does that sound like something you'd be up for?"

He shrugged slightly and I understood.

"When you feel ready, you can tell me. But until then," I said, pulling a tablet out of my bag, "I'd like you to use this to communicate. It's going to seem a little childish and beneath you to use sign cards to convey what you want and need, but you are going to own it."

He smiled a little, as I showed him the program. He typed out a small sentence, "You look very nice today," and flipped it around to hold up for Natasha. Nat smirked and winked at him. I caught a glimpse of the blush he gave her in return for the wink, and knew this was a good match. And I didn't even have to do anything!

"Alright. I'll leave you to rest. This is HERMES by the way."
"Good afternoon Dr. Fitz," The AI sounded from the tablet. Fitz looked up at me in question and I smiled, "Yes, that's Nathan Fillion's voice. My nephew knew I was a fan of Firefly. And Halo."

"All you have to do is press that button and he will request someone to come help you. I'll be asking Dr. Simmons to allow you some breathing room, so if you need help from the nurse, press the call button, and anything else, HERMES is your guy," I explained, as I stood. He seemed to just notice my belly, blinking in confusion up at me, as I smirked, "What did you think the veils were for?"

"Not that," He typed and I chuckled.

"It's alright. Agent Simmons knew, so if you want the full story, you can ask her. But if you want her in general, tell HERMES. She'll be upstairs in our bio labs. We've got all the toys you'll need when you are better."

"Thank you," He typed out, giving me a smile.

"Rest. It's the perfect way to heal your body. Daisy will-" His face screwed up in confusion, making me to stop. I laughed, "Right. Skye? Well, her real name is Daisy. She's my granddaughter. She can tell you the rest of her story, or Jemma can, because she heard it yesterday too."

"Daisy will bring you a survival pack. Or if you ask Agent Romanoff, she'd gladly find some things for you to pass the time in here. Books, music, relaxing things," I added, seeing him glance at her again.

"Would you like me to send her in?" I teased. He gave a little smirk and nodded. I gestured with my head for her to come in, and she didn't hesitate.

"Dr. Fitz," She smiled warmly. "I want to thank you for the upgraded Stingers you made me. They helped save my life the day of Hydra's reckoning."

He began typing, but she stilled his hand as I closed the door behind me, seeing her lean forward to kiss his cheek. He looked at me wide eyed as she began to pull away, flushing and giving her a wide smile. She sat back in the chair I just had occupied while I beckoned Dr. Simmons over.

"Agent Simmons, a word."

"Is everything alright Ma'am?" She asked, worried.

"Yes, I would however, like to ask you to leave Dr. Fitz's medical care to Dr. Fine unless he has asked you to step in. I am worried you will not be objective, as a concerned friend rather than medical professional."

"Of course, I understand," she said, deflating. I gave her a look continuing, "You have been invaluable to me this last year Jemma, and this isn't a punishment. Fitz appreciates your concern, but he is trying to come to terms with his prognosis as well. Give him some room. He will call for you when he needs someone in the room."

"Alright," She said, looking over through Fitz's window to see Natasha talking to him, and a smile gracing his face.

"I have a Fitz too. And not unlike him, she gets easily frustrated when she can't communicate easily. Sometimes she doesn't need someone to fix her, but to be there as she goes through a scary time. She will never be who she was, but I can be her rock and not treat her differently or with kid gloves. She really hates that."
"Understood. Thank you Colonel."

"And if Agent Romanoff would like to speak to him, do her and him a solid and vanish," I teased.

"I will. It's nice to see him smile," She said, a hint of jealousy in her gaze, back through the window to his room.

"You are still his best friend, Jemma. You knew you'd have to share him eventually. Just like he has to share you with Dr. Banner," I smiled, knowingly, as her cheeks flushed.

"I suppose so. It's just so odd, to see him like this. One of the last things he said to me in that pod, was how he didn't think he would get the future he wanted, but I should be given the chance with the one I want."

"What future was that?" I asked, as her head gestured back to Fitz's room.

"He really likes her. But didn't think he had a chance with her. I mean, she's the Black Widow, for heaven's sake. She obviously could get him to see he is wrong, if her advances are any indication. It's hard to tell if its genuine though."

"This is a side of Natasha I've never seen. If you knew her past, you'd know why this makes my heart soar, to see her allowing herself to even get close to him. This is new for her, and I think they'd be good together. She always had a soft spot for a Scottish accent," I smiled, thinking back to our movie nights.

"How awkward would it be if I gave her the shovel talk? Threaten the Black Widow and make gatherings with the Avengers tense?" She laughed.

"So you aren't denying you'd be around them more, due to a certain physicist," I teased, and she gave a smile, "No. Bruce is… so incredibly shy and reserved. But so handsome and sweet."

"So, you may have to make the first move if he is that shy. You know what, we could talk about this later. Dinner is at 6:30," I smiled, before asking her, "Do you like Yorkshire pudding?"

"What Brit in their right mind wouldn't?" She smiled.

"Good. See you then," I nodded, before walking back over to Melinda and Brock. Daisy suddenly announced, "I'm gonna go check the Satellite feeds and run a diagnostic check."

"Oh-kay," I said confused as she walked off quickly,"What was that about?"

"She a little embarrassed," Mel smiled.

"May here, just wanted us to be very careful about what PDA we show around the other agents," Brock explained.

"She probably doesn't want anyone thinking Daisy got her position because you're together, or through anything other than skill," I shrugged.

"No, I just want them to tone it down. What they do behind closed doors is their business, but this is an intelligence agency, not high school."

"Hmm, too true. That will be something for HR to decide, once it's up and running again," I teased Brock. He sighed, "No PDA. You have my word."

"It better not, or it would ruin your rep," I laughed as we made our way back to the elevators.
After I got a fair amount of work done, I checked the time, seeing several messages from teams picking up our abroad agents. Most were good, with one or two relaying that they were too late. I added the names to the list of our fallen. I was beginning to think we’d need a central epitaph, just one with everyone’s name, much like the 9/11 memorial. Tom called me in a panic asking if I had recently made a $36,000 purchase, and I laughed as I explained the situation. It was barely a blip on the map for my bank accounts though. When I went to sleep tonight there would still be 9 zeros following the first few.

When I first came into money, back after Howard started his company, I was still so careful when I spent it. Growing up on the Lower East Side with a mother who worked in a factory sewing shirtwaists and a father that sold fruit, Howard and I became resourceful. I learned to be frugal and save, making my dollars stretch and Howard learned how to lie to further himself. My conscience wouldn’t let me get tangled in those webs he wove, working a respectable job before the war broke out. But even while we had different ways of being successful, we still protected each other. He protected me from Joseph Manfredi’s lustful gaze, and I kept him above water.

So now with the large amount I had in the bank, I was taking care of my family. Extremely extended and non-related family, but family nonetheless.

After talking with Peggy today about Howard’s crash, it brought up a wave of grief that I masked into cool indifference as I left my office. I would often think of my brother, more out of guilt for not preventing his death. I couldn’t protect the person that mattered the most to me since birth. But I did avenge him.

I got into the lounge to see Bucky in deep concentration as he browsed the Internet with Steve.

"I could make an old joke, but it would apply to me as well," I teased them, stopping Steve’s explanation of not trusting Wikipedia for correct facts every time.

"Ha ha. And did you buy Sam a car?" Steve laughed.

"I'm not trying to butter him up or anything. I just wanted to replace his," I said, giving him a pointed look at Bucky and making a cut it out motion.

"I can see your reflection in the TV," Bucky said, and I sighed, "Sorry Sweetie. I didn't want him bringing it up."

"He saw the picture Sam sent me," He said, holding up his phone. The picture was of the car and
Sam's excited face along with a "WTH? I told her no!"

Steve's reply was, "She's a Stark, and she does what she wants. Enjoy it."

I snorted, "Damn straight, I do what I want."

"Food smells good by the way," Bucky said, and I smiled, "Thank you. It's got another hour-ish, but I'm gonna start a few things now."

"Did you want... help?" He asked, unsure.

"If you'd like to, maybe set the table?" I asked, pulling my apron on.

"I'll help," Steve offered when Bucky nodded. I noticed the way he would flex his arm subconsciously after setting out each plate, as I rolled out pie dough I had made this morning after breakfast. Draping the two round sheets I rolled out over pans, I trimmed the edges, humming to myself as I placed them in the oven to brown. I mixed a can of peaches with some flour, nutmeg, cinnamon and sugar, before I turned on the stove for the potatoes. Moving to mix the ingredients for the Yorkshire pudding, I saw Bucky watching me. I smiled, "What?"

"Nothing, you just... look happy."

"I am," I beamed back at him. He smiled shyly, moving to take water and wine glasses to the table in a few trips.

"Do you have any feeling in it?" I asked, watching him purposefully using his right arm for the glasses. He looked up at me and shrugged, "Not much. A few sensors for pressure."

"Are they connected to your nerves?" I asked, curious. He nodded, "Some extend towards my neck."

"That sounds... painful," Steve grimaced.

"It's not so bad, unless the arm shorts out," He shrugged, pulling his sleeve down from his forearm to his wrist.

"We can drop it, until you want to talk," Steve said, noticing the way Bucky covered up, as if in shame. He nodded, "Thanks."

I walked around the island, to gently touch his left shoulder. He almost recoiled at my touch, but I let my hand rest against him firmly.

"You don't need to feel ashamed of it. We've seen what it looks like, and we aren't afraid. I'm not telling you not to have a certain feeling about it, but I want you to know that it doesn't bother us or make us feel uncomfortable. We are all learning each other all over again. We just want to know more about you now. It is a part of you," I said, tracing my hand down it gently.

"All I've ever known with it is death and destruction. It not something to love."

"I think it is," Steve said, leaning against the couch so we didn't crowd him, "Because we love the man it's attached to."

"One day, you'll hold our daughter with it," I said hopefully, "And all she will know is the hand that helps her up, or holds her close when she's scared."

"You couldn't possibly want me near her," He said, backing up. I let him move, but gave him a
reassuring smile as I said, "Of course. We won't force you, but we trust you."

"I don't trust myself, even around you two. I don't think I could hurt you, but I don't know if my mind is my own yet. There are so many things that could set me off," He said, a look of heartbreak crossing his face as he looked back at me.

"Hey, one day at a time. You have plenty of time to decide for yourself," Steve smiled softly, "But Elle is right, we trust you. To know yourself and your limits. If your limit is that you don't hold her until you feel ready, that's alright."

"What if I'm never… ready?" He asked in a small voice.

"Then we cross that bridge when we come to it. We won't give up on you though. Like I said last night, not to get you back to who you were, but being comfortable enough with who you are now that you can live with yourself."

"Is there, anything you want from us, to help you right now?" Steve asked.

"I don't know. I'm so unsure of what my body needs, let alone what I even want."

"Okay, basics. Every human needs food, water, sleep and human interaction. So, for now, you can get your food, water and human interaction here. Anytime you feel tired, you can go back to your room and lay down. If you want to add to that list, we add small things, like fresh air, exercise, etcetera," I listed.

Bucky looked at me, with tears gathering in his eyes, as he said, "I guess, I want to add something…"

"What's that?" Steve asked. Bucky stepped toward me so fast, I didn't have time to react as he wrapped his arms around me tightly, being careful not squash my belly too much. I slowly wrapped my arms around him, tears collecting and falling from my own eyes as I felt him in my arms after so long.

"Dr. Garner said that I might need to… reassure myself that it wasn't a dream," He breathed, shaking.

"He recommended a less harmful way," He said, making me smile over his shoulder at Steve. Steve didn't look jealous at all, but was beaming at the way Bucky initiated contact with me.

"You feel warm," He commented, dropping his nose to my hair, "Like I remember."

"You are just as handsome as I remember. But I think you gained some muscle mass," I teased, gently running my fingers through his hair. He shuddered as I scratched his scalp lightly, "That feels…"

"Good, great, bad, horrible?" I asked, stopping.

"Amazing. Please?" He asked, nuzzling into my shoulder.

"Of course. Is it okay if Steve joins this hug?" I asked softly, as I continued scratching softly. Steve started to protest, "I don't think I should crowd-"

"Yes," He nodded.

"You heard him, get in here," I beckoned Steve over with my other hand. He came to gently wrap
his arms around Bucky, cocooning him with our love. He shook, saying, "So warm."

"When I woke up from the ice, anything less than 65 degrees sent me into the chills. It reminded me of before the serum, how the cold seeped into my bones. Elle is the perfect heater though."

"So are you," I hummed content as I snuggled into Bucky's embrace.

"Even with the arm?" He asked in small voice, lips brushing along my skin, sending Goosebumps racing across my body.

"Does it make you cold?" I asked, "Because I barely register it. This feels like a warm, weighted blanket, with one leg uncovered. Perfect temperature."

"It can be cold sometimes. But... it feels warmer now," He said softly.

The microwave timer started beeping and I groaned, "I have to go make pies."

"Stay," Steve sighed, trying to keep me in place. I gently untangled myself, placing a small kiss on the side of Bucky's head, "You two continue."

"After dinner if Bucky wants me to hug him, I will gladly do so, but I need to feed our family," I teased, as Bucky turned around in Steve's arms to accept his comfort.

They stood there a few minutes, with Bucky shaking silently as Steve rubbed his back and whispered gentle affirmations such as, "It's okay, we're here."

The pies were ready to go in the oven, the potatoes mashed sitting in the warming drawer with the vegetables I pulled from around the roast. Steve and Bucky moved to the couch, talking softly about the Internet again, as I banged around the kitchen. The roast was resting under tin foil while I started the Yorkshires and began making my roux gravy.

As the oven timer went off for the Yorkshires, I sighed, "Alright. Where is everyone?"

"Daisy Rogers, reporting for dinner," She cheeked as she walked in, Jemma beside her, inhaling the aromas in the room.

"Oh, this smells like home," Jemma sighed to herself, making me smile.

"Ha ha. I'm glad it smells good. Daisy, grab the roast and start cutting," I instructed, setting the knife beside the roast. She huffed, "Fine."

"You trust Daisy in the kitchen? She wasn't allowed in the kitchen on the BUS," Jemma grinned as Daisy scoffed.

"All part of her cover. Well, she was pretty bad when I first started teaching her. But now she can keep up," I teased her as well.

"What is this? Gang up on Daisy day?" She laughed as she cut, and I began putting the finished food on the table. Once the gravy was poured, I heard a number of people coming down the hall.

"Incoming, look alive," I called over to Steve and Bucky.

Sharon and Natasha were conversing, Clint following behind them, so I quickly put the pies in the oven. Brock and Mel were talking about security, with Phil and Trip following behind them.

"Buck, this is Peggy's niece, Sharon Carter. But to SHIELD, she is Agent 13."
"Sergeant Barnes, it's so nice to finally meet you. Aunt Liz never shut up about you two, so I feel like I know you already," Sharon said, holding out a hand to Bucky. He took it as I groaned, "Share-Bear, you don't say those kind of things unless you want me to spill your embarrassing stories."

She ignored me as Bucky said, "Nice to meet you."

"I'm glad they got you back," She smiled, excusing herself as I gestured for everyone to sit down.

"Oh family matriarch, can we eat?" Daisy sassed me, as I brought over jugs of water and two bottles of water.

"Yes," I said, rolling my eyes. We all dished up, eating and conversing about light subjects, leaving work outside for the night. At one point, Phil tapped his glass of wine and said, "I'd like to propose a toast, to all of us, but mainly my parents."

"70 years ago, you thought your lives had ended, fighting the good fight. Dad put the plane down, Dad fell from the train, and Mom thought she lost you both and any chance at happiness. But she kept fighting. Hydra took their time, thinking they had tricked us all, but Mom saw through them. It was like Hydra was the hare, and she was the turtle. She gave them a false sense of security, while having a plan in place to stop them. She had good people inside of SHIELD and Hydra, and when Dad came back, they became that team they were so long ago. Captain America and Lady Liberty, saved the day again, along with their new team of Howling Commandos," He explained, as the table laughed.

"We lost a lot. Good people, bases, weaponry. But we gained a little breathing room, to plan, to fight back easier. We got you back Dad, a major player on their side. They say you win the battle but lose the war. I think we are going to win this war, because we have the best people, with the best hearts on our side. And now, our family is whole, complete. Without each other, we may never succeed. But as my mother always has told me," He said turning to me.

"We are stronger together," I finished, raising my glass of water.

"To family; blood and handpicked," Phil smiled, as we all began clinking glasses.

"To the first successful day of SHIELD, where there weren't any fiery incidents," I joked, looking at Clint.

"You accidentally grab an incendiary arrow ONE TIME and she never lets you live it down," He sighed, hanging his head as the table laughed. Nat punched his shoulder and asked, "Clint, do you smell that?"

He sniffed the air, eye twitching as he beamed at me, "Peach cobbler?"

"Yes, finish your dinner first," I laughed, giving Bucky a wink, "Hopefully you like it too."

"If it's anything like what you used to make, and everything I've had today, I'll love it," He smiled.

That night, I invited Bucky over to our apartment, where we all sat down on the couch.

"Today, was long," I groaned, putting my feet up.

"You think tomorrow will be better?" Steve teased, "It's just going to get worse. More missions, more paperwork."
"UGH, don't remind me," I said, pulling a blanket over my head.

"Paperwork is the enemy," Bucky said and I pulled the blanket off my head in shock.

"Wow, I didn't think you heard that."

"What?" Steve asked.

"I was muttering to myself in my office at the London base, how paperwork is the enemy, and I would smite it with my sword, AKA my pen," I laughed fixing my hair, "And then Bucky walked in for a 'talk', where he locked the door and bent me over my desk."

"Where was I?" Steve laughed, as Bucky blushed slightly.

"You were with Phillips for a debrief... I think. And Bucky gave an excuse to the guys that I needed to talk to him about Christmas presents or something. We were lucky Peggy was in that meeting that day," I teased.

"I was sure someone would have heard. You aren't exactly quiet," Bucky smirked, before freezing as he thought he said something embarrassing for me. Or maybe it was shock at the memory that resurfaced. Steve and I laughed to ease his mind, "No, I'm certainly not. But then again, neither are you two."

Bucky still looked embarrassed, so I let the subject fall, as I asked, "How are you liking Dr. Garner?"

"He's... nice. It's unnerving for people to be so nice to me," He said honestly. I nodded, as Zeus came in his dog door.

"Where were you?" I asked him, and he came up to greet my hand with a lick, "You know, this one here had a similar story to yours."

"You were saying last night."

"Do you want to hear it? It might make things easier to explain," I offered. He shrugged, before nodding, "Okay."

"This drug kingpin in New York, was operating an illegal dog-fighting ring. He had Zeus fighting, but also as his protection. Zeus was very good at what he did, as you can tell from his lack of scars. Well, except for this one," I said, pointing to the four-inch scar on Zeus' neck.

"When the cops busted them, the dogs were marked for euthanization, especially since some of them had bitten humans when they were rescued by Animal Control. They didn't believe they could be rehabilitated after years of fighting. It was fate that I was even at the shelter that day. I was going to pick out a cat. Low maintenance; don't need much attention, just food, water and a litter box. I was walking down the hall when I saw him. He looked so beautiful. But scared," I smiled sadly, petting Zeus gently.

"I asked the woman I was with where the dogs were kept, and she took me down there, where Zeus was just about through the door, leading to where he would have been put down."

"I sprinted over, asking to see the dog," I smiled, wiping a tear away, "But they kept saying that he wasn't for adoption, that he had bitten someone."

"The only reason he had bitten someone, was in defense of his previous owner who was being arrested. After he was gone, there was no one to give him orders, and he stopped fighting. He looked
so lost and afraid, as if he knew where he was going, and didn't want to. But he didn't know if I was just like his last owner."

"He kept trying to pull away from me though, scared I was going to do something to him. I basically threw down enough money for five dogs, ensuring them I wanted him and I wouldn't come after them if he attacked me. I got him home and got him toys, a nice bed, some heavy-duty dog bowls, bones… You name it, I thought he needed it. I didn't know what to do, to get the look of fear out of his eyes."

"And he took his time, exploring the house, but being careful not to completely enter a room I was in. He'd back out if I even looked in his direction. He was confused as to why he was in a warm place, where no one was asking him to do bad things. And a month later, he finally approached me, rubbing up against my hand tentatively."

"It was like a dam broke, once he got the initial touch out of the way. Belly rubs, licking my hand, begging for scraps at the dinner table, any and all affection. He turned into a regular dog. He started sleeping next to my bed, keeping me close, and then getting bold enough to wake me up in the morning by jumping on me. He was protective of me, and like Clint said, bit his ass for firing a foam dart at me. But I never asked him to do anything he didn't want to do, like hurt people. I trained him a bit more, but he was a companion, not a slave."

"He hasn't been perfect, still on guard around new people, but he's experienced trauma. It changes you, but it doesn't have to define you," I finished. He was quiet a moment, watching me stroke over Zeus's cropped ears while the dog closed his eyes in contentment.

"Are you comparing me to a dog?" Bucky teased after the moment was over, smiling at me. Steve chuckled, as he knew my worry yesterday with telling Bucky the story of Zeus, was the comparison.

"No. All I'm saying is that your stories are similar," I answered honestly. He went quiet again, looking at his hands.

"The words they used to prep me…" He swallowed thickly, as Steve took my hand gently.

"It would take me to a blank state, where I'd just willingly obey. But I was still… aware. It was as if I was watching a movie, of my hands doing unspeakable things. I would scream for them to stop, but they never did. I'd been screaming inside of my head for years until Steve said my name. Then I had a foothold to push myself free. Almost."

"The time I saw you on the TV," He spoke, looking up at me, "Those people I killed, I knew they were going to keep me from you. I felt the need to leave, like nothing I had ever remembered. I knew had to find you. But I didn't know why."

"They restricted me even further, not sure why I reacted so strongly to you. Most didn't know who I was I guess, but in the deepest parts of my mind, I was screaming for you, for Steve. I just didn't have names to put to the faces. I saw you only one more time, before a few days ago. I saw you both."

"When?" I asked gently.

"...The night... the night I killed your brother."

I was silent, processing the grief that the sentence brought, as well as the confusion.

"I wasn't there. Steve was still frozen. Was it a hallucination?" I questioned. He shrugged slightly, "It must have been. I saw you as I left, a ways into the forest. You were looking at me so sadly. And
then suddenly, I blinked and you were gone. I didn't look for you, even when I was told no witnesses. I didn't know if you were still out there. Seeing you, made me want to disobey their orders. But I was still trapped."

I was biting my lip so hard to keep from crying, that I could feel blood begin to pour into my mouth. Bucky didn't look up, but I could see his shoulders shaking.

"Why didn't you come for me?" He asked brokenly, and I couldn't force back the sob his questions created in my chest. He looked up at me, hearing my distress, but face softening as he saw the tears rolling down my cheeks in quick succession.

"If I had known you survived, I would have jumped down that gorge myself," I cried, Steve's hold on my hand getting tighter in comfort as I continued, "I was so lost to my grief. Everything pointed to you not surviving the fall. And recovery of your body... we didn't think it was possible. We didn't try, and you will never know how much I wish I could turn back time and trail through ice and snow to find you."

"It was my fault," Steve spoke silently, making me realize he had been crying too, "If I hadn't put the plane down, she would have been in the right mind afterwards to go looking for you. Maybe we'd have been together all these years."

"But the miscarriage, the bombs? I was still in London. If I had just gone with you to get Zola-"

"No," Bucky spoke firmly, making us both stop and look at him.

"It's no one's fault but Hydra's," He spoke with conviction, looking up at us, "I just want... I want to be myself again. Whatever messed up version that is. I just want to... be free of this."

"And what do you need from us?" Steve asked.

"Just... be here. Because if it weren't for you two... even the few things I remember I did under their control, I wanted to put a bullet in my brain. Just to end it," He said honestly, looking up at Steve and I.

"We're here for you, always," I promised, wiping my own eyes.

"Until the end of the line," Steve swallowed thickly.

"Push us away, pull us close, it doesn't matter. We don't care about what they made you do, only that you are here now."

"Could you... tell me about after the war?" He asked, looking at me, "What happened with my folks and Becca?"

"Of course," I smiled, holding up a finger and moving towards my closet. I pulled out a box from the top shelf, smiling to myself as I brought it into the living room. I set it in front of Bucky, motioning in question if I could sit beside him. He nodded and I settled onto the couch, opening the box.

"This is my Bucky Box. In it is all the memories I have of you, little things your parents gave me from your bedroom and affects from your apartment," I smiled, pulling out the first letter we found after his fall. He read it slowly, looking up at us as Steve and I stayed quiet. Steve gently reached for the box, running his fingers lightly over Bucky's military dress uniform, eyes closed as a smile graced his face.

"It's smudged a bit here," Bucky asked, pointing to it, and I nodded, "Many times after the war, I
would pull it out and cry. It was cathartic, helped me cope a bit. Well, only a bit. I believe that says, "But I can go happy, knowing that you loved me."

He nodded, continuing to read. I made a motion that I would be back, getting up to grab one more thing from my make up table. When I got back, bringing a box of tissues with me, Steve took one gratefully as Bucky opened the letter to his sister.

He gave a small smile every few seconds, as if remembering his own words. I had read it plenty of times, but the message had been clear. He loved his sister, wishing her a full and happy life and he hoped she could love me.

He set that down eyes shining, as I picked up the next, saying, "The next one… is to your parents. I didn't get to read it until after they had, and they insisted."

He took it from my hand, unfolding the paper looking it over. The first sentences had him tensing, much like I had. Steve hadn't read the letters to Rebecca or to his parents, and didn't ask me to after he came back. It was personal now, but I told him the gist of it.

Bucky wiped his eyes as he folded the letter up, asking me, "They're gone, right?"

"Yes. But they both lived to their early 70's. They got to meet Phil when he was a baby," I added, "They were very touched that I gave him your name as his middle. They of course knew why, but still. You lived on."

"Rebecca?" He asked softly.

"She got married to a very sweet guy, William O'Connell. They had been sweethearts in high school," I explained, "They married about a year after the war ended, in 1946. And almost a year later, they welcomed your nephew, James O'Connell."

"I remember him," Bucky said, recalling his sisters sweetheart, "She named a kid after me?"

"You were her big brother, her hero," I nodded, "She felt it was the least she could do to preserve your memory. He grew up with all the greatest stories, and eventually married himself a nice girl named Bridgette. They have three kids, who have 2 kids each and the last I heard, 3 great-grandchildren."

"That's… good," He whispered.

"Rebecca died about fifteen years ago, in her sleep. William had died during the Korean War. I was about five miles away, and his CO gave me the news over the radio, knowing I was practically family."

"So James was their only child, but Becca and I bonded well over losing our loved ones in wars," I finished, "I was the Matron of Honor at her wedding, and they named me James's god mother. I had told them that first time I met them, how I knew I wasn't aging. So I became the protector, much like I am for the Commandos families. A matriarch to watch over them and their families."

He was quiet as I pulled the small box from my pocket, opening it to show him.

"Your mother did give me Grandma Anne's locket. I've kept it safe all these years. I take it out to look at it when I missed you, when I missed your parents or Becca. Which was more often than not."

He ran his thumb over it, a ghost of a smile as I asked him, "Do you want to open it?"
He looked confused, carefully popping it open and his face softening as he took in the contents. He looked at the black and white photo, smiling at picture of Steve and him, before noticing something. The single picture, that had been the sole occupant of the locket for over 60 years, had been given a companion.

The picture was Steve's idea, taking it from Phil's album and copying it in a pencil sketch. I was holding the little bundle and smiling warmly, with Phil's face turned towards the camera. His eyes were closed, but he was smiling peacefully in his sleep, as I gazed at him.

"Our family was together, in my heart and here," I smiled when he looked up at me. He looked back down at the picture and then to my stomach quickly. He looked over at the picture of himself and Steve pre-serum and frowned.

"What's on your mind Buck?" Steve asked gently, coming to sit on his other side.

"I'm not… I don't look like that anymore," He spoke softly, still looking at the picture.

"And that's okay. Do I look like this anymore?" I asked, pulling a picture out of the box. It had been taken with all the guys, something I had asked Howard to do after Steve and I got married. I looked so different, hair dolled up and my dark blue dress as I smiled brightly at the camera.

"No," He said, studying the new picture.

"I don't look like that anymore either," Steve said gazing at the picture himself.

"We are different than you remember us as, so it's okay if you aren't as we remember you," I explained softly, putting a hand on his metal arm. He looked up in shock at my touch, as I moved to touch his shoulder.

"I've noticed you walk favoring your left now," I said softly, "Does the metal arm weigh more than your own used to?"

He shrugged, "I only really noticed a difference a few days ago. But I remember getting used to shooting again, the arm weighing more and having to make up the difference during a long range shot."

"I'm sure we could design you something that's lighter weight, less susceptible to shell damage. I'd love to get our hands on some vibranium… If you are up to it, I can ask the lab to make you something."

"I don't know. It's been a part of me so long…" He trailed off, and I nodded in understanding. Even knowing what it's done, its something familiar.

"I get it. I'd really want Fitz or Tony to design it for you anyways, and Fitz is recovering from some brain damage. It's a long shot if he even talks normally again," I mused.

"Does… does Tony know?" He asked in a small voice.

"No. I want to tell him in person," I spoke gently, "And explain why I kept it from him."

"Elle, is he ready for that? We don't know what he'll do-"

"He will listen to me, as he has always done. People seem to think that just because he is eccentric and rash, that he can't have a serious conversation. When we told him about Phil and Bucky? He listened. When I kept explaining about our relationship," I gestured between the three of us, "He
listened without so much as a face. Keeping him in the dark will only make it worse."

"And Peter?" Steve challenged. I sighed, "That one might take him getting a couple shots at me in the Iron Man suit, to get him to calm down. He wasn't ready, still isn't. Mary didn't want Peter knowing until he was at least 15. Would give Tony some time to mature if Peter went looking for him."

"I'm confused. Who is Peter?"

"My great nephew, Tony's son. But Tony doesn't know. My friend Mary had a one-night stand with him, and she got pregnant. Her fiancé Richard married her anyways and they raised him together. They died in 2008. Dead of gunshot wounds before the plane hit the ground. Peter doesn't know they were SHIELD, but one day I will tell him."

"Did… did I?"

"No, Brock tells me that it was someone else, someone who is already dead," I reassured him. I kept showing him things in the box, like his military uniform, or pictures from the war. He looked a bit less burdened by the end, lighter after seeing things that brought back memories naturally. I felt our little one kick me and I groaned, "Okay, okay."

"What's wrong?" Bucky asked me as I got up.

"I'm just gonna get into my pajamas. Little one here wants to sleep, and I'm feeling a little tired myself."

"I'll be up with Bucky," Steve let me know.

"I think she liked having you both near last night. Can we try that again?" I asked, seeing Bucky still eyeing my belly. He looked up as he noticed I had included him and nodded shyly.

"Be right back," I smiled. It took a minute to change out of my clothes, grabbing a soft pair of bottoms and a tank top that stretched well to use as a sleep shirt.

"What are you looking at?" Steve asked back in the living room, before he chuckled, "Elle, you left the door open."

"Oh, sorry," I blushed, closing the door that was cracked open. Nothing was said after that, but I quickly pulled on my clothes, padding back out as I softly braided my hair.

"Can I sit between you two?" I asked, seeing Bucky's cheek still flushed lightly.

"Yeah," He said, as Steve got up and Bucky scooted over, with Steve sitting down in my previous spot, and I settled into Bucky's. Putting my feet up on the coffee table, I settled my hands to sit on the bump, under my bust, beginning to hum. The guys didn't need an invitation, putting their hands over my belly and listening intently.

A gentle breeze from Hushabye Mountain
Softly blows over Lullaby Bay,
It fills the sails of boats that are waiting,
Waiting to sail your worries away.

It isn't far to Hushabye Mountain,
And your boat waits down by the quay.
The winds of night so softly are sighing,
Soon they will fly your troubles to sea.

So close your eyes on Hushabye Mountain,
Wave goodbye to cares of the day,
And watch your boat from Hushabye Mountain
Sail far away from Lullaby Bay.

"That's new," Steve whispered, leaning down to kiss my bump. The little one was still awake slightly and I sighed, "I've tried it a couple times. I used to sing it to Phil. It's from a movie that came out when he was 4."

"It's nice," Bucky commented, "Gentle and soft."

"Shall we try a different one, my love?" I asked gently, feeling her resounding approval as a kick to the liver.

"Ouch, okay," I snickered, as Bucky looked on in wonder as she kept kicking his hand.

Come stop your crying
It'll be alright
Just take my hand
And hold it tight

I will protect you
From all around you
I will be here
Don't you cry

For one so small,
You seem so strong
My arms will hold you,
Keep you safe and warm
This bond between us
Can't be broken
I will be here
Don't you cry

'Cause you'll be in my heart
Yes, you'll be in my heart
From this day on
Now and forever more
You'll be in my heart
No matter what they say
You'll be here in my heart

Why can't they understand the way we feel
They just don't trust what they can't explain
I know we're different, but deep inside us
We're not that different at all

And you'll be in my heart
Yes you'll be in my heart
From this day on
Now and forever more

Don't listen to them
'Cause what do they know
We need each other, to have, to hold
They'll see in time, I know

When destiny calls you, you must be strong
I may not be with you
But you gotta hold on
They'll see in time, I know
We'll show them together

'Cause you'll be in my heart
Believe me you'll be in my heart
I'll be there from this day on
Now and forever more

You'll be in my heart
No matter what they say
You'll be here in my heart
Always

"And… she's asleep," I smiled, but Bucky didn't want to remove his hand.

"How about, I fell asleep here, and you can carry me back to bed," I sighed, settling back against the couch, addressing Steve. He too had noticed Bucky's behavior towards my bump and nodded, "Lay your head back Doll."

Bucky's eyes would drift from my stomach to my face, every few times gazing at my chest. Steve was talking to him about different things, how eventually we'd get the okay from Senate for him to be outside. And as I placed my hand over top Bucky's, I felt myself succumb to sleep.
Chapter Forty

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello my faithful readers! Second chapter for today and it's a cute one. Enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

In the weeks following the fall of Hydra inside of SHIELD, I grew impossibly larger, and we dealt with the scars our battle left behind. I made the right call in dropping Ward off in CIA custody, regardless of whatever information he might have had on Hydra. I wasn't keeping him around to terrify Fitz and Daisy, and it proved fruitful when Senator Christian Ward backed SHIELD for his brother's capture. Not that I trusted the snake. I already had blackmail in place, should he ever decide to turn on us. And once the Fridge was re-opened the CIA was turning him back over to us for safekeeping.

Bucky was getting better. It was a slow process, but he had started asking us about his memories and we'd give as much as we could. Sometimes he had nightmares and HERMES would tell us if he was in distress. Steve would go to him, to help him breath and calm down, in case he got violent. But he felt ready enough to tell the government everything Hydra made him do. He swore that he wanted them to pay for what they did to him. Andrew was very pleased with his progress, even suggesting he be given work, to keep his mind busy. So he was teaching Daisy advanced arms training, and Trip benefited from it as well.

The government had debated for over a week with what to do with him. He was a killer, but as I pointed out, he was also a POW, and sometimes you have to do what you can to survive. His brain gave over to them to stay alive, and he was paying for it with nightmares, flashbacks and guilt. The government allowed him to stay in our custody, given the promise he receive psychiatric treatment and evaluation every week, until he was deemed stable. Given that he already was receiving it, he was recruited into SHIELD, much the same way Natasha was when she defected from Russia.

Nat had come back into the fold, after taking a bit to work on a few new covers. She was teaching Daisy now, as I couldn't and Mel wouldn't be objective as her mother. Daisy was excelling under the Black Widow's tutelage, and our agents feared her aptitude after only a few weeks of training here and a month with me. I could accomplish a lot in a month, and Daisy always said I laid the best foundation for her training. Where she went with it, relied on my original instruction.

Natasha popped her head in my office one day and said, "How's Mama?"

"Mama is fine, but this little one won't let me concentrate," I smiled at her, "Playing a weird tune on my ribs. She doesn't have my sense of rhythm, but I can fix that with some lessons."

"Well, I hope she is well behaved for you soon. I'm heading out, did you want anything?"

"Oooh, maybe some ice cream?" I smiled coyly.

"You've got an addiction," She teased, "But okay, I'll pick up a tub."

"Phish Food and Cherry Garcia!"
"Addict!" She joked as she walked out quietly. I returned my focus to the pile of papers I was
humming to myself as I polished off the last of the stack of budget reports, Phil's head popped in next
saying, "You have a visitor."

"Who?" I asked confused, before a very excited 13 year old popped his head in.

"Peter!" I smiled, coming around my desk to meet him in a big hug. As much as he could with my
belly.

"Oh buddy, I missed you! Wait, what are you doing here?" I asked, suddenly confused.

"I can't tell you yet. But I'm supposed to bring you somewhere. It's a scavenger hunt!" He beamed,
as I fixed his hair.

"Really?" I asked, amused, "And who organized this hunt for me?"

"Mom, just go along with it," Phil laughed, "I've got things for the day. You need some down time.
Go have fun."

"Are you sure?" I questioned, "Rumlow should be back soon with dead drops and Hartley's due
back with intel."

"Mom, go. I got this," He pushed me out the door with Peter helping, "Be a good sport about it."

"Now, I'm worried," I smiled at Peter, who laughed taking my hand.

"Bye Phil!" Peter called, waving to my son.

"Bye Peter. Take good care of her," He smiled at his cousin. Not that Peter would learn that for
another two years. May and I had already practiced the talk we'd give, in case the other wasn't there.
Mary specified in her will, that she didn't want Peter knowing who his father was until he was 15, no
earlier. Or that she and Richard were SHIELD until that time either.

He started pulling me away from the offices, down the hall to the elevator where a familiar face
stood.

"May?" I asked, reaching out to grab onto her in a tight hug, "How did you get here? Both of you?"

"A certain Captain showed up at our door to bring us here. But I'm not telling you anything else,
because we need to head down to... which Level Peter?" She asked her nephew.

"Level Three?" He asked, as May directed me into the elevator.

"Why do I feel like I'm being led into a trap?" I teased.

"You aren't," She laughed, before smiling at me, "How are you feeling?"

"Well, aside from the fact I can't see my feet, and I'm not allowed to do anymore travelling without
express consent from my doctor, I'm okay. I wish you could be here on the big day," I smiled sadly.

"It's okay. We're here now. It wouldn't be a good time, you know with..." She trailed off and I knew
she meant Tony. He'd most likely come visit within a day or two of me giving birth.

"I agree," I nodded.

"What are you guys talking about?" Peter looked at us questioningly. I smiled, "Adult stuff, buddy.
"Ready for summer vacation?"

"Only one more week," he sighed, as the doors opened, "I just want to be done with this year! But Ned and I are going with his parents to Coney Island next week."

"Uncle Steve has lots of memories that revolve around Coney Island. Get him to tell you the time Bucky made him ride the Cyclone, before the serum. Vomiting, lots of vomiting," I joked, seeing Peter's smile as he said, "That's awesome."

"What is it with boys and gross things?" May asked, as she directed us down a hall.

"Not sure. Phil was the same way, loved mud."

"Colonel," I heard seeing Jemma smiling brightly at us.

"Are you part of the scavenger hunt too?" I asked, and she nodded, "I have a clue for you."

"Ah, the first one! Now I can start looking," I said rubbing my hands together, as she handed me a piece of pink paper.

*The ocean is blue, and so is the sky, but my room was not... Who am I?*

"Hmm," I said, showing it to Peter, "What do you think?"

"I dunno," he shrugged. I thought about the colours, mentioned and of the paper and smiled, "I know where we need to go."

Pulling Peter back to the elevator, Jemma was following us.

"Jemma, this is May Parker and Peter Parker, if you haven't been introduced. May, Peter this is Dr. Jemma Simmons, our biochemist. Peter is my godson and May is his aunt, also a very good friend of mine," I made the introductions.

"Nice to meet you both," Jemma smiled and May replied, "You as well Jemma."

"Do you have an engineering department?" Peter asked. Jemma nodded, "We do. My best friend Dr. Fitz runs it. I can introduce you later if it's alright with your aunts."

"That's fine by us," I replied, seeing May's nod of approval.

The doors opened again, and I was walking towards an office. Knocking once, the door opened and Daisy smiled, "Clue two!"

I laughed as she gave me the chocolate wrapper. I was confused for a minute, until I saw the note inside the empty wrapping.

*Feeding a Rogers take a lot of energy, and I require chocolate to do it. Or I might just need to hit someone.*

Laughing, I said, "Sweet girl, this is too easy."

She shrugged, "It's meant to be fun. You deserve some fun, Grams."

"Alright, let's go find her," I smiled. A quick trip in the elevator found us stepping off as I introduced everyone. I sought out the training rooms, where Mel was overlooking her batch of Academy agents.
"Dismissed," She told them as she saw us, "Go shower."

Many of them gave me a nod as they left, I nodded back to them with a smile as Melinda slipped me a tablet.

_We are as stubborn as mules, but we know our value._

Laughing again as I handed it back, I said, "Alright, up to Level Five. as our small herd walked down the hall."

Sharon was waiting outside her office and I asked her, "Clue please."

"This might be too easy for you," She commented, handing me a piece of paper. On it, there were Russian cyrillic symbols asking, _Has someone fed you lately?_

Hearing my stomach growl at the thought of food, I directed them all back to the elevator, Daisy and Jemma giggling as I pressed the button for Level Ten.

"Is this the last one?" I asked them.

"We were sworn to secrecy," Jemma said seriously. I raised an eyebrow at her and asked, "And you don't think I could get it out of you?"

"You could, but where would the fun in that be?" She responded cheekily. Rolling my eyes in jest, I tucked Petter into my side, "You'd tell me right?"

"I don't know everything," He shrugged.

"Oh, she's good," I teased, knowing who set this up.

Bucky was standing in the kitchen, with Steve, making sandwiches. They smiled over at me, but didn't say a word. No visible note, and no other person in the lounge.

"Beep," I heard when I moved towards them. I looked back at Daisy, who was trying to control her giggles.

"What?" I laughed, moving closer to the island. The beeps Daisy was making were soft, getting louder as I got closer to the fridge.

I touched the handle, looking back as Daisy nodded frantically, "BEEP, BEEP, BEEP!"

Opening it, I looked around the produce drawer, before seeing a post-it note stuck to the milk carton. _Before you expire, give your men a kiss_, was written in Natasha's handwriting. Ugh, her puns were bad.

I snickered, seeing them both smiling at me. I popped over to kiss Bucky's cheek and then around the counter to kiss Steve's. He pulled a note from his pocket and asked, "Having fun?"

"The suspense is killing me!" I sighed dramatically, opening the stationary.

_I have wheels and windows. I have an engine and I have something my namesake does not. What am I?_

"Wheels, windows, engine... namesake?" I muttered, thinking of all the machines we had that would apply. A car? Quinjets? Nope. The only thing that still had a name, that had seatbelts was...
"Ah!" I smiled triumphantly, "To the hangar!"

The group cheered, following me back to the elevator as I waved goodbye to Steve and Bucky.

"Ramp is down," I questioned, not seeing anyone inside the plane. The spiral staircase that lead to the top floor of the BUS, had a decorated purple arrow pointed up.

"That's ominous," I remarked, climbing the stairs while the ladies behind me snickered. Peter stood right beside me as I walked the hallway, leading to the lounge of the BUS.

"OH MY GOD!" I yelled, seeing a familiar brunette. I waddled over to her, hugging her tightly as we both cried.

"Aunt Liz!" Two young kids cried out, latching onto my legs as I was still holding fast to their mother.

"You're here! How are you here?" I smiled, pulling back to smile at Laura as I got a better hold on Cooper and Lila. She responded in kind, "Well, I wasn't about to miss your baby shower."

"Baby wha-"

"Surprise!" The group yelled behind me. I turned to see a pile of presents that was tucked away from my first glance, and the lounge had been decorated in purple and white decorations. The girls all wore silly smiles and Natasha was smiling deviously next to a table of presents.

"Oh-" I said, biting my lip.

"Aunt Liz, don't cry," Lila said, tugging on my dress gently.

"Lila, it's okay, these are happy tears," I said wiping my eyes and smiling down at her.

"Alright, sit down before I get in trouble with Dr. Fine for too much exercise," Nat teased, coming to hug me quickly. They put me in a comfy chair, where Peter brought me over a diaper pin and a sash, helping me put it over my head, before trailing Natasha.

"How did you get here?" I asked Laura quietly while everyone got settled.

"Clint snuck us in. We would have been in the lounge, but since you can dock the Quinjet to the top, it was an easier way to not be seen."

"And then you just fly home. Smart move. How long has she been planning this?" I asked a little louder.

"About a month. Triskelion happened, Clint came home for a week and Natasha sent word she wanted us to come. But she didn't know what your schedule would be like, so it's been moved a few times. We were able to work with everyone's schedules easily though."

"Everyone's but Pepper's. She sends her love and well... you'll see," Daisy stopped herself, shaking her head.

"That's too bad. But I'm so glad I got to celebrate with all my favourite ladies. And gentlemen," I added to Peter and Cooper.

"And are you okay with them knowing who you are?" I asked Laura, noticing how relaxed she seemed.
"I am. Clint observed them all and decided it wouldn't be so bad if the girls here knew."

"They've been sworn to secrecy," Natasha said, eyeing everyone.

"Not a peep shall leave these lips," Jemma and Daisy said, as if practiced before giggling. The party started, with Natasha leading us all in games, while Peter, Cooper and Lila kept score. Lila was only 4 but loved that she was at such an adult party, carefully snuggling in beside me. I had lost my pin quickly after saying 'baby' once in front of Daisy, enjoying watching the girls compete to see who could gather the most. Natasha was the last hold out and still going strong. Cooper and Peter were getting along well over by the windows. They were only about four years apart in age, but liked the same things. Natasha thrust a glass of sparkling apple juice into my hand, giving me a wink, "You're ice cream is upstairs in the freezer."

"Ha. I wasn't even worried," I teased, as a knocking came from the hallway.

"Are we interrupting the hen party?" Clint smiled, helping Steve and Bucky bring in platters of food.

"Not at all, why don't you go feed her Barnes. She looks starved out of her mind," Natasha said, directing Bucky over to me.

"YES! God, I love you," I smiled at Bucky, swiping a finger sandwich off the plate he carried by me.

"Me or the sandwich?" He teased.

"Um... both?" I said around a mouthful of egg salad. Natasha handed me a plate with a snicker, and I quickly shovelled a large amount of food onto it.

"Would the Daddies care to stay for the present opening?" She asked Steve.

"Sounds like fun. Buck?"

"Sure," He nodded, "I haven't opened a present in-"

"70 years," Most of the group finished for him.

"Liz uses that one way too often Barnes. Got to pick something new," Clint smiled at Bucky, clapping him on the back.

"Stop ganging up on him. You use whatever you'd like, and you can open as many presents as you'd like," I smiled at him, as they were given chairs beside my own. We unwrapped many gifts. Clothes, toys, books, some practical things too, like crib sheets, diapering necessities and towel sets. The last thing I was given was a card.

"To our favorite super soldier (Sorry Steve)," I read, making Steve laugh.

"While Tony and I couldn't be there, we hope to come see you soon after the birth of your little one. Back in your apartment there, you'll find your gift. Hopefully they set it up right. Your guys know how to follow instructions, right?" I read, making the ladies laugh.

"It wasn't too hard," Steve smirked.

"Now my curiosity is peaked," I smiled, turning back to the card.

"We love you and are so excited to actually see you as parents, because Phil turned out so well," I
read, smiling.

"P.S. Aunt Liz, congrats. You grew a baby. Don't keep this one from me," I read Tony's note and laughed.

"Like that could happen now," I chuckled, shaking my head. Steve smiled at the group, "Thank you truly, for everything. This was a dream to us during the war. But being surrounded by such amazing people while we grew our family, was always a dream. Until you all helped right the wrongs Hydra had done to SHIELD. You all helped reunite us that day. and we are so lucky to call you all family."

"Damn, where's the tissue box?" I asked, wiping my eyes. The group laughed as I dried my eyes, and sniffled, "Thank you. This little girl will be so loved, if the love in this room is any indication. She will have many wonderful people to help raise her. They say it takes a village, and the one I had with Phil was just what I needed. But every single one of you has impacted my life and I can't wait to see how you impact hers. You are my family, and in return for your love, I will take care of each of you. Natasha, thank you for planning this."

"What kind of godmother or best friend would I be if I didn't? You didn't get this last time and it's tradition to spoil the baby," She shrugged, but I knew she was beaming with pride as the ladies clapped for her.

After that, the party started to break up. People needed to get back to work, and Steve and Natasha started taking our gifts up to the apartment. Clint told the kids to say goodbye to me, and I hugged them tightly, crying as I knew I would not see them until maybe Christmas.

"I love you both so, so much," I smiled at them through my tears.

"We love you too Aunt Liz," Cooper replied.

"Will you bring the baby to see us?" She asked putting a gentle hand on my belly and I nodded, "Of course. You have to meet your baby cousin. She's gonna love you guys."

"I'm so excited!" Lila squealed, jumping up and down.

"Okay, let's let your Aunt up to say goodbye to Mom," Clint chuckled, pulling Lila up into his arms. Bucky helped me stand, before I clung to Laura.

"Be safe," I whispered.

"Always. You keep your head on," She teased.

"Ugh, that's almost impossible here," I fake whined, "But I'll try."

She smiled as we pulled back and said, "You've got two great guys to keep you grounded."

"Yeah, I do," I said, smiling back at Bucky. He blushed and said, "It was nice to meet you Laura."

"You too Bucky. I know you are going through a lot right now, but I hope you know you can lean on any one of these people. Liz and Steve especially. They've got your back, and we do too."

He nodded, "I will."

"Liz, we'd love to have you all for your birthday this year. Plus I get to meet this baby if you come."

"I think we could swing that. I have to postpone my annual July road trip this year, but August could be doable," I smiled.
"Perfect, we will plan for a BBQ. I still have a bottle of your Memphis Pineapple BBQ sauce hidden from last year."

"Daisy helped me with those this year. Well with everything. I want to do an apple BBQ sauce this year-"

"Sorry Liz, but I need to get them home," Clint interrupted.

"All good, I'll see you soon," I smiled, hugging Laura one last time.

"Kiss that baby for me when she decides to grace us with her presence."

"Bye Aunt Liz!" The kids called as they climbed the stairs to the Quinjet dock.

"I love you two. Be good!" I smiled, waving as Laura walked towards the stairs.

"We will!" They giggled as Clint chuckled. Laura gave me a watery smile and a wave before she disappeared out of view. Bucky took my hand and I squeezed it lightly in thanks. I heard the hangar doors opening and the sound of the Quinjet above us firing up and undocking.

Once the noise had died down, I sighed.

"Nice family," Bucky commented.

"The best. One of the things that kept me going," I nodded, "Steve said it best, that I'm nurturing by nature and having them, kept me sane as I was losing my connection to the past."

He nodded, "I could understand that. You and Steve, you're my connection."

"We are glad to be," I smiled.

"Did you want to see the last present?" He asked, gesturing for us to follow everyone out.

"Yeah, I'd like that. And then I have to get back to work."

"Couldn't you just take the afternoon?" He offered.

"I would, but barring any international incidents, I have an engagement next Thursday that I've been saving the date a few years for. SO I need to make sure all my ducks are in a row before."

"What's that?" He asked, as I looped my arm into his elbow for support as we walked.

"My CI in Queens, who lives in the same building as Peter, he is graduating, and I have wanted to go and celebrate with him and his Mom. Plus I get to see Peter again."

"Steve said they are staying the night, and Rumlow is taking them back tomorrow."

"Perfect. Before we get to the apartment, could we stop in the lounge. I need to take out more beef then."

"What's for dinner tonight?" He asked, giving me a hand down the spiral staircase of the BUS.

"Tacos. It's Tuesday after all," I smiled and he looked lost.

"Taco Tuesday, because apparently it's a sacrilegious to have them on any other day of the week," I explained. He nodded, silent as e led me back out. Steve passed us as we got to the elevator saying,
"One more trip. Wait for me before you show her."

"Seriously, it's unfair that you both know."

"We put the thing together," Bucky smirked as we got into the lift.

"Level Ten please HERMES," I asked.

"Yes Ma'am."

"Did you have fun at the party?"

"It was weird to be in a room of women like that. Is that what baby showers are like normally?" He asked, and I chuckled.

"Somewhat. I'm not as into the games as some women. I prefer to company and the food to be the highlight. Natasha took that into account and tailored it to my preferences, otherwise would have been horrified when we played the Dirty Diaper game."

"I'm scared to ask."

"Chocolate bars in diapers, and you have to guess the kind. A lot have nuts or things like coconut, nuggat or caramel. Hard to tell when its been melted or moulded to look like poop."

"Gross."

"Level Ten."

"Yeah, it is. But the ladies find it funny," I shrugged.

A quick walk into the lounge, I pulled out more beef for our tacos and mentally reminded myself to account for three super soldiers appetites combined with the rest of the families when making shells. Bucky offered his arm again, and I took it gladly, resting my head against his arm lightly.

"Any clues?" I asked as we got to the door of my apartment.

"None. Steve should be-"

"Here!" He shouted, turning the corner with Nat on his heels.

"Seriously Rogers, slow down. It's not a race, you told her to wait. I've got to get her reaction on film anyways," Nat huffed, arms full of presents. But it was nothing compared to Steve's arms.

"By the way, a million agents will be flooding your office with gifts," She grimaced and I laughed, "Who saw you?"

"Agent Koenig, L.T. She may not be a gossip, but her brothers are. And we all know how much they admire you. They'll make it a mandatory thing."

"I'll nip that in the bud when I get back to the office," I shrugged, "Or maybe I'll send a list of things we haven't gotten yet, make it easier for them. I'll decide later."

"Okay," Natasha said, putting things down on the couch, "You ready to see Tony and Pepper's gift?"

"I'm so ready, it's not even funny," I wiggled, excitedly.
"Okay, I'm gonna o in and start recording, you walk in and turn the light on," She smiled and walked away.

"It smells like paint in here," I commented.

"You just noticed that?" Steve teased. I rolled my eyes, "I noticed it a week ago. I smelled it coming off the elevator today."

"YA FILTHY ANIMAL!" I heard Natasha yell, making me laugh. Steve and Bucky looked at each other, and shrugged.

"It's from a Christmas movie. Home Alone 2. I think you'd both enjoy the first one though," I said, as Steve nodded and got out his notebook.

"O-kay! Anytime now Lizzie!" Natasha called.

I walked over to the door to the nursery, pushing the door open and flicking the light on. I was awestruck and overwhelmed by the beauty of the room. On the wall was a mural of a cherry blossom, with petals falling and flying across the beige wall. A beautiful white crib was underneath it, and boasting a neutral color patchwork quilt draping over its side rail. There were matching white pieces of furniture, a cloth rocking chair, and a tall wooden dresser, set up with a change pad already and a few floating shelves with books and beautiful trinkets on them. But staring at the shelves, I realized one of the books looked a little worn and familiar, and I had to cover my mouth to keep from sobbing.

"Daisy insisted it stay in the family," Steve smiled, as he followed where my gaze rested.

"I'd read this to Phil every night," I cried, gently touching the hard cover of Goodnight Moon, "And then he read it to Daisy whenever he could."

"So you like it?" Natasha asked, reminding me I was being filmed. I smiled, turning to her, "I love it. It's perfect."

"Pepper had the crib designed, and Tony's only request was that no expense was spared on parts and wood," Nat teased.

"It's gorgeous," I commented, running my hands over the rail lightly, "Like it was carved out of marble."

"Only the best for a Stark," Nat smirked wryly and I snorted, "That was Howard's mindset."

"Please tell the camera how much you love this room," She prompted me and I smiled at the phone.

"Thank you both. It is beautiful and more than everything I could have ever hoped for. This little girl will be very loved."

She dropped the phone and sighed, "Alright. I will let you guys nest here. I've got to go wrangle my clean up crew."

"Have fun. And thank you," I whispered, pulling her in for a tight hug.

"You are welcome."

She left with a little wave and I took one more look around the room.

"How long did the mural take?" I asked Steve who came up at my side.
"I started it about a week ago. Bucky helped me pain the walls and then he set up most of the furniture while I worked," He smiled, motioning for Bucky to come in. He did so slowly, not being surprised when I slipped my hand into his metal one.

"Thank you," I smiled to him, pressing a gentle kiss to his cheek, "You did a wonderful job."

"Steve's the artist," He blushed.

"True, but there is nothing hotter than a man working with tools," I teased, wiggling my eyebrows.

"Hey," Steve chuckled

"A paintbrush is another tool, don't worry," I teased Steve, taking his hand.

"So, do you feel ready?" Steve asked as we basked in the room our daughter would occupy.

"I do. It's only a month to go now," I sighed.
Chapter Forty One

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello my faithful readers! Here we are in 2019, and still months to go until our questions are answered for Avengers: Endgame. But for now, here are two chapters as a belated Christmas and New Years gift from me. Enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

The next week flew by, bringing the calendar closer to the due date of our little girl. I had flown into New York secretly, with Steve and Mel as my muscle, as I had a promise to keep. Tevan Jefferies walked across the stage of his high school graduation, accepting his diploma and looking out over the audience to see his mother and I hollering for him. He knew I would come in disguise, so he didn't greet me as Colonel when I found him after.

"Are you proud?" He teased.

"As proud as I would be if you were my own son," I answered, giving him a smile. He smirked, "Thank you."

"Thank you. Only four more years," I teased him and he laughed, "I see the light at the end of the tunnel."

"Take this," I spoke softly, handing him an envelope and sighing, "I'm sorry I can't stay to celebrate with you guys."

"You dropping in on them?" He asked. I nodded, "Really quickly and then we turn around. Still a mountain of paperwork on my desk I have to get through by tomorrow.

"I lost your Mom in the crowd. Tell her goodbye for me please."

"I will," He nodded, as I gave him one last hug.

Steve in disguise directed me carefully through the crowd, back to where Mel had pulled the car around. I pulled my veil off once we had pulled away from the school, "Okay, one down, one more to go."

"One more what?" Steve asked from beside me in the backseat.

"One more Queens kid to watch graduate."

"Ah. A few years on that one," He chuckled.

"You never know. He could take after his father," I sighed sadly, Steve taking my hand and giving it a light squeeze.

"Where to?" Mel asked. A quick navigation through the more residential areas, Mel pulled up to May and Peter's building.
I hopped out, with Steve coming around to offer his arm. Mel stayed with the car, observing the street from the buildings steps, much like Tevan did. We were quiet as we walked up to the Parker's floor, me giving Mrs. Bird a quick wave as I saw her door open, with the smell of garlic and onions wafting down the hall.

I knocked twice, and when I heard movement, I knew at least one of them was home.

"Peter, who is it?" May's voice sounded from further in the apartment. I heard a stool moved behind the door.

"It's Aunt Liz!" He shouted back, excitedly before opening the door.

"Hey buddy!" I exclaimed, letting him hug me.

"Wow, um..." He stopped, looking at my belly in contemplation as he pulled away.

"Yes, I got bigger," I smirked, as Steve and I stepped inside.

"Not really. She kicked," He blushed.

"Awe, that means she likes you," I teased him, "She only kicks for those she really likes."

"Cool," Peter smiled as May came around the hallway corner.

"Hey," She greeted, "How was the ceremony?"

"Wonderful. Cliché, but very worth the flight in."

"It feels like yesterday when you introduce us to him," She lamented, and I nodded, "Tell me about it. I just about cried right along with Janice. He had to grow up so fast, but he did it right."

"I wish we could have gone," May frowned.

"I know. But the less you are seen together-"

"The easier it will be if he ever has to get us out undetected," She nodded, sighing, "You know I only meant as support."

"I know," I nodded in understanding, "I got Steve to film it and I can show you his walk across the stage."

"I'd love to see it," May smiled, as we all settled in the living room.

After our quick visit, we drove back to the airfield, taking the BUS back to Olympus. The week that followed was relatively quiet, which worried me. No big missions, our recon in Chicago was surprisingly quiet and was disappointed at Nick's dead drop from Europe. Very little information on Wolfgang Von Strucker, another Hydra sleeper that worked within SHIELD. The fact that Loki's Sceptre was missing raised a lot of red flags on our end, but all was quiet on the Western front. I started a couple of early canning items, feeling on edge and needing a distraction. Bucky and Steve were watching me flit around the kitchen late one evening, exchanging their own worried glances.

"What? Out with it," I asked, fed up with the silent conversation they were holding in front of me.

"Was that the last batch?" Steve asked and I sighed, "Yes. I was gonna do pickles tomorrow, and the blackberry jams just have to cool now. Why?"
"We think you might need a different… distraction," Bucky worded carefully as I heard two loud pings from my cooling jars.

"Like what?"

"You're acting a little… jittery. We were gonna suggest a walk, or maybe even a movie. You want to watch Mamma Mia?" Steve suggested, and I raised a brow.

"You hate musicals," I challenged, "Both of you. Granted, Bucky just discovered that he hates them, but still."

"But you love them. They make you smile. You're acting paranoid," Bucky commented and I saw Steve squish his eyes shut as the words fell out of Bucky's mouth.

"Okay, let me make one thing perfectly clear. This," I gestured to the mess around me, "Is what I do when I feel stressed or anxious. But there is a reason I feel it."

"Why?" Steve asked softly.

"Because it's too quiet. The other shoe hasn't dropped yet."

"Why does something need to happen?" Bucky asked, frowning in confusion.

"Because… my gut has never steered me wrong. Since I was a kid, I have never been wrong about a gut feeling. That is my superpower," I explained, "My anxiety is a downside, always has been. But I can't function properly when it's this… quiet."

"Would it help if I said I understand?" Bucky asked.

"Yes. I know how awful it can be to be stuck somewhere with nothing to do. You feel helpless. And that's what I feel like right now. Something is going to happen, something bad. I just don't know what, where or when."

Before I could speak up again, my phone rang.

"Are you sure you aren't psychic?" Steve asked seriously. I rolled my eyes, picking up my phone from the counter behind me. Seeing the number, I was immediately on guard as I answered, "Tevan?"

"Colonel… some men came to the building. I knew they looked like trouble when they pulled up, and not your men, so I ran down the hall… I got him out," He breathed hard on the other line, sounding pained.

"And May?" I asked, holding my breath.

"She's here, she'd just gotten off of work. She busted her ankle a bit coming down the fire escape, but right now we have to get underground."

"I'll have pickup there in 30 minutes. Is your Mom safe?"

"They checked our apartment first, while I got Peter and May out… I don't know, all I heard was her scream and gunfire," He got out, voice thick with emotion as I heard him moving.

"Tevan," I said, running out the door towards the apartments, hitting Rumlow's door hard on the way, with Steve and Bucky on my heels, "Tevan, I'm so sorry. I never wanted your Mom to get hurt."
"You just promise me you'll get them. Here's May."

"I will," I promised as I heard May's frantic voice come on the line, "Elizabeth?"

"May, please listen to my voice and do exactly as I tell you. Follow Tevan, He is going to get you to a rendezvous point where I will be sending a team. Tevan is going to lift a car, and you and Peter will stay low in the backseat while he gets you out of Queens. Do not be seen by cameras, and ditch this phone. Battery first and then the phone in a direction away from your escape route. Do you understand?"

"Yes. Oh god, I think they killed Janice," She sobbed quietly into the phone, as Daisy and Brock bolted out of the door. I mouthed, "Go get your Mom," and she took off running.

"I know. Now, do not argue, but I am putting you up here in DC. You are in danger until we can get whoever did this. Until I can secure a place and surveillance for you, you will all be coming here."

"What about Tevan?"

"He'll come here too. I'm not leaving him to defend himself. Not after… not if it's true," I said sadly; breathing deeply as the elevator finally arrived. We walked in, with Daisy and May bolting in as the doors started closing.

"HERMES, has emergency services been dispatched to their location?"

"Already there Ma'am. Mrs. Jefferies is in critical condition, but alive."

"May, we have to move. Now! Peter, stick close."

"May, tell Tevan she's alive. Critical, but emergency services are there. They've got her. Now, ditch the phone. We'll be there in less than 30. Sit tight, and don't draw attention to yourselves."

"Okay, okay," I heard her panic before the line cut.

"Who's Tevan?" Daisy asked, as I caught my breath, feeling the baby kicking me.

"Tevan is my eyes and ears on gang activity in Queens. May and Peter live down the hall from him, and they were nearly set upon by Hydra. I will explain everything, but right now, we need to get to them," I got out quickly.

"We'll go, you need to be here," Steve said and I shook my head, "I'm the only one that knows where they are headed."

"Tell me where, we'll pick them up. Tevan will recognize me," He spoke softly, holding my shoulders. I reluctantly agreed, realizing I couldn't climb fire escapes in my current condition.

"I need one team to go sweep for evidence, one to pick up."

"Daisy and I can sweep," Brock spoke up as the elevator stopped on the main floor, where we walked to the hangar as I explained where they would be going. I saw Trip laughing with a familiar face in the hangar and I called over, "You two, over here now!"

They jogged over as I pointed to a Quinjet, "Brock, Daisy, take LT. Mel, Steve, you get Trip. Situation is unclear at the moment, proceed with caution. You see any police there, you get what information you can and you flash your credentials to get in. If they give you trouble, video call me on the tablet so I can straighten them out."
"Yes Ma'am," Brock said, nodding to LT, as they walked into the one Quinjet and closing the ramp.

"Go to the Brownstone, hover on the roof. If Tevan has them in the panic room on the third floor, you'll need to get to the backdoor. Six digit combo, 092001. It's Peter's birthday," I explained, as Steve listened intently, "The cameras will be running, and they'll see you from the monitors."

"Hey," Steve took ahold my shoulders once more, "We'll get them. Just breathe. Buck, keep an eye on her please?"

"I will," He nodded, stepping up beside me. Steve backed into the Quinjet, "Remember to breathe."

As the hangar doors opened, Bucky and I moved to a safer spot. I dragged him to Operations, where I found a spare monitor getting HERMES to bring up the Brownstone's security feed. It would take them a half hour to get there, and just as long for Tevan, May and Peter from the time they left the apartment to get to the Brownstone, using a car.

"HERMES, give me the story so far," I asked.

"Six men entered the building, an unmarked black SUV dropped them off at the front door. They must have known that Mrs. Parker had just gotten off her shift at the hospital."

"Any facial recognition on them?"

"No, ma'am. They were wearing full-face masks. A knockout gas was thrown into the Parker's apartment, but Mr. Jefferies had already evacuated them. Shall I update you on Mrs. Jefferies condition when I know more?"

"Please. Please tell the hospital to send me the bill, and alert the building manager that damages are on me as well."

"Not SHIELD ma'am?"

"This is my family. This is personal," I said, as Bucky came to lay a hand on my shoulder.

"It's... it's gonna be okay," He tried to comfort me. I smiled at him, "Thank you, for staying with me."

We waited in silence, as I heard Mel and Brock coordinating their headings, speed and altitude. The monitor at the Brownstone remained still, and I paced, unable to calm down.

"Is... that my parent's house?" He asked, seeing the familiar interior over the camera feeds.

"Yes. When... when your sister died, James Jr. wanted to move out of the city. So instead of letting your childhood home go to a stranger, I bought it from him," I explained, still watching for a sign, "It was my last connection to you. The first time I walked into it, I had brought your parents your remaining personal affects. It felt warm and welcoming, like it was wrapping me in a hug to protect me from the grief I brought with me. It smelt of smoke from the fireplace, tea and bread your mother had baked earlier in the day."

He nodded, "That's exactly how I remember it."

"Most of the furniture is gone, but it still has yours and Becca's growth chart on the kitchen doorway. It's the only thing I couldn't bear to change."

"I thought Stark's were not sentimental," He teased, and I rolled my eyes good-naturedly.
"I am. Scrapbooks, keepsakes, home videos… I kept more than most would. Because…"

"Because of your aging," He nodded.

"I wouldn't trust my memories after that long alone. Especially if my mind went like Peggy's," I sighed.

"Are these people family of the Commandos? I never got to ask at the party," He asked, changing the subject as I sat down in a chair, moaning as I got off my feet again.

"No, they are my family. Well, Peter is."

"Did… Did Howard have other kids?" He asked confused.

"No, Peter is Tony's son. He doesn't know he even exists. It's a long story, so could I tell you and everyone else tomorrow? I promise," I sighed, and Bucky nodded. I was hoping they could avoid cameras, in case Hydra was waiting to catch them in a mistake. Tevan knew back routes, avoid major trafficways keeping a disguise in place if they were in view of cameras. He'd take them to a police precinct if he thought he couldn't get there.

"Oh god," I sobbed, seeing Tevan on the outside cameras, May and Peter right behind him. Bucky came to hold my hand, with me grateful for his touch.

"Steve, they made it," I sighed in relief to their Quinjet.

"We are almost there," He replied, "Keep breathing."

"Colonel, we're about 5 minutes out. Local still there?" Brock asked, and I replied, "They are. Approach with caution."

I watched the cameras, seeing Tevan ushering them up the stairs, smartly not turning on many lights that would prove the house to not be empty. As they opened the panic room, they all suddenly looked up at the ceiling, scrambling in.

"Elle, we're here. I'm heading down with Trip."

"He'll ask for a code, something only you would know. If he actually listened to my lessons."

"Tevan!" Steve yelled, as they walked through the backdoor, "It's Steve. The Colonel sent me."

"What's the thing I called you the day we first met?" Tevan asked smartly, over the panic room comm.

"Who's the Grandpa?" Steve smiled at the camera. When Tevan laughed, I watched Peter open the door and bolt down to Steve. He hugged Peter tight, taking May into his arms as well.

"Let's get you out of here," Steve said, "Heading up Mel."

"Roger that."

"Lock up, and tell Tevan I owe him a car for his quickness," I breathed out a chuckle, as Brock touched down on the blocked street, next to the patrol cars.

"Trip, check them over when you get situated," I asked, as Phil came in the room, "What's happening? I just got out of a meeting with Agent Koenig and HERMES said Mel left with Dad."
"I'm sorry we didn't get you. Hydra tried to take Peter and May," I explained, as I watched from the Quinjet's feed as the three agents approached the police barricade.

"Tevan get them out?" He asked, worried as he looked at the feed.

"Yes. But his mom was shot. She's in critical condition, and when she's stable, I'd like to get them set up somewhere. I want to start on a place for May and Peter too."

"Colonel, we've got a detective here wanting to talk to you," Daisy said, linking up a connection to us and flipping the tablet around.

"Detective Diaz. These your people Colonel Rogers?" The woman on my screen asked.

"They are. They are gonna sweep. Are your people done?"

"They've got the preliminary search done. One woman at New-York Pres, two GSW's to the right shoulder. They wanted her down, not dead."

"Thank god. Her son is being picked up by other agents right now in Brooklyn, along with the intended apartments residents. They lifted a car to get out of Queens, and I will call with the location once I check back in with my other team. The Parker's apartment, preliminary search find anything?"

"Gas canister, as far as we can tell it was simple knock out gas. Affected an old lady down the hall when they cleared out, but she's with the paramedics right now. Refuses to go to hospital."

"Mrs. Bird, don't let her bully you," I smiled.

"No ma'am, it takes a lot."

"Did anyone see the direction the men took off in?"

"No, the plates from traffic cams in the area were fakes, and most people were too panicked. I heard one of your people mention Hydra. What would they want here?"

"People I care about to hurt. Thank you Detective. My people can share anything they find, information wise, but we'd like evidence to stay with us."

"Less paperwork for me," She joked, "We'll keep the scene clear."

"Thank you for your cooperation Detective Diaz. They are gonna be taking clothes and some personal effects as well, to keep the Parker's and Mr. Jefferies comfortable while we set up a safe house."

"I'll let my officers know so they won't give them a hard time. Here's your agent."

"Colonel, Rumlow and LT have something for the lab. And something for me," She said, switching from the tablet to her comm unit.

"Let me guess, a calling card. Sounds about right," I said as Mel announced, "Loaded up, heading back to base. ETA 32 minutes."

"Roger that. Any injuries to report?"

"May has a rolled ankle, Peter is uninjured and Tevan has a bullet graze to his shoulder. Not life threatening," Trip reported succinctly as I heard Tevan grumbling.
"Let them rest, give them water and blankets. Bring them home," I sighed as Brock announced they had finished and were heading back as soon as they grabbed May, Peter and Tevan some stuff. Bucky wrapped me up in his arms, as I felt my body sagging from an adrenaline crash.

"Should we get Dr. Fine?" Phil asked me, and I shook my head, "No, just give me a minute."

Bucky made some motion behind my head and Phil reacted, leaving the room for a moment, and bringing back a water bottle for me.

"Just breathe Beth," He whispered calmly.

"Believe me, I'm trying. I felt like my heart stopped," I sighed, looking back at the screen that was tracking our Quinjets.

As the Quinjet touched down, I saw the ramp opening slowly. I started walking over, seeing Peter clinging to Steve as it finished opening. But he saw me, and bolted. I was already crying, uncaring of any agents or flight crew lingering in the hangar, as I tried jogging over to him. I was somehow able to kneel in time as he wrapped his arms around me, holding him tightly and cradling his head.

"Aunt Liz," His voice wavered, a scared tone that matched what I had been feeling earlier.

"I'm here buddy, I'm here. Hey," I said, pulling back to hold his face in my hands, "I promised I would protect you, right? You knew Tevan would always get you to me if something like this happened. And you are here and you are safe."

"But why did they want me?" He said, lip quivering.

"To hurt me. Because you are my family, and I love you. You did so well, following Tevan tonight. You are my brave man," I smiled through my own tears, "Don't you ever change."

"You're my protector, don't you ever leave me behind," He whispered, shaking still.

"Never," I promised, taking a blanket from Steve, and wrapping it around Peter's shoulders to help with his shock, "Your parents would come back to haunt me for the rest of time if something happened to you. I miss them, but I would never want that to be the way I saw them again."

"Elizabeth," May called, as Mel guided her over with Tevan. Steve helped me stand, as I leapt forward to hug May, "I am so sorry. I thought you were safe, I thought we were careful."

"I know, I know. We're here, that's all that matters right now," She sighed in relief, squeezing me tightly. I pulled back to smile at her, "And you are safe here. No one knows where this base is, except for a handful of people. The rest were flown in secretly."

"So, this is where it all goes down?" Tevan spoke up, and I smiled at him, before pulling him in for a hug. He floundered a bit, surprised at my display of affection. I pulled back to say, "You, young man, will do great things here. If you are still up for it."

"I think so. This just solidified why I wanted to join, to protect people," He said, and I nodded, "I've got an update on your Mom. She's in surgery, but I'll know more soon. It sounds good, like they didn't hit anything major."

"Thanks. When can I… go see her?" He asked, and suddenly I was seeing that 13-year-old boy, who was still grieving for his father.
"Tomorrow morning. Bright and early one of us can take you. I've got local ready to keep a squad car out front, but I'd rather you stay somewhere they wouldn't think to look. I know you've got school still, but I can contact your principal," I offered as the hangar doors opened again.

"Let's get to the tunnel," I addressed to the group, Steve sweeping May into his arms with a surprised squeak from her, and me guiding Tevan and Peter.

Jemma was waiting with Dr. Fine to do a full triage, but Trip did a great job initially bandaging them. When the civilians were out of ear shot, I turned to our teams.

"Debrief, right now," I spoke softly from where we were huddled in the hallway.

"Ballistics will match Hydra's gun of choice, a .40 caliber semi-automatic. Simple knockout gas. They weren't expecting them to fight back," He spoke softly as I felt my lip curl in disgust. Taking a 13 year old boy and his aunt? Only Hydra would stoop so low to get back at us.

"No prints from what locals were saying, but there was a calling card on their fridge that said, "Open me.". We knew it seemed off because it looked like it was written in blood. There was a USB attached to it," LT explained.

"This was it," Daisy muttered, as she handed me the tablet.

"You ran a check that it won't broadcast?"

"Did that while we were still in Queens. Didn't want to risk it here. I took that screenshot and dumped the drive. There was nothing else on it," She explained as I read the picture of the electronic note.

I underestimated the Captain's Widow, she has a heart after all.

But you can't save everyone.

You have something of mine, and I will get it back.

My blood ran cold, as I put a hand to my stomach, "That's impossible. He should have been dead by now. Or over 120 years old."

"Who?" Steve asked, reading the note.

"HERMES, pull up an archive image of Dr. Werner Reinhardt, 1945," I barked at the tablet, feeling my heart racing. The black and white image came up, as I said, "Run facial recognition."

"100% match for Dr. Daniel Whitehall," HERMES responded after a minute, a modern picture of Werner in the side-by-side window.

"Mother FUCKER!" I swore, throwing my fist at the brick wall. I was glad Peter was in the other room with May, and hopefully he didn't hear my outburst. I pulled back as the dust settled, seeing several chunks falling

"What is it? Who is Whitehall?" Steve asked as I paced, feeling my breathing coming faster, holding my hand as it healed.

"I…I-" I stopped myself, holding two fingers to my neck and breathing deeply. Natasha came out of nowhere at my outburst, running over to me and getting me to sit on a chair. She was murmuring over and over to "Think of white buildings, with blue roofs. Crystal blue water."
"Blue… water," I echoed, trying to keep my breathing even.

"Rocky hills that go on for miles, the little town square with brightly colored chairs. The church bells ringing over the rooftops," She kept going, as I felt my heartbeat mellowing as I thought of my little slice of paradise.

"The café where you could sit for hours," Her voice got softer, "Where you could turn off and just… be."

"Alone in a sea of people," I whispered, as Bucky kneeled down beside my chair.

"Does this happen a lot?" He questioned Nat.

"No, but if we don't get it under control fast, it usually gets violent," She spoke softly as Phil came out from getting Tevan's official statement, "She feels like she can't breathe and will do worse than a few broken bricks to get outside."

"Another?" He asked her, but I had my eyes closed already.

"Does he look familiar?" Daisy asked and Phil sighed, "Yes, unfortunately."

"Okay, this time, he dies," I snarled, looking to Daisy, "Run a face trace."

She responded with a nod as Brock turned to me, "No need, I know where he is. He runs the Hydra base in Chicago, and their… academy."

"Did you know who he was?" I asked, still breathing deeply. He shook his head, "I didn't think there was anyone else like you, that couldn't age. I should have looked into him, I'm sorry Colonel."

"Rumlow, even I'm not perfect. Case in point," I gestured to the worried people surrounding me, "You couldn't have known about him if he took a different name, but the last time I saw him, he was an old man and wheelchair bound."

"How does he look young again then?" Phil asked, confused.

"I have no idea. But I'll get it out of him before I rip his spine from his body," I growled, before giving Peter a wave through the window. He smiled, reassured that I was still here.

"Mom, maybe you should get some rest," Phil suggested, and I nodded, "As soon as they are settled. Can someone take Tevan home in the morning?"

"I can Colonel," Brock volunteered, "I'll land at JFK and get a rental. Where do you want him?"

"Hospital first to see his Mom. I'll call local police and see if they can post someone at her door and he'll stay there. If not, take him to the Brownstone. He'll be safe there until we can set up a safe house for them."

"Well, it was almost a quiet week," Phil smiled ruefully and I rolled my eyes at my son.

"I knew it was too quiet."
Chapter Forty Two

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! Second chapter for today, so enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

The next morning, Steve went for his run as usual. I however, was not prepared to see Bucky standing in the doorway when I rolled out of bed for my own workout. I smiled at him when I got over my initial shock, "Morning."

"You looked, peaceful," He said softly.

"I'm surprised I even slept last night," I commented, getting up and stretching. I cracked my back and groaned in relief, moving to grab some work out clothes. Bucky stood there watching me, so I gave a coy smile, "I'm about to get undressed, so if you want to see the goods, you're okay to stand there and watch."

He blushed slightly, turning his back to me, and saying, "Steve wanted me to keep an eye on you this morning."

"Well, it's not like you haven't seen any of it before," I joked, pulling my tank top off and easing myself out of the nursing bra. I hissed as I rubbed my back where it had been rubbing and pulled on the sports bra I had pulled out. I saw movement in my peripheral vision and smiled as I caught him sneaking a peek. He blushed, turning back as I said; "It's okay if you want to look. I don't mind."

"I just wanted to see if… If you still looked like in my memories."

"Ah. Well, with this belly," I smiled, patting it as he looked at me, "I won't look like what you remember. But when this little girl has vacated my body, I should bounce back pretty quickly. Is that another way to reassure yourself that it isn't a dream, or something Hydra is making you see?"

"Yes," He said, looking back as I pulled on the stretchy running pants.

"Then feel free to look at me whenever you need. You can touch too, I won't bite," I smiled, pulling the loose t-shirt over my head. Piling my hair on top of my head in a messy bun, I walked over, offering my arms. He nodded, letting me initiate a hug. I sniffed his hair and asked, "I don't mean to offend you, but when was the last time you had a washed your hair?"

"Uh…" He trailed off, looking to be in deep concentration when I pulled back.

"Did they ever let you clean yourself?" I asked softly.

"No, I was just hosed off. Last actual bath I had was maybe… right before the train. And I haven't done more than wipe myself down. I didn't want to screw up the arm with a shower."

I hummed, gently reaching up to touch his hair, "Would you mind if I helped you wash it? Long hair needs a little more care. I don't want you getting your hair caught in the plates of your fingers."
"How?" He asked, and I smiled, "Our shower has a spot that you can sit, and a shower head that is on a hose of sorts. You don't have to get undressed."

He looked contemplative for a moment but I continued.

"Only if you want to. You can think about it, but right now I need to go do my treadmill walk. How I long for a day when I can run the National Mall again," I sighed, grabbing my runners and socks.

Bucky was quiet, but followed me to the gym. He looked at the equipment, and several of the agents present using them. My family was already there and working, giving me a quick wave as they kept up their sparring and training. Natasha was showing Daisy a few new moves on Brock, who took it like a champ. Bucky was still quiet when I got off the treadmill, observing the people around him. They were looking over at him every once and awhile, but wisely decided not to keep staring.

As we got up to the apartment, I grabbed a new change of clothes for myself, and looked at Bucky expectantly. He nodded, "Okay."

"Even if it's just your hair, that's still a good step," I smiled, but his hand reached out to grab me as I turned. I looked back to see him looking at me, an intense burning in his eyes.

I set him up in the shower, draping a few towels over his shoulders to keep his clothes dry. He kept his head tilted back as I lathered his hair with suds, gently massaging his scalp.

"Does it bother you, the length?" I asked, seeing his eyes were still closed peacefully.

"Not really. I can push it out of my line of sight, but they had me wear goggles so it didn't bother me on missions," He explained, as I rinsed his scalp. I pulled a bottle of deep conditioner out from under the sink and said, "This will make is softer, help heal any damaged ends and promote growth. Would you want to cut it, or grow it out?"

"I don't know."

"It's okay to not have an answer to every question," I smiled, massaging the new formula in. I heard the door open and Steve call out for me.

"In here Darling," I responded, still massaging Bucky's scalp. I saw Steve's head pop through the door and smile at us, "This looks like fun."

"I asked if I could wash his hair. But now, I'm enjoying the blissed out look on his face too much to stop," I smiled. Bucky looked over at Steve and asked, "How was your run?"

"It was good. Sam says hi."

"Did he have any more choice words about the car? It's been a month and he is still complaining," I teased, making Steve chuckle.

"I'd only get to hear what he was saying as I lapped him," He grinned, "So I missed parts. Mainly he was yelling that I had an unfair advantage."

"Steve Rogers, you are a little shit," I smiled seriously, making Bucky laugh lightly.

"I can't help it. I need some form of entertainment in life," He said, setting the cover down on the toilet seat and sitting to watch us.

"Did they shave you?" Steve asked, seeing the difference between Bucky's stubble and hair length.
"And waxed."

"Yeegh," I shuddered, "Last time I had to groom myself as far as unwanted hair, which because my hair grows so slowly I haven't needed to do anything for 5 years, I got it waxed. It felt like someone was branding the surface of my skin. My whole body felt like it was on fire, and trust me, I know exactly how that feels. What poor soul had to do that? Please tell me you punched them. I miss that chest hair."

"No," He smiled, "I was restrained. Less hair made… made the chair more effective. They didn't mind the length of the hair on my head though, so they neglected it."

I began rinsing his hair, humming to him lightly as I towel dried it, before asking Steve to pass me the hairdryer. After a few minutes of gently teasing it, it was now in a more natural style, and Bucky looked like a new man. I ushered him up to go look in the mirror, watching his astonishment.

"I look different," He commented after a minute of studying his appearance, and I smiled, "You look different. But underneath, you are still the same man. Not the Winter Soldier, not Hydra's fist. Just a kid from Brooklyn."

"I'm a monster Beth. No amount of changing the outside will take away what I've done."

"Bucky, we love you. We know everything you did, everything they made you do, and we still want you in our lives. You're our family. Till the end of the line, I am yours and you are mine," I spoke gently, holding his jaw in my hands, "No matter how you feel about yourself at the end of the day, you aren't going to lose us over it. Do you hate me, or think I'm a monster after knowing I've killed more people than you have?"

"No."

"I wasn't forced to do it, but you were. And you weren't forced to be honest with us, or show us affection. You could have said no to me washing your hair, but you trusted me. Your hug last month, felt like the world had been lifted off my shoulders."

"It doesn't feel like much," He shrugged, "But it's something I can control."

"Well, we don't want to control you, I hope you know that. I just want to make you feel safe and comforted," I said, before asking, "Now, would you like some breakfast?"

"Yeah," He smiled. I offered him my hand and he took it gently.

"If you sit in the living room with Steve, I'll quickly get myself ready," I smiled at him in the reflection of the mirror. He nodded, leaving the room with Steve, who quickly kissed my forehead. It took about five minutes for me to shower, and another five to fix my hair for the day and do my makeup. Steve switched places with me, telling Bucky that he'd be there soon.

"HERMES, please direct May and Peter to the lounge when they wake up," I spoke up as we left the apartment.

"I shall Ma'am."

"What do you feel like for breakfast? Wait! I know what I can make," I smiled at him, "And Peter loves it."

Bucky let me do my thing, putting bacon into the oven for my intended breakfast creation. Just as I finished washing my hands, I heard my tablet buzzing on the counter.
"Ma'am, incoming call from the Playground. Agent Billy Koenig," HERMES said, and I sighed, pulling my phone from my back pocket, "Answer on my phone."

"Agent Koenig," I answered, "How can I help you today?"

"I would like to report that the Fridge is now secure and operational. And I've alerted our liaison at the CIA for approval of transport of SHIELD prisoners from Gitmo."

"Wonderful news. Thank you Billy. I know you are going through a difficult time, but I appreciate yours, LT's and Sam's dedication under grief."

"It's what Eric would have wanted, and it's what I want. We honor him by making sure SHIELD runs smoothly," He answered.

"Well, you'll be happy to know we dropped Ward of at Gitmo before we came back from New Mexico. He's exactly where he belongs, behind bars. And soon he will be under our careful watch."

"Thank you Ma'am. That is a comfort."

"Alright, I've got an APB for the rest of our bases, Dr. Daniel Whitehall. We believe he is the new Hydra head. At least a high ranking official who runs Chicago and the Hydra Preparatory Academy."

"Agent Rogers, the younger that is, already sent it out."

"Smart girl. Alright, concentrate our search on him. He tried to take out my godson because I have something he wants."

"...You that be the 0-8-4 in the Cerberus Vault, Ma'am?" He asked quietly, obvious that he had done his research into the SHIELD archives.

"Yes."

"I will call with any update."

The line cut out and I turned back to my preparation for breakfast. Bucky was sitting patiently at the island, watching me. I smiled, "Do you mind if I put on some music?"

He shook his head, "Play away."

"HERMES, The Peter Playlist please," I asked my tablet. Sounds of Fall Out Boy started playing as I grabbed bowls and started pulling out ingredients. Once my batter was made, and the bacon was cooking in the oven, I started grabbing plates. One metal hand and a flesh one came out to take the stack from my hands, "Here."

"You don't have to, I'm not an invalid," I said, moving to grab glasses.

"This is something I can do," He said and I nodded, "If you are sure."

"I am," He confirmed.

I didn't argue after that, setting up the flat top with little difficulty. Bucky was setting the table when Steve came in, looking refreshed.

"Alright my troll, do you want coffee?" I smiled at him, and he laughed, "Please."
"Bucky?"

"Uh, sure?" He questioned. I poured two mugs, pulling out the milk and sugar in case Bucky might want it. Steve placed a small spoon of sugar in his, taking a small sip to test the flavor. He hummed in appreciation, "Thanks Doll."

"You're welcome knucklehead," I teased him, pushing Bucky's mug towards him.

"Thanks Beth," He smiled softly at me.

"You're welcome Sweetie," I responded, moving back to grab the bacon from the oven. When I looked back, Bucky was taking a tentative sip, before his face relaxed. This was the first time he had accepted coffee, unsure of how he would like our stronger version. I kept working, noticing my body wanted something savory, not sweet this morning. I groaned under my breath, and kept making Peter's favourite, cooking up sausages and eggs as well.

"This is not an everyday thing," I sighed to Steve as he moved to help me cut up fruit.

"I had a feeling. This is a lot of work for one person," He agreed, slicing up watermelon into cubes, before starting on the cantaloupe. I grabbed a packet from the freezer, popping the food into the microwave. Steve noticed, but pressed his lips together in a smile, choosing not to bring up my odd choice.

"Aunt Liz?" I heard from the doorway. I put my spatula down to go hug Peter tightly.

"Hey buddy, is Aunt May up?"

"She said I could walk here on my own, she was just getting ready. Her ankle was a little swollen. What are you making?" He asked as I heard a few voices coming from down the hall.

"What do I always make you?" I smiled, seeing his eyes light up much like Tony's, "BACON PANCAKES?"

"Of course. My brave man deserves them. Go sit at the table and I'll bring yours over."

"Did I hear bacon pancakes?" Daisy asked, skidding to a stop in the kitchen a moment later.

"Yes. Sit down, Gramps has the coffee pot," I smiled as she kissed my cheek. Mel, Phil and Natasha were the next to arrive, Brock and Sharon talking as they walked in a minute later with Trip, Jemma, Tevan and May trailing behind them.

"Alright. This is the last time for a while that I am making a big breakfast. If you want to eat in the morning, you make something yourself in here, or you go to the cafeteria," I said as the microwave beeped at me.

"How was your sleep?" I asked May, hugging her good morning.

"I can't say I got much. I just kept thinking about how close they had been."

"I know. It's why I want to set you up at another apartment, with more security. But we can talk about that later. Let's eat," I said, directing her to the free chair beside Peter.

"Everyone, while I have your attention because I'm holding the food hostage," I joked, "I'd like to introduce you to Tevan Jefferies, May Parker and Peter Parker. Many of the ladies met May and Peter at the baby shower."
"Hello," Peter waved at the table.

"Tevan is my CI in Queens, but he'll be returning there to be with his mom. Many of you know May and Peter already. May is the sister in law of my best friend, Mary Parker. And Peter is Mary's son, my godson. They will be with us for a bit."

"Thank you, for coming for us," May smiled to Steve, Trip and Mel.

"Always," Steve nodded to her.

"Thank you," Tevan nodded as well, "I hope I can pay it forward one day."

"Right after college," Steve smiled, and Tevan scoffed, "Yeah, I guess."

"You promised college first, young man. Alright, here is the food," I announced, bringing over a few plates, "Pass them around, more is in the warming drawer."

As the rabble descended up on the food, I heard Daisy quietly singing, "Makin' pancakes, makin' bacon pancakes."

"Take some bacon and I'll put it in a pancake. Bacon pancakes, that's what its gonna make, bacon pancaaaaaakes!" Peter finished singing, making her laugh along with the adults.

"I like you kid. You know your stuff," She smiled at him, looking intently at his eyes.

"Thanks. Aunt Liz says I know all the best things," He smiled and I laughed, "Because all the best things happened before you were born, and I'm just passing on pieces of the past. But that song will live in infamy forever."

She must have figured out why they looked so familiar, suddenly looking up at me in shock. I narrowed my eyes and shook my head. I saw the understanding in her eyes that she'd be given an explanation later. I grabbed my food from the microwave, biting into it with a moan of approval, before sitting at the table to grab actual breakfast food.

"Uh, Mom?" Phil asked, as I kept munching away.

"What?" I asked around a mouthful of food. Just because my mother wanted a little lady, didn't mean the manners actually followed me through the years.

"Why are you eating Pizza Pockets?" He questioned, making the table look at me.

"Blame her," I said, pointing at my stomach, and polishing off the first one.

"Wait, Mom?" Peter asked, and I sighed.

"Buddy, could we talk about that after breakfast? It's a long story."

Peter had decided he wanted to tail me today, to explore the base. I was a little more worried about their safety once they left here, so I didn't mind the shadow. After that kind of scare, I could understand why Peter would want to stick close. I, humbly, was his symbol of protection in this world, and he knew how dangerous my line of work could get. But after we sent Peter off with Steve and Phil for a quick distraction as they filled him in on things and Brock took Tevan back to Queens, I told my family how I was actually related to Peter.

But they understood my final warning, "That is a story for May and I to tell."
"I think..." May started, "I think he needs to know. Now, before something happens."

I nodded at her, understanding her train of thought. _Before Hydra comes after him again, or someone equally as bad._

My shadow would ask me questions, as I checked in with the communications lab and the science lab. I walked outside of Fitz' lab to see it empty for once, of anyone save for Fitz himself, him playing on the tablet with a bored expression. A stack of magazines on the one desk as well as an iPod that looked familiar, knowing if I turned it over it would have Natasha's symbol of an hourglass on it.

I tapped at the windowed door lightly and not unlike a fish, he tensed, looking for the source of the noise. I gave a small wave and gestured towards the door.

"Who's that Aunt Liz? He looks sad," Peter questioned, "Did he break his arm?"

"Yes he did," I said, as Fitz nodded.

"Good morning. Don't get up. I have a shadow today. Do you mind if he comes in?" I asked popping my head in the door.

"That's... that's..." Fitz stopped, breathing deeply before gesturing for us to come in. Peter followed me in, standing beside me.

"This is my godson, Peter. He and his aunt will be here for awhile but we can fill you in later. I came to ask you if you had given some thought to my offer. It's okay if you are still thinking," I assured Fitz, while Peter wandered over to see Fitz's cast.

"I... I..." He stopped, typing on the tablet and turning it around. Still thinking.

"Absolutely. I just wanted to see if you were in good spirits today. I see Agent Romanoff has dropped off a few things to pass the time."

"It's... hard... to..." He made a motion with his non-casted hand as if he was reading a book.

"Is it the lack of arm, or the words?" I asked.

"B...both," He deflated as Peter peeked over his sling.

"Peter," I chided him, making him back up, "Sorry Aunt Liz."

"He's... just... cur...curious," Fitz got out, giving Peter a smile.

"How did you break it? Fighting bad guys?" Peter asked, and I smiled as Fitz blushed.

"Do you mind if I tell him?" I asked Fitz. He shook his head, as I looked at Peter, "So, Hydra had this mean guy undercover on Phil's team, and he was told to hurt Dr. Fitz and his best friend, Dr. Simmons."

"Dr. Jemma?" Peter asked, and I nodded, "But Dr. Fitz here, hid them in a med pod. They got ejected from the plane over the ocean, but instead of it floating like it was supposed to, it sank. He used an EKG machine to send a signal for help to come get them at the bottom of the ocean. But they still had to get to the surface. So with a broken arm, he rigged up enough air for Dr. Jemma, so she could get to the surface."

"But what about you?" Peter asked Fitz.
"Not… strong… swim… swimmer," He said, and I laid a hand on his shoulder, giving him a reassuring smile.

"A friend of ours picked them up and now Dr. Fitz has trouble putting words together. So we can't ask too many questions. He's still healing."

"What kind of doctor are you?" He asked, and Fitz looked up at me in a panic.

"Try. You won't know unless you try," I said gently. Fitz took a deep breath, licking his lips and thinking hard about making his mouth form the word.

"Engi… engine… engineer..rrr," He got out, and I smiled as Peter lit up.

"That's so cool! Dr. Jemma wanted to introduce me to you the last time we were here, but we had to go home pretty early the next day. Hey, can I sign your cast?" Peter asked and I chuckled, "Peter, he hardly knows you."

"That's… o…kay," Fitz said, using his other hand to pull down the sling. I saw Daisy and Jemma's handiwork, and laughed.

"Did they leave the pens?" I asked, and he nodded, pointing towards the desk drawers. Pulling open the drawer, I found a couple different colors and handed them across the desk to Peter. Peter diligently started drawing, looking up thoughtfully once or twice in contemplation, but Fitz and I were unable to read it from that angle.

"What have you drawn?" I asked, coming over to the side Peter was occupying. It looked backwards, but once I flipped the image in my mind, I kissed the back of his head, "You got it right."

Fitz looked confused but I shook my head that it was all right. When Peter finished, he smiled at his work and recapped the last pen, "All done."

"Should we tell him?" I teased, seeing Fitz panicking.

"He should see it next time he finds a mirror," Peter laughed.

"It's a backwards message," I finally explained to Fitz, seeing a small mirror under the stack of magazines. I walked over, pulling it out for him to take. He held it up to his arm, angling it so he could see the message. His face softened seeing Peter's message.

"You saved your friend from the bad guys, using your head, not your muscles. You're a hero. I hope when I grow up, I can be as brave as you," Peter smiled when Fitz looked up from the message's reflection.

**Dr. Fitz is a hero!**

Fitz gave Peter a small smile, "Th...than... thank... you."

"No problem," Peter beamed, tucking himself to my side. As I spotted a piece of artwork on Fitz's inner bicep area, a knock came from the door. I turned to see Jemma smiling, "Dr. Fine asked me to bring you for a check up. He heard about your panic attack last night and isn't happy."

"Who told him," I sighed, knowing I was going to have the book thrown at me.

"I'm afraid that would be Captain Rogers."

"I'm gonna kill that man myself," I muttered, making Peter laugh.
"Alright, let's go. Do you want to see the baby?" I asked Peter, whose jaw dropped, "That would be so cool!"

"And maybe after Jemma can show you around engineering. She knows a lot of what goes on in there because she and Dr. Fitz have been working together for years," I explained, ushering Peter towards the door. Peter smiled and waved at Fitz, "Can I come visit you sometime? We are going to be here for awhile."

Fitz looked surprised and nodded, "Y… yes."

"I think he would like that very much," Jemma smiled, "You can show him what you know. Peter is very smart Fitz. He may give you a run for your money when you are feeling better."

Fitz gave a smile to Peter, who blushed, "Not super smart or anything."

"Oh come now Peter, no more self deprecating talk. You are very smart for your age. Fitz here was the same, or so his mother tells me," Jemma said, offering a hand to Peter and giving Fitz a wave goodbye, "Is it okay if I come see you later?"

He nodded, as I patted his good shoulder gently, "Remember to think about it."

"I… I… w.. will," He nodded, moving to grab Natasha's iPod.

"I hope you like the music. It's actually very big that she let that be used by another person. Someone's music says a lot about who they are and their thoughts. A woman's music library is even more personal," I smiled as he looked at it in wonder.

"It's true," Jemma smiled at him, "She must really like you."

Fitz looked like we had smacked him upside the head, confused as he stared at the iPod. We left him quietly, and I saw a ghost of a smile as we walked past his window. Jemma directed Peter and I downstairs a floor, to where Dr. Fine had set up an ultrasound machine, but was nowhere to be seen.

"Mrs. Parker stopped him and asked if he needed any help while they were here," Jemma said, as I laid down on the bed, Peter standing on the other side as I lifted my shirt for the ultrasound.

"She's got a sprained ankle. What does she think she'll be able to do?"

"Who knows. She is almost as stubborn as yourself Colonel."

"And I'm not nearly as bad as Peggy," I sighed as the door opened.

"Hey," Steve's voice sounded as he came in the room.

"You are dead," I teased, with narrowed eyes.

"I'm just worried about her," He said, standing behind Peter with a hand on his shoulder. Peter watched as Jemma squirted the gel on my stomach, but I was still looking at Steve. "If I felt something was wrong, I would have come. The attack wasn't any longer than two minutes, and she was kicking normally. The serum would have protected her anyways."

"Never hurts to be cautious," He pointed out.

"Darling, you are the complete opposite of cautious," I teased.

"The Colonel is right, this little girl is healthy," Jemma smiled at us, as Dr. Fine came in.
"Looking good," He nodded in confirmation. Fine asked Jemma to take a couple measurements and Peter got to see her kicking.

"She looks like an alien," He whispered to Steve, who laughed, "Yes, but she will look much prettier when she's fully grown."

I saw Brock waving at us through the window, pointing to Bucky at the door. I beckoned him in, but he shook his head, and continued watching from the door.

I couldn't help the sting of rejection, blinking as my smile fell. He was trying to distance himself after our conversation this morning. Steve sensed my mood change, looking over to Bucky as I looked back at the monitor. Fine got my attention, "What brought on your panic attack?"

"A number of things. Peter and his Aunt almost being kidnapped. My CI's mom got shot as he got Peter and May out of there and we didn't know if she would make it. And then I got a calling card from someone I thought was long dead. He knows I have something he wants and is willing to hurt and threaten more people to get it."

"Alright, from now on, you either need to be on bed-rest or strictly at your desk," He said and I just about complained, when he continued, "In any case this is what I would press. Stress is not good for any baby, even a super soldier serum enhanced one. I'd like you on administrative only, with Deputy Director Rogers taking over the operations until after she is born."

"You understand we just got SHIELD running again, I can't pull back now," I argued.

"You need to. You need to think of what is good for this baby first. I know SHIELD has always been your first born, but you need to let go of the reins until she is out safely, or we find a way to strap you to a bed for your own good," He said, and I just about snarled in frustration.

"Am I clear, Colonel?" He asked, eyes hard.

"You know I agree with him," Steve said, when I looked to him for support.

"Okay, now it's Gang Up on Elizabeth Day," I muttered, but bit out, "Alright. I am not using a wheelchair though. I can walk just fine and I do need some exercise. It's not like I'm doing a marathon by walking around base at penguin speed."

"Fine, but I want you in here next week. And any twinge-"

"Yeah, yeah, my shadow here will be your snitch," I teased, looking at Peter. He laughed, glad that my tense mood had passed. He didn't like confrontation.

"We might have 3 weeks to go, but I don't want to take any chances," Fine said honestly. I nodded, as Jemma cleaned my stomach, "I just want her healthy. I could care less about my health, but I don't want to compromise hers."

"I'm sure Bucky would love to keep an eye on you," Steve smiled as I noticed said man coming to stand at Steve's side. I hadn't heard the door open, but smiled brightly at him, "I would love that. If he's up for it. I've been told I'm a handful."

"I can help!" Peter perked up.

"Couldn't think of two better people to keep an eye on her for me during the day," Steve said, ruffling Peter's hair lightly. Peter laughed and started to fix it, but I took over, pushing it back into his normal style.
"We don't mess with the hair," I teased Steve.

"Alright, go sit down somewhere," Fine said, shooing us out. As I got my shirt back in place, Bucky offered his hand to help me off the table. I took it gently, scooting off and huffing, "I feel like I'm the size of a house."

"Definitely not," Steve said, smiling at me as Bucky shyly offered his arm.

"Thanks Jemma. See you at dinner."

"Where to next Aunt Liz?"

"How about my office? I can show you my holotable," I smiled, as Steve led Peter away from the room we just exited.

"That would be so cool. Come on Uncle Steve!" Peter started tugging Steve's hand enthusiastically.

May came around a corner, greeting Peter and Steve as she hobbled along. Peter started telling May about the baby as they walked further ahead of Bucky and I.

"Thank you, for coming in," I said softly to him as we walked. He looked at me and said, "I never want to be the reason you look that hurt. I don't want to hurt you like that, ever."

"But if you don't want to do something, I have to accept that," I said, watching Peter and Steve laugh ahead of us. I was so glad Peter wasn't scarred after his experience last night, but I knew it would put May on edge for awhile to come. Losing Richard and Mary, and then her husband… She would rather she was the one that got hurt, than lose Peter.

"But, you just want to include me. I was being… emo," He said, making me snort.

"Where did you learn that word?" I asked.

"Internet," He replied and I chuckled.

"I do want to include you, but I would never force you."

He was quiet a moment more, watching Peter and Steve. He whispered, "He's gonna be a great Dad."

"I think so too. He's always been great with kids," I smiled, before adding, "I think you'll be great too."

"No, I think I'll scare them more than anything."

"I highly doubt that, but that's my opinion. How was your time with Dr. Garner?"

"He's... nice. Doesn't pry. Small questions, and asks me to explain my answers."

"He's assessing you, seeing where your limits are," I explained, "Wondering what might make you react."

"It's easier to talk about it than it was. I'm remembering more."

"That's good."

"Aren't you curious?" He asked me and I smiled as I said, "Yes, but you'll tell me when you are
ready. You should know better than to bait a Stark."

"Bait?"

"Baiting. You've put a little bit of information out, thinking that you might get me to bite. You are fishing and instead of trying to lure me in slowly, you better just tell me if you want me to know. If you don't want to talk, I can wait until you are ready."

He was quiet a moment before he laughed once.

"What?" I asked, amused.

"Sometimes Steve and I would forget who really… held command in our relationship. Clearly it was, and has always been, you."

"I'm bossy, I know," I teased myself, as I watched Steve call an elevator ahead. I made a motion that we would catch up, so he didn't hesitate to usher May and Peter into the opening doors.

"No, you know how to get right to the point. And you kept Steve and I in line. Or you did," He smiled, "Some of your stories of the last year…"

"Ah yes, our idiot of a husband," I chuckled, seeing Steve look back at me with narrowed and playful eyes for the comment.

"You know it's true," I teased at normal volume, seeing him roll his eyes in response, before turning back to Peter and May as the elevator doors closed.

"We had vows, didn't we?" He asked softly. I nodded with a sad smile as we caught the second elevator, "Yeah. Ours were just the three of us back in the London apartment."

"Even if Steve is technically your husband, he's also mine… unofficially."

"Not by the letter of the law, but in our hearts and to each other. People these days… while you can't be married to more than one person legally still, you can have a commitment ceremony."

"What's that?" He asked as Hermes announced, "Level Six."

"Basically a wedding but without an officiate, were you pledge yourselves to each other in front of friends and family. Like we did in London, but with witnesses," I spoke gently as we walked towards my office. He nodded, remaining silent.

"Would you want that?"

I turned to him in surprise at his question, seeing the apprehension on his face as he waited for my answer.

"Maybe. It's more for others, to show them how serious we are. We already know we love each other. I would quote Howard but that would apply to an official wedding."

"What did your brother say?" He asked, intrigued.

"Every time I asked him when he was going to settle down and quit being a man whore he would say, "It's just a piece of paper." And then I would proceed to beat it into him that he shouldn't waste a single moment with someone he really cares about. You never know when you might lose them."

Bucky looked at me sadly and I gave him a smile, "I got cynical for quite a few years. Didn't want to
replace either of you, but even though Howard was looking for Steve still, I had an anger… a fury that couldn't be quenched. It's why they fear me,” I spoke softly, looking at the agents we passed in the hall, giving me a nod.

"They respect you, just like the Commandos,” He argued.

"People fear what they can't explain. I should be dead. Hell, we all should be. And it isn't my youthful glow or rank they respect."

"What is it then?"

"It's that at any given moment, I could break a desk in half or rip someone's head clean off. You walk into HQ covered in blood enough, people will avoid your company," I shrugged, seeing Bucky's horrified look.

"You did what?"

"I didn't gain the codename Athena because I was in the War. I gained it because I became war itself. The embodiment of the part of it that men feared; their death."

"You never thought of leaving, just… having a quiet life?" He asked. I shook my head, "No. A quiet life wasn't in the cards for me, even if you both had survived. I knew that even with the War ending, I was going to be needed again. I took my time though. I couldn't stay oblivious forever. Tim wouldn't let me."

"Dugan?" He asked and I nodded smiling.

"He dropped in unannounced and told me to pack my bags. He said, "Liz, I mean no disrespect, but get off your ass. The meek won't inherit the earth, the warriors will.""

"What's that mean?" He asked, not understanding the paraphrasing Tim used of the Bible.

"It meant that I was needed. I couldn't sit on my ass and wait for someone to call me for my help. I had to quit feeling sorry for myself and get home. The war for true peace, wasn't over. My gut told me so when Peggy and Howard brought me the idea to form SHIELD."

"There's a mini fridge in here?" I heard Peter's voice from where he, May and Steve had entered my office.

"Will we ever get to retire?" Bucky asked seriously.

"You could. You could just be free, and relax for once in your life. But we both know that knucklehead in there won't retire until he's dead."

He chuckled, "True. Even then he'd still probably try and fight the Reaper."

I laughed, scaring one of the agents down the hall as I wiped my eyes of laughter tears.

"It's so true."

"Ha ha," Steve scowled as we walked into my office.

"Darling, you know it's true. You are so full of ‘fight me’ it's not even funny."

Peter looked a bit sad for a moment and I questioned him softly, "What's wrong buddy?"
"Aunt Liz, was this like the Expo? Did Mrs. Jefferies get hurt, because of me?" He asked with watering eyes.

"No," I spoke firmly, sitting down and taking his hands, "And the Expo wasn't your fault either."

"You are so very special to me, so important. These men, they are bad guys. Just like in your comic books. They hurt people because they don't care about them. Mrs. Jefferies got hurt because they didn't want her coming after them with her wooden spoon. That thing is a weapon all on its own."

Peter gave a small laugh, but it didn't quite reach his eyes. May and I locked eyes and without a word being spoken, we knew that it was time. I'm sorry Mary.

"Peter, you remember when your parents… when they told you that Richard wasn't your biological father."

"Yeah, but he's still my Dad," He said, laying a hand over his heart in muscle memory.

"Exactly. You see, your mother, she met your biological father one night. And the next morning, she didn't really remember their meeting very well."

"Was she drinking?" He asked seriously, and I smirked, "Yeah. You're mom was a lightweight at times."

"So, I was a mistake?"

"No, god no. Peter, never ever think that. Your parents loved you with everything they had. No, I was trying to explain that she didn't know who it was she went home with, until after she learned she was pregnant. We learned that a few weeks later when we retraced her steps."

"So, you know my real Dad," He blanched. I nodded, "Yes."

"Why… why now?"

"Because while your mother wanted us to wait until you were fifteen… The last 24 hours have made it very clear that we were fooling ourselves in trying to keep you hidden from the world, without you knowing the reason why."

"Why hidden?" He questioned.

"Because you are the only child of my nephew, Tony Stark."

Peter went even whiter, sitting on the coffee table as he said, "Wow."

"I know that's a lot to take in. But think about how many enemies your Dad has, and then how many I have. Every single one of them would love to find a weakness of ours to exploit. You are that weakness Peter. The men that wanted to kidnap you, work for Hydra, who knows that I was very good friends with your parents and that you are my godson."

Peter was quiet a moment, studying my eyes softly. He looked over at Steve and to May, whose eyes were overflowing with tears of guilt and fear. This could either go well or it could go horribly wrong. We could gain Peter's trust back, or lose him forever.

He looked back at me and took a deep breath.

"Does he know?"
"No."

"He doesn't know I exist?" He asked confused.

"No. And for a handful of very good reasons. Peter, what impression do you get from my- from Tony, from the news and tabloids?"

He looked thougtful for a moment before answering, "Impulsive."

"Yes. And his track records with relationships?"

"None, but… Miss Potts."

"And that took years. My nephew… your father, refused to talk to me for years because he felt I could have prevented his parents death or the fact that I survived out of the three somewhat stable adults in his life. He wouldn't have believed me, and he wouldn't have been ready to be a father. He still isn't in a lot of aspects. He holds grudges easily, he flies off the handle and he, like your Uncle Steve, jumps without grabbing a parachute. All of those things have made him enemies. And he is Iron Man, pulling even more into his life," I explained.

"But wouldn't he be able to protect me then?" He asked in a small voice.

"Maybe. But like we found out yesterday, even I, your protector, almost couldn't keep you safe. Yesterday was too close Peter."

He furrowed his brow as I stopped talking and looked down at his hands.

"Would he even want me?"

My heart broke for my nephew, carefully lifting his chin so he could see the sincerity in my eyes.

"Tony is a complicated guy. Like me, he doesn't let people close, but when he loves you, you know it. He gives you things, makes you gadgets you didn't ask for, puts up security measures in your home to keep you safe, or even makes you an AI. I know he will be mad at me for the rest of his life for keeping you a secret for so long, but he will love you fiercely if you give him the chance. He's like an onion, he's got layers you've got to peel back. But give him time, once he knows," I smiled warmly, "And just remember, you have more people that love you than you know what to do with. You've got Phil and Daisy now as cousins, your Aunt May, Uncle Steve, Bucky… and me."

His eyes had filled with tears and I used my thumbs to brush them away as they fell to his cheeks. He nodded, launching forward to wrap his arms around my neck tightly.

I hugged him back, rubbing his back gently as I felt his body shake in silent sobs. I gestured for May to come sit beside him. As she did, Peter pulled away to launch himself into her arms. They both sobbed as she quietly spoke into his ear.

"I wanted to tell you so many times. But I didn't want anyone taking you from me. After your Uncle Ben," She sobbed, "I couldn't let anything happen to you. I couldn't lose you too."

"I know," Peter spoke, voice thick with emotion.

"There was another reason I suggested my office as the next stop on our tour," I spoke softly when they separated. May looked resigned as she already knew from our brief phone conversation yesterday my stance on the subject I was about to bring up.
"With Hydra now knowing about your significance in my life, at least as far as being your Godmother Peter, we need you both to go into protection."

"Protection?" He asked, looking at me for an explanation.

"More specifically, you need to stay here. At least until we can track down the man that wanted you kidnapped," I continued, "So that means, you won't be going home."

"What about school, or Aunt May's job?" He asked, and I nodded, "Valid points, but both of your safeties lie with keeping you off the grid. I'll bring in a tutor for you when you want to resume your studies, and you can always learn from our sciences department for a more focused education in that field. May's job at the hospital is the unfortunate caveat. I will have to tell them she's in Witness Protection, and they will know not to release that as public knowledge to anyone outside of Human Resources. Hopefully. If not, we can give her a good word for new employment when you are both safe to return to Queens."

"What about my friends? Ned and I were supposed to go to camp this summer," He frowned.

"Peter," May sighed softly, "This is important. We can't talk to anyone outside of your Aunt's base. No one can know where we are."

"And any electronic interaction with your friends or people you guys know, would put Hydra on our trail. It's better if everyone thinks you've disappeared. If your friend wasn't worried, Hydra would know that he knows something, and they go after him and his family. You don't want that, do you?"

"No," Peter shook his head.

"Then please, try to see if from our view. We want to protect you, and we can't do that if you don't follow the rules here. Believe me, if I could have spared you all of this, I would have in a heartbeat. But I was selfish when I chose to stay in your mothers life. I knew that getting close to people, with Hydra still active, would put them down as weaknesses of mine. And you are my weakness Peter," I sniffled, "Both you and May."

He nodded, and I offered my hand to him. He took it, as I smiled at him, "You're my brave man. Don't you ever change."

"You're my protector, don't you ever leave me behind."

"Never," We promised, giving goofy smiles to ease the mood.

"So, you've seen quite a bit of the base, and we've had our serious talk. Do you want to go pelt some trainees with paintballs?" I offered Peter and his eyes lit up.

"YES!"

"Then let's go," I smiled.
A/N: Hello my faithful readers! So this weeks chapters are a day late. No excuse other than I didn't think they were perfect. You guys deserve the best, and it's what I strive to give you. Okay, there is a little joke in this chapter, and it you catch it, congrats! It was hilarious when my husband's friend said it, and it's still funny today whenever we drive past one.

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers. Or any restaurant chain mentioned in this chapter.

Peter and May settled in quickly, and Peter was actually enjoying doing schoolwork during his summer vacation. Not really school work even. He and Jemma would conduct little experiments and the staff in the labs loved his enthusiasm. Bucky, Steve and Peter would spend time together, to keep him somewhat socialized. May was flourishing in Medical, impressing Dr. Fine thoroughly. She took a week for her ankle before giving her all as a nurse. The hospital May worked at in Queens was surprisingly gracious about the Witness Protection angle, and Peter's school would be alerted when the office reopened for the new school year.

Steve and Bucky were acting rather anxious lately, mainly because I refused to do any more bed rest than I had to, working at my desk most of the day. My due date approached quickly after the events of Queens, the guys keeping a careful watch over me. It was almost comical how they jumped into action when I even so much as frowned, with Bucky sometimes doing his best impression of a statue. Peter spent whatever down time he could, learning about our family, his grandparents and a little bit about his Dad. He learned what his Dad was like as a child, and how he had shut me out of his life after his parents died. He understood why his parents didn't want him to know about their lives at SHIELD until he was 15, like they wanted to wait to reveal his birth father till.

I was having mild contractions for a day or two before my water had broken. It was during a video conference meeting with Phil, Gonzales, Weaver and Calderon, about establishing a team and rotation at the Fridge and getting the Academies running again. Calderon was a thorn, but Gonzales was there to make him less so.

"Phil, take over," I asked my son, getting up and walking calmly towards the door. I was a bit embarrassed that my pants were wet, but I couldn't help it, I was having a baby.

"Colonel, you need a doctor," Anne voiced in shock, concerned over her connection from the science Academy.

"That's where I'm headed. I'm pretty sure the four of you will work things out. Play nice," I said, opening the door and walking out, closing it behind me.

I walked towards the medical labs, nodding to several agents. I was a little mad that the labs were on the other side of the compound, but I was the one that planned out the base, so I had no one but myself to blame. And then Daisy came running around the corner, with Simmons being dragged behind her, running up to me in a panic.
"Let me guess, your Dad told you," I smirked, noting the look on Daisy's face as Simmons noticed my wet pants.

"Is someone bringing me the stretcher I asked for?" Jemma yelled down the hall.

"Where's Dr. Fine?" I asked calmly, as I heard the frantic pounding of feet and something on wheels headed towards us.

"Grandpa is finding him. He was headed out for lunch an hour ago," Daisy said, as the stretcher appeared with May and two other medical personnel. Jemma and May helped me onto it as I breathed deeply.

"And what about your Grandpa Bucky?" I asked, concentrating on the conversation and not my contractions.

"Grandpa was with him when Dad sent the alert out. He clammed up a bit and tried to go back to his room."

"Ask him to come see me," I smiled softly as they wheeled me down the hall. Daisy nodded, running off.

"Director Rogers, around you alright?" Sharon asked as we passed her. She still didn't want to be known as only Peggy Carter's niece, so we still had to pretend she was only a SHIELD agent I had trained.

"Going into labor. See you after," I waved to her.

"Good luck!" She called, with a chuckle at my nonchalant attitude.

Jemma had me set in a private room in the medical wing, and I calmly told her, "If she isn't coming naturally, you might need to tie me down."

"Why?" She asked, confused.

"Because epidurals don't work on me," I explained, and she paled.

"Your body metabolizes it too fast," She realized as Dr. Fine came in.

"Oh boy," May commented, paling a bit.

"Yes, Dr. Fine knows this. He was the one who got to hear me screaming in pain as he untied my tubes," I joked, as Fine gave a dry smile.

"Not the first time I've have someone screaming expletives at me," He said as Steve skidded to a stop at the doorway.

"Did you run all over the base? Dr. Fine was already here," I teased.

"Daisy turned me around from grabbing Bucky, said she would be dragging him down here," He said, coming to take my hand.

"Just calm yourself. Haven't even done an exam yet," I said, breathing through a strong one.

"Let's get you into a gown Colonel," Jemma said, closing the curtain on the room.

"As soon as you're in it, I'll come back in to check on you," Dr. Fine said, leaving the room. Jemma
and Steve helped me out of my wet clothes, sliding the gown overtop of my head just as I heard Daisy's voice outside.

"Grams? I've got Grandpa here," I heard her say. Since they had met, Bucky had become very protective of Daisy

"Just a minute Daisy," I said, as Steve lifted me back onto the bed.

Dr. Fine came in first, giving me an exam, and saying, "You are a stubborn woman Colonel."

"Why?" Steve asked, confused.

"She's 7 cm. Three more and we'll be ready to start pushing," He said, removing his gloves and looking at me seriously, "How long?"

"At least 6 hours ago they got worse… They were light before for a about day, and still felt like Braxton Hicks. Only slightly stronger," I said sheepishly, and Steve gave me a look of disappointment for not telling anybody.

"Well, if it's only 6 hours since they started, I'm guessing the next three are going to move very quickly," He hypothesized, "So we can't do an epidural. Dr. Simmons, let's see how the baby is doing."

"Of course," She said brightly, as I looked at Steve, "Bring him in please. Tell him we would love to have him, but if he doesn't want to, that I'll understand."

"I will," He smiled, kissing my forehead. Jemma and May got me hooked up to the fetal monitor and I breathed through another contraction, barely hearing Steve's voice outside.

A few seconds later, Bucky came through the door, with Steve behind him, looking at me for confirmation.

"Come here," I said, holding out a hand to him. He walked up slowly, taking my hand in his and said, "I didn't know if you wanted me here."

"Of course we do," I smiled at him, "She is yours too."

"We always want you here with us Buck," Steve assured him, taking Bucky's other hand.

"Baby is good, so far I would say a natural birth is highly likely. She's engaged, so it should be smooth sailing from here on out," Fine said, after a minute of reading the paper coming out of the machine.

"Good, because I might tear someone's limbs off if I had to be cut open again."

"Let's get the room prepped just in case. Straps for the Colonel are in that drawer, shield and antiseptic, forceps, the works. I don't want to be caught off guard," Fine spoke to May and Jemma, but I stopped listening as Bucky looked at me.

"Why?" Bucky asked, confused.

"No painkillers work on me. So even if they tried to put the lower half of my body to sleep, it would wear off in minutes," I explained. Steve and Bucky sat down, getting comfortable as we waited. Bucky had expressed to us that the thought of being around a baby made him nervous, and we promised we wouldn't force them on him. But Andrew said now that he had accepted what he had
done, we needed to give him little pushes.

"Have you picked out a name?" He asked softly about 40 minutes later. I was feeling very uncomfortable and I found walking was helping, so Bucky helped me pace the hallway with Steve.

"We had a few boy names picked out first, but now they're to be saved for the next one. I was thinking Robert Grant, or Joseph Buchanan," I said, looking to see Bucky smiling softly at me.

"I thought we said we could name him Alexander, after your Dad?" Steve asked and I shrugged, "After Pierce, I'd rather not."

"If we cut names off the list because someone we don't like has that name, our choices are very limited," Steve pointed out.

"But, no offence Steve, I don't like Grant," Bucky said and I asked, "Why?"

"Ward," He said, and I nodded.

"But Daisy would understand. It's her Grandpa's middle name," I smiled, showing him it was okay. He conceded, as I squeezed his hand in comfort.

"What about a girl name? You know, since it is a girl?" Bucky asked.

"Steve wanted to name her after my Mom, Sophia," I explained, breathing deeply as a contraction started.

"What about a middle name?" Steve asked Bucky, "What does this little girl deserve as a middle name?"

He looked contemplative for a few moments before peering at me shyly. I nodded as tears sprung to my eyes, "Rebecca."

"Sophia Rebecca Marie," Steve said, and I laughed, "That's a lot of names. Why Marie?"

"I just thought it was pretty."

"What about after her Mom?" Bucky suggested, "Elizabeth or Hermione."

"Please, no Hermione. When Natasha learned it, she started calling me Herms. I have never been so mad that my father picked Hermione. AH Margaret, was my- Jesus Christ this hurts. Why was Phil so easy and this baby wants to split me in two?" I gasped.

"Okay... Margaret then," Steve agreed.

"Natalia," I shook my head.

"Sophia Rebecca Margaret Natalia Rogers?" Bucky asked.

"No, I don't want to confuse her with so many middle names. She'll have 15 names if we go down this route. We can use- Oh, I may vomit on this one," I felt all the blood drain from my face as Steve held me steady.

"Bucky, the thing-" Steve motioned to the hospital barf bins, grabbing me one as I prepared to heave. I shook my head as the feeling passed, "Hold onto it though."

"Sophia Rebecca Rogers-Barnes," Steve offered and I nodded, "That is perfect."
Bucky was quiet as I looked up at him. I smiled weakly, "Come on, you didn't think we'd be leaving you out, did you?"

"You really want her to have my last name?"

"Unofficially, I have your last name sweetie. I am Mrs. Elizabeth Rogers-Barnes, in my heart. It may not be her legal name, but she will know, just like Phil, that she has two Daddies that love her and will protect her. Is that okay?"

He looked at me softly, before smiling warmly as he nodded, "That's more than okay."

"How are we doing?" Dr. Fine said meeting us in the hallway.

"Dying slowly, but that's nothing new for me," I joked.

"Are they getting closer together?" He asked.

"I would say so, as well as lasting longer," Steve said and I said, "I didn't know I could throw my voice like that. Oh, oh, FU- Ah!"

"Sorry," Steve chuckled, as I nodded to Dr. Fine through my pain that Steve was right.

"Let's check, shall we?" He said as Bucky started to guide me back to the room.

"Has someone... called Tony?" I wheezed to Steve, who shrugged, "I'll ask Daisy."

Bucky looked down silently as I got on the bed. I lifted his chin and grunted out, "Buck up mister."

He smirked, before the smile fell from his face again. He took a seat, waiting as Dr. Fine gave me another exam. Steve was texting Daisy hopefully. She and Tony were the best of friends now, hacking Hydra together.

"Well," Dr. Fine said, "Our main event has arrived."

"You're kidding," I whispered astonished, "I barely feel anything."

"She's crowning," He explained as the nurse came back into the room, Jemma following her.

"Gown and gloves," He asked May, moving to wash his hands. I took Bucky's metal hand and said, "Don't leave please."

"If you want me here-" He started, looking worried.

"I always want you here," I stated, silencing any excuse.

The next contraction, made me set my head back on the pillow and inhale sharply.

"Ready?" May smiled at us.

"We're ready," Bucky smiled to Steve, who was coming to my other side.

"Oh boy," Steve commented, looking pale. The end of the bed, to make room for Dr. Fine to sit and catch the babies, and my feet were placed in stirrups. I knew they wouldn't hold, so I asked Steve and Bucky, "Can both of you take a leg?"

"How?" Bucky asked, a little confused at the sight of my bare leg. May showed him how to hold it
up and Steve mirrored Bucky's movement, taking my hand. It felt nice to have Bucky's metal arm holding my left leg, because while I wasn't in a lot of pain, I was overheating and it was cool on my skin.

"Alright, let's deliver this little girl. Colonel, on the next contraction, you know what to do."

"Slow and consistent," I nodded as they waited for the machine to tell them when I was ready.

Bearing down, I moaned lowly as I breathed out.

"Nice deep breaths Colonel... and push," Fine said, as I gripped Bucky and Steve's hands a little tighter. It wasn't crazy like it was shown in the movies, as my body knew what to do. The pain was bearable (somewhat) and Steve peered over the sheet a little to see what was happening.

"You might regret that," I whimpered, panting slightly, "You won't want to have sex for a year."

"I doubt that very much," He smiled softly as Fine said, "Another push, now!"

I moaned as I felt my body being torn and simultaneously knitting itself back together. That was true agony, a never ending wound.

"Baby's head is out, one more for the shoulders Colonel... and push."

I closed my eyes as I breathed out, feeling the obstruction being pulled from my birth canal.

"And we have our little girl," Fine announced, pulling her up and over the sheet screen to place her on my chest.

I sobbed in joy, mainly that the pain was over, but seeing my daughter take her first few breaths was magical. Her eyes squeezed shut as she started wailing at the change in temperature.

"Hi, little one," I smiled as I caught my breath, as Jemma and May cleaned up the squalling mess. Bucky looked ready to pass out, but smiled at me.

"Who wants to cut the cord?" Fine asked the boys. Steve looked over to Bucky and smiled, "Go on, I'll get the next one."

Bucky hesitantly took the scissors from Jemma and cut just above the clip, detaching me from my baby girl.

"Sophia," We all said, as she was placed higher on my chest, her skin against my own. Much like her older brother did, she protested at being cleaned, but once she was, she all but snuggled into my chest.

"I'll just take Sophia over here, get her all weighed and measured. And then I will bring her right back," Jemma said gently, taking her from my chest. I nodded, shaking my head from the panicked thoughts I was having and concentrating. As Sophia got weighed and checked out, Dr. Fine had me deliver the placenta and May helped clean me up so I was more comfortable.

I was propped up on the bed, and ready to receive my little girl. She wailed until I snuggled her against my skin.

"I should grab her something to eat now," Jemma whispered, as Bucky backed away from the bed slightly.

"Thank you Jemma," Steve smiled at her, before gazing back down at our daughter.
"Pull up a chair Sergeant," I teased, as Steve kissed my temple.

"Look, look!" Steve urged Bucky, seeing Sophia reaching her little hand out from underneath her swaddle.

"Could I?" Steve asked softly, a nervous look in his eyes.

"Of course. Would you mind helping him?" I asked May.

"Not at all. Steve, hold out your arms like this," She said, and he copied her movements. She lifted Sophia off my chest, bundled her up and gently placed her in Steve's waiting arms, explaining that he needed to support her neck and bum. The last time I had seen him cry was when we found out about Bucky, and the time before that was when Bucky fell. It was so rare for him to show emotion like that, but he was freely crying in joy as he held our daughter.

"Bucky, would you like to hold her next?" I smiled at him. He looked a little scared and I assured him, "I trust you."

"I don't trust my arm though."

"Bucky, you could have easily snapped my neck back when we first tried to bring you in, but you didn't. You will do great. This is great for your fine motor skills with the arm. She's just the size of a loaf of bread," I teased, "And besides, you have the next two spots in line, so you need some practice first."

"In line for what?" He asked, and I raised a single eyebrow. He blushed, "Oh."

"Yeah. Only if you still want that," I assured him.

He sat down, eyes watering as he studied our daughter.

"She's beautiful Liz," May smiled from where she was cleaning up.

"Thanks May."

I laid my head back to rest, hearing a soft knock. I looked over to the door to see Melinda sticking her head in.

"We heard it was over," She smiled at my weary face.

"All over," I sighed.

"Up for visitors?" She asked, and I nodded. Daisy and Phil followed in behind Mel, smiling softly at us.

"Where is my aunt?" Daisy whispered excitedly. I pointed over to Steve who smiled, bringing her over to our family. Melinda softly approached Steve, looking down on her sister-in-law's tiny cheeks.

"She's beautiful Mom," She smiled at me.

"She is! She's so tiny. I just want to pinch those cheeks!" Daisy cooed, making Phil chuckle. Steve offered for Phil to hold her, and he smiled at his Dad's offer, "I can tell you just got her. Enjoy every moment though."

Daisy tucked herself under her Dad's arm, and he kissed her temple as Sophia made a small noise.
"What is her name?" Mel asked, running a finger over Sophia's cheeks.

"Sophia Rebecca," I said, as Jemma walked in with a tray of food.

"Sandwiches and a smoothie to soothe your metabolism. I can bring more by if this isn't enough," She said, putting the hospital tray over my bed. I shook my head and said, "This is perfect. But at one point, I'm going to need you to go and grab me some Five Guys."

"I can go," Daisy said seriously, "I volunteer."

"Missing the constant adventure of the BUS?" I teased.

"Not that I don't love you all, but I've got cabin fever. I need to see something other than brick walls."

"I thought Brock was taking you out last week," I said and I saw Phil's eye twitch.

"That was before you sent him out to set up Agent Morse within Hydra."

"Right, well I grant you and him time off this weekend if nothing else comes up. I'll even produce a magic wand and go Bibidi-bobity boo for you if I have to," I said, and Phil said, "Nothing overnight."

"Dad," Daisy sighed, as Jemma hid her smile.

"Hey, has someone told Tony?" I asked her to keep an argument from brewing.

"Yes! He said he and Pepper would drop by your old apartment tomorrow at noon. He understands the base's location is top secret, so they are expecting a pick up there."

"No need to bag them. I trust them," I nodded and Phil said, "I'll tell Mack to go get them."

For a few moments it was peaceful, as our family enjoyed the warmth and joy Sophia's presence brought to the room. After Daisy had taken our orders, we all just hung out in the medical room, with more people coming to check in on us. Sharon came by, cooing softly over Sophia, before congratulating me and heading back to work. A familiar head of red hair poked her head in, and raising a single brow at me.

"I heard you've been busy while I was away," She smirked. I rolled my eyes, "Yeah, we've got the Fridge up and running and I had a baby. Get in here!"

She smiled brightly, closing the door behind her, before tip toeing over to the bassinet where Steve was gazing over our girl. Bucky was beside me, as I gently scratched his head, as Steve asked, "How was Marakesh?"

"Classified," She chuckled, before looking at me expectantly.

"No," I teased, before smiling, "Of course you can hold her, you're her godmother."

"Aunt Natasha, please meet your goddaughter, Sophia Rebecca Rogers-Barnes," Steve smiled at her as he placed the bundle in her arms. I saw the tears collecting in Nat's eyes, nothing to the untrained eye, but a huge show of emotion for the Black Widow.

"She's perfect," Nat's voice cracked, clearing it gently, but Mel in the corner merely smirked at the obvious emotion the redhead was feeling.
"We like to think so. Now Sophia, you will learn many things from your Aunt, and from the rest of our little family. But you will have a special bond with her. But she still reports back to me, so don't go thinking you can hide a boyfriend. I know all," I joked to the baby, making Steve chuckle. Bucky gave a smile before saying, "I'll definitely be carrying a gun by then."

"Overprotective Dad already," I smiled at him, "You're a natural."

A soft knock on the door, and I heard the rustling of bags as Daisy and Phil came back inside.

"Here you go Grams," She smiled, pulling my food out first, before passing her Grandpas' their burgers. Phil set out the drinks as Daisy apologized to Natasha, "If I had known you'd have been here-"

"No, I already ate before Agent Simmons gave me the news. Thank you though," She assured Daisy as she gently sat herself down in a chair, snuggling her goddaughter close.

"Ommmm," Bucky moaned, biting into his burger.

"This is the most delicious burger I've ever had," Steve agreed after his first bite.

"Perfection. I love having Five Guys all up inside of me," I joked around my mouthful, making Steve, Bucky and Daisy choke a little. Natasha, Mel, Phil and I just laughed at the inside joke, as the guys clear their throats.

"Oh that was too good," Nat smirked, glancing up at us before moving her eyes back to Sophia.

"What?" Bucky wheezed, before I smiled, "That was a Clint line. We were enjoying an after mission trip to Five Guys, before de brief. And he said it before he could realize what it might be taken as. Now it's just an inside joke. We try to bring it up as much as we can. The best part of that, Fury had just walked in behind him and actually chuckled."

"That's amazing!" Daisy laughed lightly, keeping in mind her Aunt was sleeping.

"It's brought up everytime anyone of us sees anything to do with the restaurant," Phil explained, while Daisy snickered with Mel over their fries.

"Don't think that I don't see you eating greasy food Agent Rogers. You'll be working that off tomorrow," Nat warned Daisy.

"I'm prepared to accept whatever torture you can come up with. This was worth it," She smiled, raising her burger like she was tipping her glass to Nat.

"Oh, now I'll make it good," Nat teased.
Chapter Forty Four

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers. So we've got a lot going on in this chapter. Tony comes to meet his cousin, gets an explanation about why Bucky is acting strange around him and Elizabeth narrowly avoids certain doom... aka Tony's anger when he finds out. But it's not the only plot device I have in play. I feel like I've got multiple storylines that keep intersecting and looping back on one another...

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

The next morning, Fine cleared Sophia and I to to back to the apartment. She was eating well, hadn't lost much of her birth weight, and her bloodwork was clear. Teaching Bucky and Steve how to change 21st century diapers was fun. I borrowed one of Lila's dolls for them to practice on until they felt confident.

Sophia had just fallen asleep in my arms when I heard a soft knock on the door. Steve went to answer it, jerking his head for someone to come in. I smiled when Peter and May came into view, "Hi."

"Hi Auntie," Peter waved, and I motioned for him to come over.

"She's so small," He whispered.

"She'll get bigger. If her genetics are any indicator, hopefully she won't be cursed with my height," I teased myself lightly.

"Aunt Liz, you and I are the same height," He teased.

"Yeah, but I haven't grown since 1939. You've got a few years to put on a few more inches. Not too many, I don't want you towering over me," I winked. May sat on a chair, as Steve asked her if she wanted something to drink as he started off, "No thank you. We just had breakfast."

"I'm gonna go check on Bucky," He smiled to me, before closing the door behind him.

"Your shift start soon?" I asked May, and she nodded with a smile, "I was going to drop Peter off with Agent Fitz and Agent Mackenzie."

"Mhmm," I smiled at her, while Peter let Sophia wrap her fist around his pinky. May shot me a look, making me chuckle. Over the last few weeks, May and Mack had been getting to know each other pretty well. I had seen the looks she had given the mechanic, who returned her smiles with equally flirty ones of his own. I knew Mack's past and May's, obviously, so I knew they would be good for each other. If nothing else came of a relationship, other than healing.

"When..." Peter started, looking up at me nervously.

"He'll be here after lunch," I answered the unspoken question. Peter nodded, and May sighed, "Did you want to meet him?"
"I don't know," Peter answered, shrugging his shoulders, "He might be my father but... but my Dad..."

"I know Buddy. Your Dad's place in your heart can't be replaced," I nodded, "Do you want to see him? You don't have to be seen by him. Or I could tell him about you?"

"Won't he be mad at you?" He asked, worried for me.

"Maybe, but with Pepper here, he should be less angry and easier to control. I already have to tell him about Bucky, so I might as well rip the bandage off all at once," I shrugged, "But did you want to hold your cousin?"

He nodded, smiling. May showed him how to hold his hands, and I gently transferred Sophia to him, reminding him to support her head. He looked down at his cousin, enamored by her already, smiling at me, "She's so cute."

"She is," I smiled down on my daughter, who yawned sweetly.

"Not yet," Peter spoke gently, before looking at us.

"Of course. It's up to you," May nodded, and I could see the relief rolling off of her in waves. I knew Tony might be mad about it at first, but we both worried he would start a custody battle, putting Peter in the limelight for all our enemies. We might be his legal guardians, but a court of law would choose the biological parents first; Unless the biological dad was an overgrown man baby with a superhero complex, and a tendencies to build robotic suits that helped him fight crime and aliens.

"We will support you. From now on, you decide what and when you want to do anything. Except date. Sorry buddy, but you've got to worry about your schooling first," I teased, and he rolled his eyes as he groaned, "Aunt Liz!"

Tony and Pepper stayed for a few hours, before returning to New York. Tony and I had sat down so I could explain to him in person, what Bucky had gone through. He sympathized with Barnes, having been tortured while the Ten Rings had him.

"Tony, Hydra made him do things. Kill people he didn't know, and some he did. Some he knew during the war," I said, as he understood what I was saying.

"He..."

"Yes, the Winter Soldier did. Hydra's attack dog did," I said, feeling my eyes tear up.

"So Mom and Dad..."

"It wasn't on impact," I said. He looked at me for a moment before asking, "How long have you known?"

"I knew something was up when the original coroner was killed. I always had suspicions about Hydra, but I didn't know it was Bucky until a few weeks before Christmas."

"You wanted to wait until you found him again to tell me," He said, sounding betrayed.

"No. Our worry was Hydra, and I know you. You would have come in guns blazing without thinking," I pointed out. He shrunk back at my tone and I sighed, "I was trying to protect you. Not from the truth, but until we had a better handle on things. They are still out there Tony. We need
every able body we can get. And I won't lose you to your own vendetta against them."

"So you plan to use him," He stated.

"No. He's… he's dealing with decades of guilt. He thought I would hate him for what he did to my
brother, but it only fueled my anger towards Hydra. Pierce ordered the hit on Howard, he even
admitted it. They wanted the super soldier serum Howard was transporting to our New York office."

"Another serum?" Tony asked, realizing it was more than just Hydra wanting his Dad out of the
way. I nodded, "According to Rumlow's intel, it was used. The test subjects were put in cryo, and
our plan was to storm the facility so no one can wake them up. They are deadlier than Bucky, and
they collapse governments over night."

"So Barnes was the first."

"But they volunteered. Bucky was… an unwilling participant until 20 years worth of brainwashing
and torture broke him. His programming turned him into the Winter Soldier. But now, he's... he's
someone else." Tony sat back, covering his mouth with his hand and looking contemplative.

"You understand that it wasn't him, wasn't the man you met, who holds our daughter so tenderly…
He isn't the man he was when I knew him during the war either. But he wants to make up for what
he has done."

"And he thinks apologizing is gonna change the fact that my parents are dead. He killed my Mom!"
Tony looked enraged, narrowing his eyes on me.

"And the Winter Soldier killed my brother!" I yelled back, silencing him.

"My twin, the one I shared a womb with Tony. There was a deep bond between us that went further
than being siblings. He was my best friend. And since he died, something has been missing from
inside of me," I said, wiping my eyes, "But I will never blame Bucky. Even the government agrees
that he did so under hypnosis and duress."

"But my Mom… You know how rotten Dad was to me," He said as I nodded, "But Mom was the
reason I didn't cut and run. Dad had maybe another 15 years, but Mom might have had another 20-
25 left. She could have…"

"Could have what?" I asked, seeing him slumping.

"I was gonna ask Pepper to marry me," He said, and I couldn't help the girlish squeal I let out.

"No, no, no, we don't do the mushy stuff or the excited girly stuff, remember?" He joked. I laughed,
"Let me have this. I called it since the beginning that she was the one for you."

"Ha ha."

"But seriously Tony, we don't know. If it hadn't been Bucky, they would have had someone else…
well, you know. What if it had been me? What if I was the brainwashed super soldier and you found
out I was alive. Learning you had an aunt, and then learning that Aunt killed her own brother,
without even recognizing him? He's in pain. Howard was his friend too. He wasn't as close to
Howard as Steve was, but because we knew when he learned how to read Bucky he might clue in to
our… unorthodox arrangement."
"This… this is a lot to process right now. Just give me some space to think about it," He said and I nodded, "I love you nephew, no matter what."

"Love you too Aunt Liz. Congrats again on the little tyke. And then thanks a lot for putting that gleam in Pepper's eye," He teased. I laughed, "It was already there, you just had to look hard enough."

"Did you know you have a child running around the engineering department?" He asked suddenly, and I schooled my face as I nodded, "It's my godson."

"What's he doing here?" He questioned further.

"Hydra tried to come after him and his Aunt, to get to me. They are here until we catch the guy that wants them, and he loves all things science. Physics in particular with mechanical engineering. My team has taken over his education in various ways until I can vett a tutor. Why do you ask?"

"Kid, took one look at me and ran. Not the usual response."

"Maybe it's good for your ego," I teased, "Not every kid loves Iron Man. I'm his favorite superhero, but that's mainly because I make him cookies."

He shook his head smiling and got up to kiss the top of my head, "I should go find Pepper."

"Safe flight back," I said, as the monitor sounded for Sophia. We parted ways, knowing Tony was going to think about what I had said, and they flew back to New York. Him seeing Peter wasn't necessarily a problem, but it presented me with one in Peter. He had tried to sate his curiosity by peaking at Tony, but next time he got curious, he might try to get closer. Who knew what might happen if Tony studied his face a few seconds too long, or asked a question Peter knew the answer to? Peter rambled when he was nervous, and he was not a good liar.

Steve came into the room with Bucky, smiling at me, "Hey, everything alright?"

"She's all good, just needed some love and a little milk," I smiled tightly.

"What's wrong?" Bucky asked, sensing I wasn't alright.

"I told Tony, about you. And as he was leaving, he mentioned that he saw Peter in the labs," I whispered, stroking Sophia's cheek as she fed from me.

"Does he... suspect? Did he ask anything?" Steve asked worried.

"No suspicion. Just curiosity as to why I have a preteen running around dangerous equipment. I mentioned he was my godson, the attack on him and May, but I didn't give their names. Peter took one look at him and ran for it, so he was confused more by the lack of Peter asking for an autograph."

Steve smirked, a sigh of relief rolling off of him, "Well, Tony's ego is bigger than Stark Tower."

"Try the island of Manhattan," I teased, "He's exactly like Howard, in every way. He just refuses to believe it."

Sophia mainly slept, so I could do some work while she napped in my office. Bucky and Steve were a lot more attentive to me, making sure I ate and that I had enough sleep. Bucky wasn't quite ready to move into our little apartment, but we weren't pushing him. At 3 weeks, Fine said I was recovered,
and prescribed birth control, before Jemma pointed out it may not be compatible with my serum. So, after a long discussion with Steve and Bucky, I went back under the knife, having my tubes tied again.

I wasn't going to be ready for another one for at least two years, and the guys agreed. But next time it would be Bucky's. He had stammered out an excuse that he had to go teach Daisy some sniper stuff and disappeared for the rest of the day. We'd give him time, but I know Steve and I were feeling the exact amount of sexual frustration.

While Sophia wasn't a fussy baby, she was a handful. Diaper changes every hour it seemed, and feedings every two. We had a bassinet in my office and a change table. Bucky or Steve would be close by in case something happened, like a diaper explosion. I was seriously considering a nanny for everything other than feedings, especially when Steve went back into the field and Bucky decided to join him.

SHIELD's clean rebirth was tricky. The government wanted us to be above reproach, so I had to explain everything we did, down to the last paperclip. It would end at one point, that was what I had to keep telling myself as I submitting expense reports to accountants and mission reports to the CIA and Capitol Hill.

Steve understood that running SHIELD was stressful and enlisted Bucky to help him look after Sophia when they weren't on assignment. It broke my heart to not be more involved in her first weeks out of the womb, but I got my bonding time during feedings and after the workday was done. Not that my schedule was normal office hours by any stretch of the imagination.

Our days got more complicated with the surge of activity of the Hydra base in Chicago. Phil and I had discussed it at length that Morse wouldn't be enough. She could get information from the day to day running of the place, as their head of Security, and she had already supplied us with names of Heads and supervisors. We needed someone in the science department to figure out what they were working on, and we only came up with one name.

"You want me to go undercover, with Hydra?" Jemma asked, eyes blinking in confusion.

"It's not ideal, the situation we are putting you in," Phil said, and I snorted, "Isn't that the truth."

"But Agent Rumlow is prepared to give you an intense undercover training program," Phil finished.

"This is optional?" She questioned professionally.

"Yes. We won't force you. But you are the most qualified person for the job. You know the science, and you've worked with Fitz. You can understand the basic engineering so we can counter anything they have," I explained, adding, "And there will be a dead drop protocol in place."

"We have eyes in there already, but their identity won't be revealed to you quite yet."

"Why not? Wouldn't it be good to know in case something happens?" She asked.

"No, because you'll get cocky knowing who they are. You need to be on your toes, don't trust anyone. They will reveal themselves to you when the need arises, and not a second before," Phil assured her. It had been discussed with Rumlow and Morse, who felt she wouldn't be as aware of her surroundings, if she knew someone was watching that could get her out of a jam.

She needed to be detached, and not given the opportunity to out Morse as well by accident. She looked down for a moment and nodded, "I accept."
"Do you know the risks?" I asked her seriously, "If you are caught, they either kill you or torture you. If you can't get out of there, we can't guarantee an extraction. I know Dr. Banner or better yet, the Hulk would be there in a second if you were in trouble, but we need information out of there, not rubble."

"I understand the risks. Daisy understood them when she took on the assignment of watching Ward. If you believe I'm qualified and can do it, I will do anything I can to bring down Hydra," She replied confidently.

"Told you," I smiled at Phil, who nodded back.

"Alright Agent Simmons, report to Agent Rumlow. You start building your cover in a week. You won't go in for your interview for another week," Phil instructed her.

"You already had an interview set up?" She asked, and I shrugged, "I knew you would do it. If not, we'd just cancel it."

"All right. Am I dismissed?" She asked, as she got up, unclear of if she was or not.

"You are dismissed," I smiled.

"Simmons, about that side project," I said before she opened the door, "Is it ready?"

"It is, Dr. Banner and I are just concerned about it affecting your milk now," She said and I sighed.

"Well, I've waited 70 years to age, another year won't kill me," I smiled, nodding to her. As she closed the door behind her, I looked at Phil who spoke quietly, "Alright. I'll let Morse know."

"Let's take advantage of this lull and try and gather our intel. Daisy has some leads, but I want to know what our other plants have. Specifically on Von Strucker and who these mysterious heads are. The Banker, the Duchess, etc." "Gideon Malick still refuses to sing like a canary, and Mitchell Carson is in the wind," He added.

"Well, I know one person that could track him," I sighed, not wanting to ask.

"Dad ready for that?" Phil asked, stunned.

"I'm not sure. He wouldn't have to kill Carson, just bring him back for interrogation. Steve could go with him, but we both know your father is about as subtle as a gun," I sighed, pinching my brow, "Damn you Nick."

"Not loving the job?"

"It's not that. I was okay with being Omega clearance, but I was still able to clap my hands over my ears and let him deal with things. Now, I'm the one with my hands in the mud, and I've got to bring everyone back safe. That was always my anxiety, not getting everyone back. It's why I worked alone."

"The job is crazy, but we both know it's worth it. These people, they trust you and will follow you. You know how to do this Mom, you practically wrote the rules on being an operative. You have to trust they know their limits too."

"I know. And speaking of crazy," I raised an eyebrow at him. He tried to school his face and he asked nonchalantly, "What?"
"Any symptoms?" I asked, and he sagged in defeat, "Not as crazy as Garrett."

"So it's something." I baited him. I knew my son and he wanted to tell someone, but he was afraid of the risk regarding this particular subject.

"Something. A dream, and when I try to write down what happened in it, it comes out as lines and circles. Symbols," He explained.

"Like the ones Garrett drew on the lab door," I offered, folding my arms across my chest as I leaned against my desk.

"But it's not obsessive. The dream leads me to a stone room, with a circular table built from the floor, and at the center… There is an odd shaped object. It wasn't until Daisy started cross referencing what was taken from the Fridge did I even see the object."

"SHIELD had it?" I asked, as he brought up a picture on his tablet. As he turned it to me I stepped back, running into my desk.

"What is it?" He asked, as I stared in horror at the Obelisk.

"A weapon," I said swallowing hard, and biting my lip.

"But what is it?" He asked, and I whispered, "The first."

"The first…0-8-4?" His eyes widened, clueing in to my behaviour.

"One of the first times I tried to kill myself," I confirmed, taking a deep breath.

"What does it do?"

"If you touch it, it turns you to stone. It cannot be reversed. I tried to touch it, but it didn't work," I explained, as a knock sounded at the door.

"Col...colonel R...r...rogers," A voice said, and I said, "Come in Fitz."

"I...I...I... I f...f...found the f-file you wanted," He said, handing it to me.

"On the gravitonium, perfect," I said, opening it to look at Dr. Franklin Hall's notes. I looked up at Fitz, who looked to be struggling to form his next words. I waited patiently, until he groaned in frustration and began drawing on his tablet, showing us what he wanted to ask.

"The baby is fine, thank you for asking," I smiled softly at him as I understood the picture, "She loves the mobile you made. Smiles at it every night when we play it."

"M...Mack helped me m...m...make… it," He said and I nodded, "Well, she loves it. It was a very sweet gesture Fitz."

"Agent Fitz," I said, as he tried to turn to leave. He looked back, holding his arm that had just healed, a tick he had developed since waking up.

"Have you thought more about the speech therapist I suggested?" I asked, my tone explaining this wasn't pity and I wanted to see him get better.

"N...n...no… I… I f...f...feel…" He stopped and I saw the shame in his eyes as he didn't know what word he was looking for.
"Fitz, we can make it an order," Phil said, as he shook his head. He was still struggling, pulling out his tablet and saying, "They will s-s-s-ee it…as…"

One word was typed out.

"Fitz, no one sees you as weak. You aren't defeated," I told him sternly, "You are a hero."

He shook his head, but I held up a hand, "Yes, because you saved Jemma, you were prepared to sacrifice yourself. You rigged an EKG to send out a distress signal, that we heard. You are brilliant, and everyone here knows it."

"They admire you Fitz, and we all want to see you thrive," Phil smiled honestly.

He looked a little teary eyed so I suggested, "Sleep on it one more night. We'll talk about it tomorrow, and if you still feel the same, we'll drop it."

He nodded, and left, closing the door behind him.

"So, in these dreams," I spoke up, gaining my son's attention once more, "What were you doing?"

"We're back on this? And since when do you not make therapy like that an order?" He asked, and I rolled my eyes.

"I already have something in play. A 'push' if you will," I looked down at my phone, quickly sending a text off.

"Like what?"

"Natasha," I smiled conspiratorially.

"I'm lost," He shrugged, and I rolled my eyes again, "He's got a crush on her."

"So, you're emotionally manipulating him. That is more your style," He smiled.

"She likes him too," I sang, as I walked around my desk. Phil looked on me in confusion, "What?"

"She hasn't said it aloud, but I see it in her eyes when we talk about Fitz. She worries about him. He was falling over himself back when the BUS was being repaired, and she came to ask about upgrading her weapons. She… she was different than I've ever seen her. And now she's been hanging around him since his... hospital stay. Drew a little Black Widow symbol on the inside of his cast, next to his heart... Do I have to keep going?"

"Doesn't mean she wasn't trying to work him, even subconsciously," Phil shrugged. *Men.*

"I doubt it. She let him borrow her iPod and she actually smiles at him," I shrugged, "But I'll let things happen on their own time."

"Except for when it comes to Fitz's speech therapy," Phil concluded and I smiled, "Of course, I'm getting me way on this one. Now…"

He sighed and began, "In the dream, I was… I don't know, guiding someone or multiple someone's. And when I wake up, I want to write down the location, but it comes out as lines and circles. It looks like nonsense, just like Garrett's."

"You told Mel?" I asked, and he shook his head.
"You need to tell her, and Daisy," I demanded.

"They don't need to know," He said and I shook my head. "No, they have every right to know. This might not be full on 'Garrett' crazy, but they need to know to have an eye on the situation. If you start drawing symbols instead of writing reports, or carving it into tables or walls-"

"It's not that bad," He tried to assure me, and I narrowed my eyes at him.

"I promise, to tell you the minute I start doing anything other than writing down my weird dreams," He promised.

"Is there any pattern?" I sighed.

"No, but I keep the pages on me," He explained, pulling them out of a pocket, "So no one finds them in the garbage by accident."

He laid them out on my desk and I took in the symbols. Something caught my eye and I looked up at the door quickly, "Lock it."

"Why?" Phil asked, doing as I had said. I pushed a stack of papers off of the holotable in the middle of the room, scanning the images into it. As they jumped up on the holotable, I started to manipulate the images to fit together.

I stood back looking at it and saying, "Huh."

"What is it?" Phil whispered in confusion, as I stared at the image. I pointed to the corner and said, "This is a few of the symbols I had seen on the Obelisk, but from what I can tell, it's a map."

"A map? I've been drawing a map?" He asked in astonishment, and I peered at it closer.

"Do you see this circle? Notice how everything is placed around it? Like La Plata, Argentina," I said, bringing up the city grid on my tablet.

"Like a cathedral, a sanctum," He agreed upon seeing the aerial image of the city, and I nodded, "Exactly. The center."

"Director?" I heard as a knock sounded.

"Just a moment," I called, closing down the hologram and saving it. Phil unlocked the door, opening it to see Mel.

"Good, you're here," She said coldly to Phil, locking the door behind her, "Director, I would like to report that Deputy Director Rogers has been exhibiting symptoms of the GH-325 drug."

"I know, he just told me," I smiled, and she looked confused, before turning to Phil and crossing her arms. He had the good grace to look guilty as he said, "I didn't want to worry you."

"Consider me worried," She bit, pulling out another piece of paper. I snatched it from her and scanned it into the holotable as she continued, "I found that in your pants when I went to wash them. What is that?"

I pieced it together with the rest of the images and said, "It's a map."

"Of what?" Mel asked confused.
"Some sort of city," Phil shrugged, "Where, we don't know."

"We need to check that Daisy isn't exhibiting symptoms. And she might be able to use software and overlay it over satellite images to even find it," I worried, looking at him. He sighed in defeat, "I'll go get her."
A/N: So... I'm back! At first, I didn't have much as far as chapters, having run out of pre-written ones, and then we moved and my kid needed attention (lol). But I thought I might want to watch Captain Marvel first, to make sure nothing would surprise me later, after already writing these chapters. Thankfully my husband took me for my birthday, so I've been given a fresh shot of Marvel and I'm ready for action. So, here is something that has been long overdue in many ways ;) And because I'm a glutton for pain, I already wrote everything after the Decimation (The Snap from Infinity War.) I was crying my eyes out during Endgame and I thought... "This is what fanfiction is for; fixing things we didn't like or shouldn't have happened!" But you won't see the twist coming for some time yet :P

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

Daisy was concerned when we explained everything and then asked her if she was exhibiting symptoms like her father's. She said she didn't feel any different. But the next day she wanted to tap into a satellite to look for a landmass with the same structure as the map. Phil theorized that it might not even be on Earth, but she was sure because she and I both had dreams that night as well.

"I wasn't leading, or guiding like you were, Dad. But you were there, you brought us there," She said, and I stopped what I was doing and asked her if there was an object in the middle of the room. She nodded as I showed her the picture of the Obelisk. We had withheld the information from her yesterday to see if there was a chance she got the dream. But because I had seen it last night myself, and something told me we shared a dream.

"What does this mean?" She said, looking at the photo.

"We had the same dream, only your father was leading us to the temple."

"But you didn't have the GH-325," Phil asked in concern, "So how did you share her dream?"

I shrugged, "Maybe it's because of the Obelisk."

"Why?" Daisy and Mel asked.

"Because while everyone else that touched it turned to stone, it glowed for me. It was during my suicidal period after Steve put the plane down, and no one was around it. No one saw me pick it up, but it had symbols on it. I can kind of remember some of it," I explained, drawing a few symbols.

"Elle?" Steve's voice asked, and I sighed, "Just a minute."

Daisy pulled the image off the holotable while Mel opened the door to see Steve and Bucky, the latter holding Sophia.

"What's going on?" Bucky asked, seeing how tense we all looked. I motioned for Mel to shut the door as I said, "Back after Steve put the plane down, the Commandoes, Peggy and I went after the remaining Hydra heads. One was a Dr. Werner Reinhert. He was obsessed with an object that had
been found in Chaves, Portugal. This object turned people to stone with one touch. But when I tried to touch it-

"Why would you do that?" Bucky asked, concerned, "If you knew-

"I wanted to die," I stated simply, "Without you two, life wasn't worth living. But I couldn't die. My cells regenerate so fast that any attempt on my own life was pointless. This attempt before I found that out though."

"But you didn't get the chance, right?" Steve asked as Bucky handed Sophia to me. I cuddled her close, smiling down at her as I replied, "I did. But it didn't work. Instead of stone, it started glowing in my hands."

"So, you're fine?" He asked. I then explained everything about Phil's resurrection and how the drug was used on Daisy and our dreams. We showed them the map and said, "We want to find it."

"So how come the three of you shared that dream? You didn't have the drug."

"No, but something tells me that the Obelisk and the alien are of the same origin."

"Can we call Thor? He might know of blue aliens that Lady Sif didn't," Phil said and I nodded.

"I've got a picture and we can open the case holding the Obelisk, we just have to make sure it's only me that handles it," I said, before Steve interjected, "Why is this all being kept from the rest of SHIELD."

"We only discovered it yesterday. Or at least that's when Phil gave me his drawings and then Daisy and I had our dreams last night. We gather all the information we can before releasing it to our team. Don't worry, it's our next step," I said, assuring them.

Sophia yawned in my arms and I smiled down at my little girl, "Once we know where the temple is, if it is even on this planet, we'll be seeing if anyone is willing to come with us."

"You are planning on looking for it?" Bucky asked confused.

"Yes. Because as weird as it seems, it is significant that three of us had the same dream."

"About the temple…" Steve understood and Phil nodded, "It's too much of a coincidence."

"I'll get Foster's number. I doubt Thor has a phone," Daisy said, as Sophia started to grumble in Bucky's arms.

"Ask them here. I'd much rather speak about this in person and I'll send Trip to pick them up. Accommodations provided and I want to speak to Dr. Foster about her teaching at the Sciences Academy. Or even just the odd lecture here and there."

"Sounds good," Daisy said, as I made my way over to the chair in the corner.

"We'll leave you," Phil said, noticing I was getting ready to feed Sophia. We said goodbye as I pulled a cover over myself in case someone walked in. Bucky put Sophia in my arms and I smiled down at her, "Okay, sweetheart. Momma's here."

"I can feel your eyes on me," I spoke aloud softly as she started feeding. I looked up at Bucky who blushed.

"I spoke with Dr. Garner," He said, and I nodded as he continued, "He said that you had mentioned
"I hadn't kissed you."

"Oh. No, that was merely an observation on my part. He needs to know if you are getting better outside of the sessions you have. So, I merely said that it had been a little less than 3 weeks since you showed a sign of affection. He asked what that meant and I said it was the kiss you gave my hand during delivery," I said, as he looked down at his shoes, "It wasn't meant to hurt you or make you feel bad."

"I know. I'm... Since I've been remembering more of my past, images have been popping up in my head. Times we all spent together... And I just... My arm..."

"You're self-conscious about your arm," Steve stated, shifting his weight. Neither Steve nor I had seen Bucky without a shirt since we got him back. He had begun to wear t-shirts, even when working out. We never saw further up than the red star on the shoulder.

"I don't want to hurt either of you. I don't know if there is any program in it that might get triggered by the wrong word, or if in the heat of things I grabbed one of you too tightly with it."

"Your concerns are reasonable," I said, "But we can go at your pace."

"We would love to have you join us in our apartment, but if you aren't comfortable with that full time, maybe one overnight. Just sleep. And you decide from there if you want more," Steve offered.

"What if I hurt you in my sleep?" He asked, and I argued, "I heal stupidly fast. Steve is the same. If you attacked one of us, we can easily subdue you."

"We use a safe word, in case one of us feels you are too rough," I added, gently putting my hand on top of his left.

"I don't know if much would snap me out of an episode."

"We'll figure something out," Steve said, coming up to cup Bucky's cheek with his free hand, "We love you, just the way you are. You aren't going to hurt us."

Bucky was quiet, nodding once. The conversation was dropped for now. Because it would be better to have it when someone couldn't walk in. After Sophia finished, Steve took her to burp. Bucky and Steve took her back to our apartment and I finished up some work.

Normally, people who lived in the city would go home, and those that lived on base would congregate to the lounge for dinner or the Cafeteria. I had made a roster for KP during the week so that everyone had a turn and nothing felt like Groundhog Day. I didn't want to cook every night, so it made sense.

Brock's cooking was second to my own, then Phil's, Jemma's, Daisy's and Mack's. I took two spots, Friday and Sunday because those had been the extra important days when Phil was growing up. We'd have a fun Friday night dinner and watch a movie. And Sundays had been when Howard came over to visit. But tonight was my night, so I walked in, grabbed what I needed and got started.

"Colonel," Brock greeted me, moving to help chop up fixings for the tacos.

"Brock," I said pointedly. He sighed and said, "Fine... Elizabeth, how are you?"

"I'm fine. We've got a lead on an alien weapon, but until Daisy gets permission from the NSA to use their satellites, we're waiting to brief the teams."
"I go where you and Daisy go, just tell me when you need me."

"Mhmm," I teased him. He chuckled, "You planned it, didn't you? Tried to play matchmaker with your granddaughter."

"I just planted the seed," I said chuckling, "You were the one that let it grow."

"Well, I'm grateful you did. Your granddaughter… she's amazing," He said as I heard footsteps approaching. I smiled, "Damn straight. She's a Roger's what did you expect?"

"Not always so amazing right off the bat. What about the story of Steve tripping over his shield?"

Nat's voice filtered into the conversation as she entered the lounge. I laughed once, "That was a great day. Steve may have had a few months to get used to his newfound muscles, but he was still clumsy and gangly at times. The Commandos wouldn't let it go. Plus they all took turns tossing the thing around and getting used to its weight, and Jim ended up taking it to the side of the head. He was damn proud of those stitches though."

"It's always good to hear that everyone wasn't always perfect," She said as I turned to look at her, "And it just makes it easier to see him as human."

"He's always been human. He's just enhanced," I pointed out, "And you seem to forget the story about how he got caught up in the net wall during the Absentee Father."

"True, but he wasn't enhanced then. Clumsy and gangly," Rumlow quoted with a smile, as I finished grabbing plates. Nat took half of my pile and started setting the table, as I moved to stir the meat.

"Yes, but he was a determined thing," I said, looking over my shoulder at Nat again, "Speaking of determined…"

"Fitz or Daisy?" She asked with a slight sigh of exasperation, and I rolled my eyes, "Of course both, but we can talk about Fitz later. Daisy's training?"

"She's just like her grandfather and father," Nat teased, "Stubborn and determined."

"I would be concerned if she wasn't," I smiled. Everyone filtered in, as I set the bowls of meat on the table. There were new members to the original Team BUS and since SHIELD's battle with Hydra on the Potomac. Mack, the Chief Engineer aboard the Iliad had transferred here to help with our repairs until Fitz was better. Isabelle Hartley and her two merc friends had joined on to our cause. The mercenaries had decided to work on a contract term, but Isabelle was SHIELD, through and through. Lance Hunter, who I was amused to find out was Barbra Morse's ex-husband. He claimed she was a demonic hell beast, but I knew better.

Idaho, all we knew him as was a bit more mysterious than Hunter. Daisy checked him out and he was clean, so I dropped it. Not everyone is a social butterfly. They ate downstairs, as they didn't have rooms on the tenth floor.

Was I ever happy when LT contacted me after Hydra's exposure inside of SHIELD. She was in charge of her brothers, within SHIELD and outside of, and worked with Isabelle and the merc's in the field. Currently, she and Hartley were picking up SHIELD agents in Europe that were being hunted. Get in, get out, bring them back for debriefing in the Chair.

"What's on your mind?" Steve asked me after dinner. We had bathed Sophia, and I had just given her one last feed before bed when I felt my mind wander.
"I don't know. Just have a lot going on," I said, gently wrapping Sophia in a swaddle. She took her soother easily and I placed her in the crib.

A soft knock sounded from the other room and I heard Zeus give a soft woof in a warning. I motioned for Steve to go get the door while I tiptoed out of the room. When I shut the door, I turned to see Bucky standing at the entrance to our apartment. Steve had shut the door behind him and put a finger to his lips that signaled our little one was sleeping.

"Bucky, what's wrong?" I asked softly, coming closer. He looked tense as he gave Zeus a head rub. "I… uh…" He said, before huffing and surging forward to capture my lips. I was stunned for half a second before I responded to his advances. It was a sweet, passionate kiss and everything I could have hoped our reunion kiss could be. As he pulled back, I looked up at him lovingly, as he moved to kiss Steve as well with just as much passion.

"I think, we don't know if we don't try," He said, and my heart fluttered in my chest.

"Do you feel ready for intimacy?" Steve asked softly, looking hopeful.

"It has to be what you want Bucky," I said, as he took my hand.

"What I want, is to be able to fall asleep beside you both, after making love. And I don't know if that's possible unless I try," He said, taking Steve's hand as well.

I nodded, unable to find my voice, before gently leading him towards the bedroom. Steve followed up the rear, still holding fast to Bucky's hand.

I felt like a virgin again, wondering how to proceed past actually getting to a bed. He didn't speak, but caressed up my arms, ghosting past the side of my bust and following the curve of my sides until he reached my hips. I was still wearing my work dress, and he gathered up the material in his hands. He pulled it up over my head, raising my arms to help him ease it off my body before he sucked in a small breath. I looked down, wondering what he was looking at. I wasn't wearing lingerie; just a pretty nursing bra and practical underwear. Did I look different? I hadn't aged, and my skin was still unmarked despite numerous injuries I had received over the years. Which I was sore about because I wanted battle wounds.

"What?" I asked, a little self-conscious. He swallowed before saying, "My memory must not be that great, because you look even more beautiful than the first night we had you."

"It's the breastfeeding," Steve said, staring at my chest hungrily.

"Horn dogs," I teased them, before looking at Bucky, "But it feels like the first time again, you know?"

"Yes," He whispered, leaning down to kiss me again. I moaned against his lips, as his right hand went to massage my hipbone lightly. I backed up to let Steve capture Bucky's lips in a hungry kiss of his own, while I kneeled down in front of Bucky. I popped the button on his jeans, gently easing the zipper down, making sure not to make sudden movements. Steve pulled off his own shirt in between their kisses and I eased the jeans down his legs, helping him step out of them. I turned to help Steve remove his jeans, while he and Bucky made out hungrily.

As I stood, Bucky and Steve parted, staring into each other's eyes lovingly. As Bucky brought me into their arms, I went for his shirt slowly. He stopped my hands and looked at me brokenly.
"No matter what," I promised, "No matter how you feel about the way you look, we will still love you."

"It's… it's not pretty."

"Neither was the wound from me getting a spear to the shoulder, but I survived. And you survived a fall that should have killed you. You could have lost more than your arm. And while I am in no way happy about what you had to go through, this arm," I said, gently laying my hand on the 'forearm', "Is part of you now. You've had it longer than you had your actual arm."

"The scar tissue, it's thick and ugly-"

"Bucky," I said, "We aren't concerned about your arm. Unless it's hurting you, and then I am very concerned."

"What we care about is feeling you pressed up against us," Steve said, pressing a kiss to Bucky's neck, "And taking your pain away. Making you feel safe."

"What we care about is you feeling comfortable. So if you need to keep your shirt on until you do, that's your choice," I smiled at him, "All of this is your choice."

He took a deep breath and began to peel his shirt off his body, revealing his cut figure. Bucky had been muscular, but every muscle was more defined than the last time I saw them, and I wanted to nibble on his abs. But when the shirt hit the floor, I cautiously looked up at his face. He was looking at his feet, frowning, as if waiting for rejection. I touched his arm without looking at him, pushing myself up on tiptoes to inspect the scar tissue. It was thick, but not grotesque, and I had seen much worse.

I gently pressed my lips to his chest, right above his heart, hearing him moan softly in the back of his throat. Steve had been inspecting it from the back, gently massaging around it, causing Bucky to shudder. I moved my lips towards the scar tissue, kissing it softly.

"Bucky, look at me please," I said lifting his chin. He looked up into my eyes, unshed tears in his own.

"You are still tied for first as one of the sexiest men I've ever met," I smiled, "Steve's third."

"Hey," Steve chuckled, and Bucky laughed once, nodding at me.

"Who's my competition?" Steve joked as Bucky let me lead him to sit on the bed.

"No one, I was kidding. You are both sexy as hell, and I am one lucky bitch to be able to call you both mine," I said, straddling Bucky's lap.

I felt Bucky's arousal press up against my center and he froze.

"A little backed up?" I asked, and he nodded, "I've been a little preoccupied with remembering things, therapy and Sophia to… take care of things. Didn't seem fair if you guys were waiting for me."

"Well, in that case, I think the Captain should get up there and distract you. I need to relieve the pressure," I smirked, sliding off his lap, eliciting a groan from him. I slowly pulled his boxers off, as Steve captured his lips in a searing kiss. They were very distracted, so I didn't waste any time in taking Bucky in my hand and licking the underside of his member from base to tip.
He bucked up in shock, but I was holding down his hips with one arm. Gently swirling my tongue around the tip, I pulled him into my mouth. He briefly released Steve from their kiss to peek down at me. I pumped him in and out of my mouth slowly, building up the pressure a bit, before I wanted to send him flying into his orgasm. Learning on Steve was a fun experience for both of us, but it enabled me to learn the tell-tale signs of when he was going to blow his load.

Bucky was exhibiting a sign; rapid breathing.

He threw his head back, as Steve guided his one hand down to hold my head. Steve loved to run his finger through my hair while I sucked him off, and Bucky was apparently the same, lovingly touching my hair while I hummed around him.

He came with a cry of surprise, shooting down my throat. I eased up on my movements, pulling as much as I could from him. He swore under his breath and I chuckled, softly licking him clean. His eyes rolled back into his head at the vibrations, before I released him.

"What. The. Hell? You clearly learned some things since we were last together," He panted.

"That was all recent learning, Sweetheart," I smiled, crawling back up his body to kiss Steve. He responded, moaning at the taste of Bucky on my tongue.

"Have the roles been reversed since we got separated?" Bucky teased himself and Steve released me with a peck to smile at Bucky, "Don't worry, I'll finish her off if you can't."

"Punk."

"Jerk."

"Can either of you please touch me? I'm kind of going to spontaneously combust," I snarked. They looked down at me to where I had sandwiched in between them and smirked at me.

"With pleasure Doll," Bucky said, leaning over to dip a finger underneath my underwear. He was teasing, by running his metal finger over my hip, as Steve caressed up my stomach towards the underside of my bra.

"Just rip them," I whined impatiently, locking eyes with Bucky. He did as ordered, tearing the fabric at both sides. Steve was a little more tactful, knowing I still needed the nursing bra, gently bringing it up and over my head, before palming one breast gently. Bucky's fingers were dancing up my inner thighs, and the difference in temperature made me squirm.

Bucky spread my legs, settling in between them on the bed, and inhaling softly.

"God, you smell delicious," He teased, before looking up at Steve.

"Go on, I'll hold her down," He said, leaning over me to kiss me with bruising intensity, distracting me. Bucky's tongue probed me gently and I moaned into Steve's mouth as it flicked against my clit. He instantly began to devour me, making me thrash against him. His metal arm came up to mirror my movements from earlier, trapping my hips underneath its weight. Steve continued to kiss me, moving down from my lips to my throat, lightly tracing around my breasts. I moaned again as I felt Bucky's finger slowly inserted into my channel.

"Not there," I breathed, looking down my body to meet his eyes. He looked at me confused for a minute, before I continued, "The other one."
Bucky's eyes went wide with lust, as Steve lifted his head and said, "That's also recent."

"Like almost a year ago," I blushed.

"I love it when you go red like that Doll," Bucky said, finger slowly moving down to trace my ass. I sighed, as Steve went back to nipping down my chest. I grabbed him through his boxers, pulling him out while Bucky slowly pressed one finger into me. I chocked on the pleasure, as Steve's lips engulfed my nipple, grazing it lightly with his teeth.

"Oh god," I sighed, feeling my impending orgasm. Bucky doubled his oral efforts on my clit, curling his finger inside of me and I pumped Steve harder as he sucked my nipple hard.

I crashed over, Bucky still keeping me steady as I convulsed and moaned. They eased me down gently, Bucky kissing back up my body as he withdrew his fingers.

"Steve, get the lube," I said, giving him a quick kiss as Bucky was almost at my neck.

As Steve moved, Bucky captured my lips in a soul-searing kiss. I moaned as he settled on top of me, "Who would you like first?"

"What?" Bucky asked, dazed as he pulled back from my lips.

"Well, you can have me or you can have Steve. I'm okay for a few minutes sweetheart," I explained, "I think you and Steve should reconnect."

"No, we've been apart too long to figure out who should have him first. You lived without us for 70 years, both of you," Steve said, "I can be patient."

"Or you can join in the fun," I teased, seeing him jump out of the corner of my eye. Oh, he knew exactly what I was proposing.

"I'm confused," Bucky's eyebrows furrowed.

"I get you up front, and Steve in the back," I said, wrapping my arms around Bucky's neck, quirking an eyebrow at him. His eyes went wide, and I felt him harden further against my center.

"Lay down on the bed," I ordered. He eagerly flipped us, making me laugh at his hurried movements. I didn't say a word, positioning myself to straddle his hips, reaching swiftly underneath and lining him up with my center.

He shuddered as I sank down slowly, stretching myself on this member, and keeping my eyes on his. As I became fully seated on him, he panted, closing his eyes in bliss. His right hand came to rest on my hip, massaging me as I rocked on top of him. Steve moved behind me, tracing down my back and massaging my ass cheeks. One hand left my ass only to brush it slightly as he fondled Bucky's balls.

"Steve, if you keep doing that, I'm not gonna last," Bucky said, squeezing his eyes shut in concentration.

"You'll make it," I said, stopping as I felt Steve's hand slip upwards to trace me. I shuddered in need as he lubed me up before I felt him pressing at my entrance. I fought against my body's rejection of feeling so full, relaxing as Steve pushed in slowly. Bucky groaned at how my body tightened and sighed, "I can feel you, Steve."

"This is better than I imagined," I panted, feeling deliciously full. Steve stopped moving, allowing us
"Fuck, this feels sinful," Steve swore under his breath, causing me to chuckle. Steve rarely swore, but the situation usually warranted it when he did.

"It feels right," Bucky breathed in correction, making me smile in reply, "It is right."

I saw Bucky nod to Steve over my shoulder, before they started moving. I gripped Bucky's shoulders tightly, nails scratching against the metal as I closed my eyes in bliss. They moved in sync with each other, Steve pressing kisses to my shoulder and Bucky reaching between us to scissor my folds with his right hand.

I felt overwhelmed by my senses, not knowing which way was up and which was down as I let the waves of pleasure wash over me. I felt my body tightening and I leaned down to press my lips to the scar tissue on Bucky's shoulder. I muffled my moans of pleasure against his skin, nibbling gently on the raised skin. He sighed in pleasure before I heard his muffled groans mix with Steve's. I lifted my head for half a second to realize that they were making out over my shoulder. I rested my temple against Bucky's shoulder, watching as they took pleasure from our union and each other.

Bucky gave a sharp thrust, hitting a spot inside me that drove me wild.

"I'm so close," I keened, as Bucky continued to rub my folds in time with their thrusts.

It felt like minutes, hours and seconds all at the same time, as I shuddered between them, my body convulsing as that final wave of pleasure towed me under. Bucky followed and then Steve did, moaning into each other's mouths.

"Can we do that again?" I said, watching Bucky release Steve's lips as he smirked at my teasing. He had said the exact same thing after our first night, the three of us in London.

"Anytime we can. But next time, I'm gonna know how it feels to fuck your ass," He said, quoting me from the '40s. Well, except the fucking my ass part, but boy did that make me shiver again in desire.

"Amazing, but then again all of Elle is amazing," Steve smiled, kissing underneath my ear as I sagged onto Bucky's chest.

"Let me go clean up," I said, squeezing my floor muscles with a few kegels, as the guys groaned.

"Tease," Bucky said as Steve slipped out from behind me. I pulled myself off of Bucky, feeling their essence dripping down my thighs as I walked to the bathroom. Grabbing a cloth I quickly wiped myself down, feeling deliciously sore as I did. As the cloth moved across my skin, the air hit the cooling water, making me shiver. Our generation would have considered that not only sinful but sodomy. Well, it still was, but nowadays, people were more accepting.

"Penny for your thoughts?" I heard Steve say. I snorted, "They aren't worth that much."

"I disagree. You looked like you were lost in a memory," He said, rinsing the cloth I had used on myself for him and Bucky. I said, "I'm not regretting anything we did. Just remembering how scandalous our union would have been, to begin with, and now that."

"That was something else. I didn't think it was possible, but the Internet..."

"Steve Rogers, you haven't been looking at porn, have you?" I chuckled, teasing him with my tone.
"No, just… it's like going down a rabbit hole. I was looking for a definition for… our relationship, and it kind of snowballed from there."

"Wikipedia," We said at the same time, as I heard a little cry from the monitor. I quickly threw on one of my nightgowns and said, "Have some time without me."

"Are you sure?" Steve asked, and I could see the hope in his eyes.

"Of course. I love you," I said, kissing him quickly. I ran out to peck Bucky's lips and he smiled, "Love you, Beth.

"Love you too," I whispered, before padding over to the nursery. Sophia had squawked, but she was all right. A little humming and she was soothed back to an easy sleep. As I tiptoed out of her room and shut the door, I could hear Steve and Bucky's breathy moans from our room. I crept back to our door, finding them in a tangle of limbs on the bed, kissing wildly.

I smiled, leaving them to their time alone, moving to grab us all a glass of water. I waited a few minutes before I heard them groaning out in ecstasy before bringing in the filled water glasses for them. I set them on the bedside table, casting a shy glance over at my men. They were both smiling at me, looking thoroughly ravished, before Bucky flashed a debonair smile, "Are you up for more?"

I blushed for the second time, for what felt like the first time in years. I felt like the girl I was during the war again, not the hardened killer and spy years of loneliness and separation from my guys had made me.

"I'm up for it, if you guys are," I replied cheekily, as I sat down beside them. Steve and Bucky untangled themselves from each other before I was flipped over Bucky's body, to settle in between them.

This time, Steve pulled me up to straddle his hips and I felt Bucky moving behind me to lift my nightgown up and over my head.

"She's all ours Stevie," Bucky breathed, kissing my shoulder sensuously.

"Forever," He agreed, smiling at us softly.

"Forever," I promised, bringing both of their hands to my heart.
A/N: Hello faithful readers! I was away last Friday (Mentally and physically) from my computer, so I wasn't able to update. I'm getting really excited about writing the in-between of CA:WS, Season 2 of AOS, and A:AOU. Man, that is a lot of acronyms. But I've decided to leave the timeline alone form now on. So we've still got two years before Age of Ultron (May 2015) as it's about the end of June 2013 in this chapter, so we'll be addressing a possible time jump in the future, and it won't be a few weeks. More on that later though. Enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC, or the Avengers.

Within the next few days, Fitz had agreed to and started speech therapy and Simmons had started her undercover work at Hydra's Chicago facility, passing Brock's crash undercover operative course with flying colors. Natasha was helping Fit's confidence, mainly by her continued flirting. She and I had discussed the matter, and she said she might never be able to give him children, but that shouldn't stop her from seeing what they could become, even if just for a little while.

It was the closest thing to a confession I had ever gotten out of her.

I knew it haunted her, the knowledge she would never have children. It was another thing the Red Room stripped her of, aside from her innocence. When she had told me, when she first came to SHIELD, I left for Russia on a one-woman mission to burn down their headquarters. I knew it wouldn't stop them if they wanted to create another Black Widow, but at least Natasha would know peace with the building destroyed.

Bucky had opened up a lot more, even so far as moving into our apartment a week after our 'reunion'. He and Steve trained every day and Fitz and Mack were designing him a new arm. Fitz pitched that the metals they would normally use would be susceptible to damage, unlike Steve's shield. So then I had the task of tracking down Vibranium. Howard always said he found the last bit in Wakanda, but I'd also had my spies over the years say that there was a protected store of it somewhere. For now, his arm was going to be made of a carbon steel alloy. Of course, my nephew heard about it through Steve or possible Phil and sent over specs as a gesture of peace for when we found enough Vibranium. It wasn't forgiveness, but it was Tony's way of saying "Welcome to the family."

Daniel Whitehall was becoming a thorn in my side. He was after the Obelisk again from what our inside source says, but also trying to collect powered people. The Sandbox was one of our facilities that fell and Hydra wanted to recapture Donnie Gill, the enhanced result of Phil's teams visit to SciTech Academy last year.

And then we had Raina problems. From her place in Guantanamo Bay, she told the CIA that Hydra still wanted her. That she had valuable information on an object that Hydra wanted and they would get her out. I had her smuggled out and back to the re-opened Fridge. Of course, I flew down there myself, with Brock in case I needed a more expedited interrogation.

"Colonel Rogers," Raina said upon entering the interrogation room, "This is a surprise."
"The fact that it's me or that the CIA trusted us enough with your... pleas for help?"

"I would think that the Director of SHIELD had more pressing matters," She smiled coolly, "Little ol' me can't be that big of a problem for you. I've been as innocent as a lamb in here, and even while under the CIA's custody. A law-abiding inmate, as it would be."

"Instead of waiting for me to get antsy to see my daughter, tell me why you think I should help you, let alone trust you," I narrowed my eyes at her, seeing the fear she was smart to be feeling from my presence. She knew well enough to not waste my time.

"I know that Hydra is looking for something, an object that brings death-"

"The Obelisk, move on. What do you know about it, and why does Hydra want it?" I spoke coldly, interrupting her. She seemed stunned, before saying, "I believe it was once a key. Whitehall believes it is a weapon."

"A key to what?"

"The next step in evolution," She smiled, and my blood ran cold. Her eyes reflected the look I had seen in many cult followers; a brainwashed glaze with a thirst for something unattainable to those deemed not worthy, and a willingness to do anything to attain it. From Ward's interrogations, he saw Garrett descend into madness, muttering about evolution and being the key. He had taken some variation of the GH formula that Raina designed, so I wasn't quite sure she hadn't sipped on the Koolaid herself.

"Let's talk about this," I said, putting the picture of the Obelisk on the table. She stared at it, touching it reverently.

"You've seen it?" She asked, in awe.

"I've seen what it can do. Tried to end my own life that way. Didn't go as planned," I shrugged, watching her face fall in shock.

"You've held it? So you saw..."

"Saw what?" I asked, crossing my arms.

"Symbols, markings... a sense direction. What did you see?" She asked intrigued.

"How about an answer for an answer, hm? I'll answer that if you tell me why I need to protect you. From what Ward told the CIA, you told him to go after my granddaughter."

"Skye-"

"Her name is Daisy," I spoke in a low tone, and Raina nodded.

"Daisy... is like me. We are human, but not. We have the potential for something more. The Obelisk is actually called a Diviner. It divines who shall receive the gifts of evolution and who is not worthy. And you are worthy," She spoke slowly before I watched something pass over her face. Regret.

"When I touched the 'Diviner' I felt it pulling me. It wanted me to follow it. Along with symbols. Alien markings that somehow looked familiar to me. Though that was the first and last time I saw something like it, until recently."

"My turn, as you still haven't answered. Why should I protect you when you basically dangled my
granddaughter as bait to Ward? He thought he could make her comply. Though he never did get the chance," I said, watching her eyes snap up to mine.

"I was misguided. I was consumed with fulfilling a promise to someone in my past. He would give me my destiny if I delivered him his daughter," She looked fearful.

"Well, she isn't. So you were going to pass her off as such, in exchange for what?"

"Whatever is in that temple," She said plainly, and I smirked.

"What temple?" I taunted, though I knew exactly what she was talking about.

"He told me that it would lead me to a temple, where my gifts would be revealed," She explained.

"And these gifts would those be?"

"We don't know. What we become is only shown after the Chrysalis. My turn," She smirked, "Where is the Diviner?"

"At a secure facility. And it is nowhere Hydra could possibly find it," I smiled, leaning back in my chair.

"How do you know that?" She asked,

"I just know. You are going to have to trust me Raina. Because I have no reason to trust you right now, but I'm giving you information anyways. If this temple has the ability to create powered people, and you want to go through it, you have another thing coming. We have the Index for powered people. If you were to go through this change, you would be on it. And that is not something to take lightly. If you run, we bag and tag you. You'd be wearing a leash for the rest of your days, regardless of your threat level. Because let me make one thing abundantly clear, I do not trust you."

"You'd have gifts too. It's how you were able to touch the Obelisk. It only allows you to touch it if you are worthy," She tried to entice me.

"Raina, I am already on the Index. I was the first person on it because I put myself there. It exists because people with powers need limitations. They go power hungry, they go insane, or like me, they want to do good; to see a positive change in the world, yet still could do damage to it. We are not gods because we have gifts or enhancements."

"Why do you fight it? It's destiny," She spoke passionately, "And it will happen."

"How are you so sure you'd be let out of this facility, let alone fly to wherever the temple is and take part in something that would allow you powers? You are a prisoner here Raina, and prisoners don't take field trips. Let alone to get unknown powers," I said, crossing my arms, "I can assure you that won't be happening."

"Because I know something about Daisy. She wasn't the only child in that village," Raina said, making me narrow my eyes at her.

"You are going to tell me everything, and if not, I will send Agent Rumlow in here to make you," I said seriously. She had the good grace to look scared, as she said, "In exchange for protection? You'd keep me hidden?"

"From Hydra, it's what we do. You have my word," I said, giving a nod.
"From… him. From the man that I tricked into thinking that Skye was his daughter. He's a monster," She said softly, a look of fear in her eyes.

"Again, tell me everything and we won't have a problem," I repeated before she took a deep breath and nodded.

"There was a mission, December 1988, to the Hunan province of China. In a small village, there was a massacre. The whole village was destroyed, save for a baby girl," I spoke, addressing our team at Olympus. Gonzales and Weaver had already been briefed in a leaders meeting where I laid out all the facts. This was personal for me, for my family, and I didn't expect any help while we had more important things happening in SHIELD. But they had surprised me, wanting to know more about the intended process.

"I have recently learned, there was a very elaborate plot by Hydra, to steal children, and see who carried a specific gene. Two girls were stolen from their parents, one was our own Agent Daisy Rogers, and some of you know her story. She was rescued by SHIELD and placed in an orphanage in Orangeburg. The other was the daughter of a Chinese woman named Jiaying, and Calvin Zabo, real name Calvin Johnson, an American doctor. Coincidently, both girls were named Daisy. Their baby did not survive the massacre, dying from hypothermia before the SHIELD agents sent to investigate found her," I said, bringing up photos of the couple.

"This woman was someone we encountered when we arrested Dr. Werner Reinhert, a Hydra scientist and the next head after Johan Schmidt. But according to our prisoner, Raina, she lived without aging until Whitehall killed her upon his release from the Rat. He was trying to understand how she could touch… this," I sighed, placing the Obelisk on the table.

"I would advise you all to not touch this," I warned seriously, locking eyes with everyone as I said, "The moment you do, it turns you to stone."

"Then how come you can touch it?" Mack asked, confused.

"Because I carry the gene. In an attempt to end my life after Captain Rogers crashed the Valkyrie, I sought it out, knowing it would kill me. And yet it glowed and gave me a feeling. A sense of direction that was pulling me towards something. I ignored it then, and we sealed it away. This is the first 0-8-4, the Obelisk," I spoke firmly, touching the top with a finger. It glowed, showing the symbols that Daisy brought up on the screen behind me.

"When Deputy Director Rogers was brought back after New York, Former Director Fury and I had his memory of the treatment and memories of the drug used, altered. There were side effects of the treatment. The first couple of test subjects had a range of side effects, from hypergraphia, aphasia, catatonia, and/or complete psychosis. All had the memories altered and identities changed to protect them. Deputy Director Rogers has only displayed one symptom, the hypergraphia. And even this is mild compared to the others. Garrett was the opposite end of the spectrum; complete madness. He had dreams that led him through tunnels towards a room with a pedestal, and when he tried to write out what his dreams entailed, it became this," I gestured behind me, as Daisy brought up the map.

The 3D model appeared, first as two dimensional, rotating on an angle and expanding to show the intricacies of the city tunnel systems.

"At first I was concerned, but as I looked at it, it became a map. The city looked planned out, much like La Plata, centered around a holy place," I explained, pointing to what we believed to be the temple, "Or there could be a Minotaur at the center of this labyrinth. Who knows?"
Phil gave me a small smile before I looked back at our team.

"The next morning, after Deputy Director Rogers had come to me with his symptoms and we brought Agent Rogers in on it, we all shared a dream. And I knew it wasn't just a coincidence that the Obelisk, or the Diviner, was a part of my past and then our dreams."

Pointing to the screen again behind me, as a picture of Raina came up, "Raina willingly gave the information that she had already alerted Zabo to 'Skye' being alive. She sought the temple and the Obelisk, so she tricked him into thinking our Daisy was *his* Daisy, in exchange for information. She has since realized we can get her closer to her goal, and switched sides… again."

"Dr. Werner Reinhert, remember him from earlier? Well, he is back and young again, most likely thanks to whatever he did to Jiaying. Meet Dr. Daniel Whitehall, his identical twin, 70 years into the future," I said sarcastically, making Isabelle and LT snicker.

"He's after the Obelisk because he thinks it's a weapon. Our play is to set a trap. A look-alike, in every way, and a tracker inside that allows us to follow wherever it goes."

"But that's for another day," Phil said, getting me back to my point.

"Yes, thank you. While this is a personal mission, it's not meant as a way for our family to obtain more power. I've always believed that with great power comes great responsibility, and when I first got the Super Soldier serum, I didn't realize it. My goal, for finding the temple, is to stop these dreams before they become obsessions. To find answers rather than gifts. While we may need help, no one is being forced. It may be dangerous, and we will take every precaution."

"Please think carefully if you decide to help. It's not something I take lightly, nor should you. Those who would like to help, we leave tomorrow morning, at 8 am."

"You found the location of this city?" Trip asked, genuinely intrigued.

"Yes," I nodded, "And for those of you that come, you will know the location. Because after we are finished there, I plan on collapsing the tunnels to ensure nothing gets back to Whitehall."

The group didn't respond, but I motioned for Daisy to close down the holotable images, as I said, "That is all. We'll know more tonight after Dr. Foster and Thor arrive. Take the day to think about it, dismissed."

The Agents went their separate ways, but Sharon stayed behind, coming up to say, "I'm willing to go."

"Sharon, are you sure? You've got a lot of work here," I asked softly.

"Of course. Look, Fury had his faults, and most of it was his secret keeping. I get that it was to protect us, but you, as Director have more integrity by giving us all the information instead of just 'need to know'. I'm ready and willing to follow. Lead," She prompted and I smiled at her.

"If you get hurt, I'm telling her it was your stubborn idea," I teased.

"She would believe that," She snickered, "I'm a Carter."

"It's obvious from where I'm standing. Now, when's the Quinjet landing?"

"Should be within the next five. Their quarters are all set up, and Dr. Foster has a place to work in the lab if she chooses."
"We've got all the best toys," Phil said from my side. Daisy hovered behind us, looking a little wary.

"What's up Sweet Girl?" I said softly, knowing that Sharon wouldn't tease her for the nickname.

"Do I have to go?" She asked, biting her lip slightly.

"No, but we don't know if your dreams will stop until we visit the temple. Or if they will at all. I'm not even sure what will happen, but trust me that I would never put you in harm's way. No one is forcing you Daisy," I said, and she nodded.

"I just have a bad feeling. Not bad bad, just ominous. You know?"

"I understand. I felt that way several times over my career with SHIELD. When you don't know all the variables, you start to doubt if it's safe. Trust that Aunt Liz will move heaven and earth to bring us home in one piece," Sharon smiled at Daisy.

"Damn straight," I smiled gently, feeling my phone buzz with an alert.

"Alright, look alive people. We've got incoming, an Asgardian and scientists," I called out, as I put my phone away, "Steve's on his way to greet Thor with Bucky and Sophia. They're waiting in the wind tunnel."

Sharon got back to her station, while Phil, Daisy and I walked to the hangar. Daisy was a little nervous about meeting Thor, but I distracted her by asking, "Anything from Brock?"

"He's just making sure Jemma is being safe. She's in place, and he's trailing her to see if Hydra are as well."

"He's hopefully using a Photostatic veil with different faces," I sighed, before glancing over at my son.

"Seriously, it's been over three months," I teased him for his scowl.

"Doesn't mean I have to like it."

"Doesn't mean that she doesn't take your distaste for him as an insult to her ability to make her own decisions," I spoke to him lowly.

"Grams, stop," Daisy said, embarrassed by my comment.

"No Daisy, your father needs to hear this, go on ahead," I argued, shooing her off to where Bucky and Steve stood in the distance. She sighed, but left at my order. Once she was out of earshot, I turned back to Phil with a withering gaze.

"Just like you and Mel needed boxing around the ears at Christmas, you need it now. Brock might be older than Daisy, and yes he was a triple agent for me, doing some very inhumane things in the name of keeping his cover, but that doesn't mean that he won't treat your daughter, my granddaughter, like anything less than a Queen."

"Mom-"

"No, don't 'Mom' me. You are feeling threatened by him. You are threatened because you just got Daisy back and now another man has her attention. Don't tell me you are too thick in the head, just like your fathers, to see it," I said, looking back at him to see his jaw set and gaze drifting down to his shoes.
"I just missed out on so much time with her," He admitted, and I nodded.

"I know. Just like your fathers missed with you. Do you feel neglected or threatened by me or your sister?"

"Of course not," He defended.

"Because they are making an effort. Wasn't it just last week you all sat down to watch the Dodgers game?"

"And they were so mad that they moved the Dodgers to LA," He smiled at me, "Wouldn't stop grumbling how the team was better in Brooklyn."

"Trust me, I was very vocal about it, back in '57. It was something I did with your cousin James," I said, as I watched him take a deep breath.

"How about instead of being standoffish when she brings him up, tell her how you are feeling. Because I can tell you right now, Mel is jealous over how much Daisy has bonded with you."

"But-"

"She is exactly like you Phil. Mel loves Daisy, and would never begrudge you two time alone. But you have to share her, Phil. Especially with me, because once I'm done breastfeeding I'm taking her clubbing again," I added with a smirk, nodding my head back over to our family.

"I'll do better," He said, as we walked.

"No, you'll-"

"Be my best," He smirked at me.

"That's my boy," I smiled back.

"We're thick in the head?" Bucky teased as we walked up to our family.

"Sometimes Sweetheart," I smiled, giving him a soft kiss, before stealing Sophia from his arms.

"How's my little love?" I cooed to her, as I heard the hangar bay doors opening from the other side of the door. I vaguely heard Phil's apology to Daisy as Steve came up to kiss me in greeting.

"She missed you," He said, and winked at him.

"I missed you all, it's only been like an hour since I saw you last," I said, smiling at him.

"Quinjet touched down," Phil said, looking through the small window on the door.

"They'll direct them over," I said, not wanting to damage Sophia's hearing with the loud hangar echoes of engines powering down. He gave a small wave through the window, and pressed a button on the wall to open it up.

Thor's smiling face was the first we saw, and Dr. Foster's followed, and another brunette I recognized as Darcy Lewis.

"Holy shit," Darcy squeaked softly to Jane as they approached, "It's Captain America."

"Darce, we talked about this," Jane sighed in reply, before turning her face back to us, smiling as if
her intern/assistant/best friend wasn't fangirling over my husband. I smirked as Steve put his arm around me and Bucky placed a hand on my shoulder.

"Steve! I hope you have been well. I wish I had known you were slaying enemies, I would have joined you," Thor said as they reached us. Steve held out a hand to Thor, who shook it as Steve replied, "It was a bit of a stealth operation, but I know I could count on you in the future. We might have a few missions that could use your touch."

"Well, the battle with the Dark Elves wasn't my finest moment. Jane explained to me the concept of 'property damage'," He teased, as Buck took Sophia back so I could hug Thor. He was gentle and brotherly in his hold, smiling as we released each other, "It is good to see you looking so well, Elizabeth."

"You as well Thor. Even though he caused a lot of damage, I'm sorry you lost your brother," I sympathized honestly, and he nodded, "I understand, and I thank you for your kind words. I know you understand."

"Thor," I spoke, redirecting the conversation away from mentions of Howard, "I would like you to meet Bucky Barnes."

"Your third! It is good to meet you, my friend. But Steve and Elizabeth said you had perished," He shook Bucky's hand, confused.  

"It's a bit of a long story, but it's nice to meet you. Thanks for watching their backs in New York. Lucky to have you on their team," Bucky replied, as Thor straightened up at the thank you.

"Of course, we part of a team. A family if you will. And speaking of family," Thor smirked, looking at Phil.

"Son of Coul," He said, greeting Phil while I stepped forward to introduce myself to Dr. Foster, "Son of Steve, now though."

"Yes, no longer Son of Coul. It's good to see you Thor. May I introduce my daughter, Daisy Rogers- " I tuned them out for a moment while I held my hand out to Jane.

"Dr. Foster, thank you for accepting our invitation. Our labs are at your disposal. Anything you need, we will be happy to provide."

"No, thank you Colonel. My research wrapped up and we've been kind of waiting for something to appear and then you called."

"I assure you that you will always have a place at SHIELD. And there will be no jack-booted thugs stealing your research," I promised as Sophia cooed in Bucky's arms.

"Oh-m-Gee, a baby!" Darcy squealed, making Steve smirk.

"Hello Ms. Lewis," I smiled as she cooed over my daughter.

"That's Darcy to you, your Colonelship," She smirked up at me, and Jane rolled her eyes heavenward in exasperation as I looked at her.

"Alright, Darcy. First things first, ladies may I introduce my husband, Steve Rogers. And our partner, Bucky Barnes."

"Partner?" Darcy asked, confused, before her eyes lit up in understanding, "Oooh, partner. Gotcha.
Nice to meet you- Damn, you both are thiiick. Your Colonelship, you are one lucky beyotch."

Daisy was full belly laughing after Darcy mentioned how muscly my fellas were, and I couldn't stop laughing as I saw the confused looks Bucky and Steve exchanged.

"Thank you Darcy. I like to think so as well," I teased once I got my laughter under control. Bucky straightened up at that, puffing up a little bit as I winked at him.

"It's the easiest description without giving the backstory," I spoke at Steve's confused face before I turned back to the ladies, "And our son, Phil, you know. And our granddaughter, Daisy."

"Nice to meet you!" Darcy said, smiling at Daisy and thrusting her hand forward. My, that girl was friendly.

"Hi," Daisy said, smiling at her, "I think you'll fit in well here. I can't wait to introduce you to Mack, you'll drool. But I think Nurse Parker has his attention right now."

"Damn, where is he? All these superheroes and I just want a muscly guy of my own. Is that him?" She asked as Brock gave a little wave at Daisy.

"That's my guy, Brock," Daisy beamed.

"Dude, you bagged Commander Rumlow? He was sent to take out the alien leftover by the Dark Elves shit in Greenwich," Darcy spoke a little slack-jawed.

"Oh yeah. That's where we first met, but he was my contact-"

"Ladies, we can talk about all of that later," Phil interrupted, and I mouthed, Thank you, to my son before I turned to introduce the ladies to my men.

"This is Dr. Jane Foster and Darcy Lewis. And Thor, I'd like to introduce you to Sophia, our daughter."

"More offspring, how wonderful! I thought that was a marvelous trick, that you pulled on the TV, revealing that you were with child. Something my brother would have been proud of," He smiled sadly, gazing down at Sophia in Bucky's arms.

"Yeah, gave me a lot of good PR, but that wasn't my point," I shrugged, as Jane came closer to peek at Sophia.

"So, usually calling the big guy means something alien or another Asgardian," Darcy spoke up, calling our attention back to why they were here.

"Yes, it's alien, but what we don't know," Phil said, showing him a picture on a tablet of the blue alien.

"Why do you have a corpse of a Kree?" He asked after a moment of studying it, confusion coloring his features.

"Kree?" I spoke softly, feeling my brain trying to remember where I'd heard that word before. PEGASUS, wasn't it? Nick had briefly mentioned something otherworldly as he returned the Tesseract, and was going to write up his report. I ordered it shot into the sun, but Peggy assured me that it would remain safe underground. I have more "I told you so's" than I should have built up for her, but yelling that at a woman that is suffering from Alzheimer's is cruel.
"Yes, there was a battle between the Kree and the Skrulls over a thousand years ago, and they used Midgard as the battlefield. They experimented on humans, turning them into weapons, with extraordinary and sometimes dangerous gifts. The Kree have been hunting down the Skrulls for decades. My understanding was there was a little skirmish not too long ago as well. But I couldn't tell you the Earth year. Time works differently on Asgard."

"That's what I was worried about," I sighed, "Phil, why don't you take them up to talk in my office. I have to make a phone call."

"Elle," Steve spoke softly, looking at me worriedly, "Are you alright? You don't look so good."

"I need to make a phone call," I repeated, bidding goodbye to the group, pulling out a non-descript burner out of my back pocket and turning it on. I found a training room that was empty, asking HERMES to lock the door and not let anyone in as I dialed one of three pre-programmed numbers.


"One-Eyed Nick's Bar, how can I help you?"

"I'm looking for my cat. Orange, tabby, slight chance he's mixed with an alien creature with wicked sharp claws? He goes by Goose. Have you seen him?" I smiled in mirth over my joke.

"Your sense of humor hasn't changed since you had your kid. That's good," came the dry reply to my question.

"I need information Nick. Something only you had first hand. Kree, Skrulls… You knew that alien in TAHITI was Kree, didn't you?"

"I had a suspicion. You just confirmed it. One's I met weren't mummified, so it was hard to draw the parallel."

"Thor confirmed it. We have a veritable shit storm brewing over a Kree artifact. Where is the official and unofficial file, Nick?"

There was a slight pause before he sighed, "It was at PEGASUS. Never did get much out of the rubble."

"Are you still across the pond?"

"Windy City. Just headed to exchange some info with our mutual friend."

"Could you pass along what you remember of the incident?"

"I can."

"Who was your contact with the Kree again?"

"She wasn't Kree by birth. She was a pilot for the Air Force they took and brainwashed after she showed powers from exposure to… the Tesseract," He spoke, before his volume dropped, "Carol Danvers."

My blood ran cold at the mention of that monstrous blue cube before I steeled myself and practically snarled, "Where is she now?"
Chapter Forty Seven

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! I'd just like to say I'm awful. Truly. I am so sorry, but life
does kind of gets in the way at times. To make it up to you, I am posting two chapters this
week. And next week, there will be two chapters and a one-shot from Natasha's POV. I
debated making it a chapter, but it wasn't long enough for my liking.

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

Brock returned that evening after Thor had given us all the information we needed. Or as much as he
knew at least. We put aside our shop talk to catch Thor up on everything that had happened since
New York. He wanted to tag along in the morning, in case we needed some extra muscle. And of
course I didn't have a quiet moment alone to actually open Nick's dead drop, so we were going in
blind still.

Darcy was all over staying behind and taking care of Sophia, and surprisingly Mel as well. After
Hydra being inside SHIELD, she still didn't trust everyone completely, and wanted to give me some
peace of mind. I promised I would bring Daisy back safely, who had decided after talking to Brock
that not going and never finding answers for herself would be something she may come to regret.

Despite my warning, Isabelle, Idaho, Hunter and LT offered their help, despite our team being
comprised of Sharon, Trip, Steve, Bucky, Phil, Daisy, Thor, Brock and I. I didn't know how many
we would need, and Sharon was called away for another mission. Thank god, because Peggy would
have killed me if she had gotten hurt. But I declined the mercs and Isabelle's help, opting for a
smaller team. We took the Bus, and I was impressed again with Trip's flying skills. Mel usually didn't
like anyone touching the BUS, but she made an exception since she wasn't coming with us.

As we landed in San Juan, we took the Quinjet attached to the BUS so we could covertly study the
governmental area of the city. The Castillo San Cristóbal gave us the only access point that didn't
involve tunneling into seabed or through fifty feet of bedrock. Morse had given me her contact
through a dead drop to Brock a week earlier, and he helped us overlay plans of the city and the
garrison, so that when we were done we could flood the tunnels.

"I'll get you in, but I won't be going in," Diego, our contact said, "There are stories of men going into
the garrison, and never coming out."

"Understandable. In exchange for not forcing you in there, we would like you to alert us if Hydra
starts to snoop around," Phil said, as I helped Hunter and Trip unload the rigging from the Quinjet, as
we would have to repel down into the tunnels. Fitz had sent us with the DWARFS, so we would
hopefully be able to see how far down we had to go and what it may look like.

"Si. Buena suerte," Diego said, as he left us.

"Gracias por tu ayuda," I responded, inclining my head to him. He nodded back, before
disappearing. As I turned back, Bucky looked at me confused and said, "When did you learn
Spanish?"
"I took college courses. When I was in Greece after the war, I learned Greek much better thanks to my neighbor. Sweet lady, but it spurred me to learn more. Got back Stateside and learned everything I could. Still don't know half of what Tony says, or if he's making up words to confuse me, but I just smile and nod and look things up later," I smirked as we walked down towards the garrison.

"So I'm not the only one," He smiled at me.

"There's a saying, 'You learn something new everyday.' And two weeks ago I learned I had unique DNA. Yesterday, I found out it was alien. And today I realized, that my alien DNA affected the serum. So, you could say that what I turned out as, may not have been the outcome for the first test subject, had it actually been completely human."

"InHuman is the term," Thor interjected as we made our way in.

"Yeah, that," I said, shrugging as we set up the rigging. Trip used the Mouse Hole to cut through the floor, while Daisy set up the DWARFS. As soon as the hole was opened, they were off buzzing and disappearing into the darkness.

"So, when will we know what's down there?" LT said, standing lookout at the door.

"Fitz pre-programmed them for us to survey the tectonic structure of the tunnels, and how deep they go. So as soon as they have something to send back, they- What the hell?" Daisy said, looking at the tablet.

"What's wrong?" Steve asked our granddaughter as I rigged myself up.

"I've lost the signal. The tablet is still working, but the drones are dead," She said, looking into the hole. I unzipped a tactical bag I brought along, cracking a few chemical glow lights and tossing them down, before grabbing the case with the Obelisk.

"That's at least a 100 feet," Bucky said, before I walked off the edge. There were cries of protest as I dropped, and a sudden yank snapped me back from my free fall, sending me crashing into the sidewall without the slack.

"Bucky, Steve, let me go! I'll be fine," I hollered up the dark shaft as I felt them trying to pull me back up.

"Elle, you don't know what's down there!" Steve called as they stopped.

"Yeah, and I'm not willing to risk someone else's safety if I wasn't willing to go myself. Now, let me drop! I've done worse," I said, a little annoyed at their overprotectiveness. Did I need to remind them of their track record when I left the two of them alone on missions?

One fell off a train and the other put down a plane.

"She has," Phil's voice said, "She's jumped out of windows higher than that."

"We are lowering you down," Brock said and I rolled my eyes, as I grasped the safety release on the harness.

"Um, no thanks," I said as I unbuckled myself. I was falling again, before gently landing on my feet, rolling to absorb the impact. One of the chem lights was by my right hand when I looked up, and my hand wrapped around it gently as I peered through the darkness.

"Elizabeth Hermione Rogers! Are you trying to give me a heart attack?" Bucky yelled and I
smirked.

"Really, my full name? How does, "I'm fine, Darling," sound from up there?"

"Don't move," He grumbled, as I heard Trip's chuckle.

"Bring down the map. We'll go as a group," I said, knowing that most of our group would be coming down, chuckling to myself at the bit of mythology that popped into my mind, "I wish I had some red thread right now, though I highly doubt there is a Minotaur in here."

A figure dropped in front of me and I chuckled as I held the chem light up to see Thor's smiling face.

"Young Daisy seems… worried."

"She's been having dreams. One I shared with her last night, which she doesn't know I did, was particularly troubling. But we've got a goal here, to get the dreams to stop and to understand why it was us that were given the ability to be more," I said, crouching to pick up one of the Dwarfs.

I pulled out my cellphone to see if I could get any signal and found my phone was dead.

"How about- Nope," I sighed, turning on my flashlight to find it wouldn't light up.

"Electronics are shit down here. We are gonna have to do this the old fashion way," I yelled up, just catching someone's approaching figure.

"Send up the harness," Bucky said, touching down. I pulled it off to clip it onto the rope when his hand caught mine.

"Remember we don't know what's down here," He said, and I gave him a teasing smile, "I'll be careful."

Brock and Trip were staying topside with LT to bring us back up and to keep a lookout for company. Daisy, Steve and Phil were next, before we took the chem lights to survey the map. They all argued about which way would be faster, while Phil kneeled down to take the Obelisk out of its case. After we had tested mine and Daisy's blood on the Obelisk, to see if she too could touch it, we had tested Phil's, sighing in relief that he carried the gene too.

"Okay," I spoke as Phil grabbed ahold of the Obelisk, seeing the same symbols on the floor, covered by a layer of dirt, "That's either a really good sign or a really bad one."

"Please let it be good," Daisy frowned, worriedly looking around.

"These are Kree symbols," Thor stated brushing some of the dirt aside, reeling back as if burned, as the marking on the floor began to glow. Thor held his hand, gasping.

"Thor!" Steve yelled, going to hold up our friend and teammate.

"Something's wrong," He panted, as we watched his face screw up in discomfort.

"Thor," Steve asked worriedly, putting a hand on his shoulder. He looked up at Steve, eyes turning dark, and grunted, "Can't... fight...this."

"Okay, we should run now," I quipped, pulling Daisy and Phil away from Thor's reach.

"Go, we'll hold him off!" Bucky shouted, thrusting the map at me. I took it and pushed them along, "Go, now!"
I led them down corridors, through hallways, all while hearing the echo of Steve and Bucky fighting Thor. I knew they would be okay. Steve and Thor were a match for strength and Thor had left Mjolnir topside.

"Grams," Daisy panted, "Where are we going?"

I looked down to the Obelisk in Phil's hand, glowing and trying to pull him somewhere.

"It wasn't pulling towards the city," I said, "It's the temple."

Keeping an ear out for the approaching fight between my guys and zombie Thor, Phil took a moment to look around, before he started moving again. I studied the map and noticed we were getting closer to the center.

I dropped my chem light as I walked towards what appeared to be the temple.

"Mom, is this it?" Phil asked. I nodded, "Yes. Lead us in, just like our dream."

He strode forward with the Obelisk, leading us into the temple. It was eerily quiet, save for the distant sounds of fighting, our feet scrapping over the ground as we approached the entrance. Two opening separated by a wall of stone led into a round room, the dais I remember from my dream illuminated by soft light from above.

"Grams, I don't know if I can do this," Daisy whispered as we entered.

"We are just looking around. If you want to leave, you can. But we are meant to be here," I said and she scoffed slightly.

"Destiny."

"Daisy, everything in my life, led me to this. The Obelisk, having your father, him having you, his resurrection by a Kree's genetics, you being saved by the same thing… None of that is a coincidence," I spoke, as the Obelisk glowed brighter, floating out of Phil's hand.

"I'm not doing this," He promised as he turned back to us, and I nodded, "Okay, this is freaky."

There was a grating sound, stone scraping against stone, and I looked back to see the curved doors of the temple closing.

"What's happening?" Daisy said, panicking as she took my arm.

"I don't know," I said, "But we are about to find out."

As the stone doors closed, the Obelisk began to open, freaking me out as blue crystals began to grow. Daisy said, "Can we stop it?"

"I don't think this is something you can stop, Sweet Girl," I sighed, taking her hand. She squeezed mine tight as Phil stood next to her, taking her other hand.

A cloud of dust emanated from the crystals, causing us to step back slightly. My body began to feel something I hadn't felt in a long time, like I was ill. My gut was telling me something, because I felt a strange sensation starting in my hands. I watched in horror as my arms and legs began turning to stone. It was creeping up and I looked up to Daisy, seeing her panic as she looked up from her own legs.

"Mom," Phil spoke nervously as stone encased his arms, getting my attention. I quickly apologized,
"I'm so sorry. I love you both."

"G- Grams," Daisy choked out in fear, as the stone covered my face. Something about being able to breath in the husk, but unable to speak, was really concerning. My body felt off; like all my neurons and nerves were pulsing in unison, building in intensity. And with one last pulse, I felt my body begin to come back to a normal state of wellness. It took only a moment for me to feel the shell cracking. I began moving, cracking through it like it was no more than paper.

"Daisy? Phil?" I called as I shook the last of the rock off. I was still holding Daisy's hand, and when I pulled mine away her skin was showing from where our hands were joined.

"Try to move, it comes off," I spoke loudly, hoping they could hear me.

I could hear Steve and Bucky outside the temple, calling for us. But what I wanted to hear was the rock falling from my son and granddaughter's bodies.

And then it happened, the rock fell from around Daisy's eyes first, and then Phil's.

"Keep moving, it will fall off," I encouraged them, before I felt a wave of air emanate from Daisy. The rest of her rock flew off; causing Phil's to shatter like tempered glass, as debris flew into my face. She started hyperventilating and the ground began to shake around us. I took one of Phil's free hands and smiled at him, "We're okay."

I felt a burning sensation in my chest and back, as Phil took a deep breath, looking relieved. I looked down to where a familiar looking scar now sat between my breasts. It began to fade and the pain left.

"Daisy, Daisy," I said, turning to take her face in my hands, trying to calm her down. I winced, feeling a pain in my abdomen, but focused on Daisy and getting her to breath. Daisy paused in her freak out for a moment to put a hand on her own abdomen.

"I feel different," She said, and I lifted my shirt to see two scars on my stomach. They were a mirror placement to where Daisy had been shot only a few months ago.

"That's freaky," I quipped, as Daisy lifted her own shirt to show unblemished skin where there should have been scars. Mine were fading, as was the one on my chest. Phil was shaking off the last of the rock and looking over his skin to make sure all was still the same. He even unbuttoned his shirt, revealing unscarred skin on his chest.

"That's weird," He agreed with me, before I turned my attention back to Daisy, as the ground began shaking more.

"What's happening to me?" She asked nearly hysterical, crying, "What did it do to us? I feel… Something feels wrong."

"I don't know, but what I do know is that panicking won't solve anything," I said softly, looking over at Phil. He was shaking off the dust and looked at me confused, "What was that?"

"The damn Chrysalis Raina was talking about," I sighed in frustration as the Obelisk closed up, "I'm sorry. I didn't know it would react like that."

"So, we went through the Mist that Thor spoke of?"

"Yes, I'm sorry. I didn't know what would happen," I spoke softly as the shaking started again. I looked to see Daisy looking around terrified.
"Sweet girl, breathe with me," I encouraged, inhaling slowly, and exhaling after a moment of holding my breath. She mimicked me as the stone door opened and Steve, Bucky and Thor rushed in.

"Thor, are you okay?" I asked, and he nodded.

"I'm sorry, I did not think that the city would affect me. I believe you going through the Mist is what brought me back out of it," He said, as I gently dusted Daisy off.

"Okay, let's place the charges and get the hell out of here," I said, putting the Obelisk back into its case that Steve handed me.

"So, do you feel different?" He asked, as I closed it and looked up to see the result of his scuffle with zombie Thor.

"I don't know. It was weird, we were encased in rock. And I've got a strange feeling under my skin."

"What's that?" Bucky asked, as I gently touched his cheek, where he had a small gash. He held my hand to his cheek, looking at me in astonishment as he pulled it away to touch where the same gash had formed on my skin.

I stared in wonder, as the gash was gone. Looking down at my hand, the only reminder was a drop of blood on my fingers and the feeling of healing tissue on my cheek.

"Did you do that?" Phil asked, as he held Daisy.

"I… think I did," I responded, looking at my hand as I closed it.

"We need to get topside, get you all to a doctor," Steve suggested, and I immediately responded, "Bruce. Bruce is the only one I trust right now, as Jemma is indisposed."

"Bruce it is," Steve said, scooping Daisy up in his arms, as we all started running back through the tunnels. We made it back to the shaft, Steve taking Daisy up first, while I remembered, "The charges! Send them down with the cable."

"Mom, is that important right now?" Phil said, and I nodded, "I'm not letting anyone else go through that. Who knows what powers could get into the wrong hands?"

"I'll go with you," Bucky said, and I nodded, "Fine, but we've got to improvise a little. The detonators are electronic, so hopefully Trip has some ideas in mind."

When the cable came down, Thor had already called Mjolnir and said, "Tell me where to send it and I'll make the holes for you."

"Well, that's great because Trip didn't pack the manual timer and detonators," I sighed dramatically, as Phil harnessed up.

"Sorry!" Trip said from up top.

"Just smash through the outer walls. Should be enough to flood the city," I suggested, pointing to a couple places on the map.

"Alright," he said, "I'll be back."

He used Mjolnir and was gone in a matter of second with a chem light and the map, while Bucky pulled me in close.
"So, no more going down rabbit holes?" He teased, and I smiled, pressing a kiss to his shoulder where the metal arm met skin. I felt an ache in my own but contributed that to whatever just happened to us.

"My arm doesn't hurt," He observed softly, and I pulled back in shock, "What?"

"Normally it hurts, a dull ache I got used to. But it's gone. Did you do that? Like you healed my cut earlier?"

"All of that, while amazing, was unintentional. I mean, I saw you were hurt and wished I could reverse it..." I spoke, trailing off, as I thought of the emotional trauma he had gone through as the Winter Soldier. I reached up to kiss him, softly at first and then holding his head tenderly. He gasped into my kiss, as I felt searing pain ripple through my brain. I held still, fighting my natural reaction to flee from what was giving me pain, until it started to subside from my head. I pulled back, searching his eyes for a sign my theory had worked.

"How did... It's gone," He whispered, smiling in relief.

"I just... concentrated on your trauma. Did I really?"

"It's gone!" He laughed, smiling down at me, before kissing me passionately.

"This is amazing. I can heal Fitz. And Robert, his leg! Oh... Peggy," I beamed, holding a hand to my mouth, "I might be able to get her back. She can be herself again. I can have her back!"

The harness was lowering beside us, so I strapped Bucky in and straddled his hips as he tugged on the cable.

"There might be limits to all of this," He reasoned as we started ascending, "We don't know what Phil or Daisy can do yet."

"I did notice that the ground stopped shaking when Steve picked Daisy up," I said softly, and he looked up worried, "So she can make earthquakes?"

"Unsure. We'll test all of us when we get back, but she may feel like a bug under a microscope. She was panicking so much in the temple, and the shaking got worse with her emotions. We can't stress her out, or spook her right now," I spoke quietly, noticing we were getting closer to the surface.

"We'll talk about it later, in the air," He nodded, as my hand caught the ledge. Another hand started pulling me up and I looked up at Brock.

"Cap's got Daisy, taking her back to the BUS, and then LT will come back down for us. Deputy Director Rogers, is with them. Anyone else injured?"

"Well, not anymore," Bucky said, shrugging. Brock and Trip shared a look and I said, "Back to the BUS and I'll explain as best I can."

We grabbed the rigging, gear and started bringing it back out to the courtyard. LT touched down, turning off the Quinjet, before coming to help us load up.

"What happened down there, boss? We heard the sounds of fighting, and then a couple of minutes later everything started shaking."

"Like I told Rumlow, I'll debrief on the Quinjet. I've got to submit a report first, so they know what we are dealing with, back at Olympus," I said, Brock, Trip, and LT nodding, as Thor came out of
the garrison looking very wet.

"It is flooded. No one shall be going down anytime soon," He said, throwing Mjolnir up in the air, catching it with a little smile.

"Alright," I chuckled, nodding my head for him to get in the Quinjet.

Chapter End Notes

Spanish translation:

Buena suerte: Good luck.

Gracias por tu ayuda: Thanks for your help.
Chapter Forty Eight

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! This is your second chapter for today, and I hope you enjoy it :)

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

Daisy was lying on a bed in the medical bay when we arrived back at the BUS, and Phil was talking to her softly, saying we would be all right.

"Grams," Daisy said, and I could see the conflict in her eyes.

"I'm sorry Daisy. I shouldn't have made you go down there," I said, sitting on the bed. She nodded, "I get it. Curiosity."

"But my curiosity should not have come at the cost of you," I argued, "I had no way of knowing what was going to happen. Raina sent me in with half the information. But I think I did, and I wanted that for you. I wanted you to… as Raina would have put it, 'claim your birthright'. And I am sorry for forcing it on you."

"I know," She said, giving me a watery smile, "You did give me the option to back out though."

We sat together in silence as Brock got us the hell out of San Juan. I wanted to be as far from that city as possible. Steve and Bucky paced, as I gave my son and granddaughter a rudimentary checkup. Phil gave me one, but until we got back to base, we wouldn't know the extent of what the temple did to us.

"Get some sleep," I ordered Phil and Daisy, "We're about 3 hours from base."

They nodded at me as I closed the door to the med bay, going to grab Steve's arm mid-pace.

"You are not helping," I spoke softly.

"Why?" He sighed, "All I'm doing is waiting."

"Not patiently," I quipped, "You're making even me nervous with the pacing back and forth you are doing. Go up and check in with Mel about Sophia. Please?"

"You could come too," Bucky offered, coming up to rub my back slightly.

"I'm staying here with them," I shook my head slightly, "Daisy has a lot of anxiety already, and she can't hurt me if I have to take the brunt of her gift. Brock is probably worried but don't let him down here. I can work on my report with them."

"And if LT and Trip ask?" Steve spoke softly.

"That I've quarantined us apart from the non-enhanced in case this is contagious. Thor is good to go with you," I gestured to the God of Thunder, who was looking pensive in the corner.
"He's going to be okay?" Steve asked, and I nodded, "He's healed of the pain and the mental fog. It's just a lot to process, that you were a mindless puppet for something unearthly. Bent to someone else's will."

"Sorry," Steve gave a sheepish smile at the reminder of Loki.

"No, I get it," I gave him a small smile, leaning up to kiss him, "Tell Mel to give her a kiss for me."

"We will," Bucky nodded, leaning down to kiss me languidly. As he pulled back, his fingers trailed over my cheek and lifted my chin slightly so I was looking into his eyes better.

"You did the best you could with the information you had," He spoke seriously.

I merely nodded, gesturing for them to go upstairs, Steve inviting Thor to join them. Grabbing my tablet, I asked HERMES to pull up two blank incident report files; one for the government, and one for SHIELD.

I relayed the events verbally, as HERMES transcribed for me, repeating the same with the unofficial SHIELD file. But of course, adding in details only my agency would know of. That ate up an hour, as I watched over my son, who watched over his daughter. When Phil closed his eyes finally, I got up to ask Brock over comms how far we were out.

"Caught a tailwind Colonel," Brock's voice came over my earpiece, "ETA 45 minutes."

"Does base know we're headed their way?"

"They do. Gonzales is there, and wondering what the hell happened."

"I'm assuming he didn't read my report then," I replied sarcastically.

"More of an 'in-person' debriefing topic."

"Tell him to gather the troops, as I won't be repeating myself," I sighed once. No one spoke a word as we descended and landed, with Daisy and Phil rousing as Steve and Bucky came down. Phil looked very panicked for a moment before a mask went up as his eyes met mine. I pondered that for a moment, wondering if his dreams hadn't stopped since going through the temple.

"Ramp's lowering," Steve alerted us, as my attention snapped back to the sound of the BUS' ramp indeed lowering. As it did, I spotted Fitz in the crowd of agents, along with Robert and surprisingly Bruce. They'd probably already gotten him before we were even halfway home.

"So, we had a very… interesting time on our mission. But instead of anyone actually reading the report, to begin with, I guess you're all just curious to see the outcome," I sighed, walking down the ramp and moving towards Fitz. He looked startled for a moment, as if I was going to attack him but collected himself when I gave him a gentle smile.

"Okay, I haven't contacted you since we left, right?" I spoke clearly, seeing a crowd gathering around where we had stopped in the hangar.

"No ma'am," Fitz asked, confused, looking around at the crowd. I nodded, looking back at where Robert was standing, seeing his confusion for why I was doing this in front of a crowd.

"Don't be afraid," I smiled, slowly reaching out to put my palm to his forehead. I concentrated on his pain, trauma and the scars on his brain and the part of his arm that had been broken twice in his lifetime, clenching my teeth at the sudden pain in my own brain and arm.
Pulling back when I felt his body become whole again, I held my own head, shaking it slightly to clear it.

"What? What did you do?" He whispered, touching his arm and blinking.

"She healed you," Daisy said softly from the ramp. All eyes turned to her and she lifted her shirt to show off her stomach; free of scars, "No more reminder of Ian Quinn."

Melinda faltered against Phil, "They're gone."

"It's not the only thing," He said, unbuttoning his shirt again. He showed off his now unscarred chest, and she had to hold back the sob I'm sure was trying to force its way past her lips.

"Robert," I called next, shaking my head, as I felt the last of the brain damage leaving. I walked up to him, taking his hand, and nearly collapsing from the pain in my leg.

In all of his years at SHIELD, I had never seen the man smile, but he came damn near close to doing so when he realized he could let go of his cane. I balanced on my one leg for a minute, before the nearly debilitating pain started going away, and Robert asked, "How?"

"We accidentally went through the temple. Thor touched the ground, skin contact and became enraged with Captain Rogers and Sergeant Barnes presence. We had to run while they held him off, and found the temple. It closed us in and we were exposed to crystals inside of the Obelisk. They released a mist which covered us in stone, and like Raina said, we emerged from the Chrysalis; changed. I take on the wounds and scars of others while healing them, but I'm not sure what the limits are, but my own regenerative healing doesn't allow me to be in pain for long."

"I haven't exhibited any unique abilities... yet," Phil said, as Melinda took his hand and looked on him in worry. He smiled and wrapped an arm around her in comfort.

"And I shake the ground, so excuse me if I don't come out of here for a while," Daisy sighed from the top of the ramp.

"Bruce, if you wouldn't mind coming to the lab on the BUS to run some tests for us?" I asked, and he nodded, "Sure."

"It's all in the report, Robert," I explained to my colleague. He took a deep breath, and nodded, "Yes, Colonel. I'm glad... I'm grateful..."

"I know Robert," I spoke gently, touching his arm to convey he didn't have to speak the words aloud. I could see them in his eyes. Thank you.

"I think I should return to the HUB now. You've got things handled," He spoke above our previous level of volume for the surrounding agents, nodding to someone by his Quinjet, "Keep us informed."

"I will," I nodded to him, before he moved towards his Quinjet.

I guided Daisy back to the lab, sitting down myself after Daisy had. Phil was patient, waiting by the door with a worried Melinda. Bruce washed his hands, gloved up and came to start collecting samples from us, Jemma's lab assistant running them back to analyze as we explained. Daisy was nervously glancing out the open ramp, to where some were still looking in. I got up and yelled, "HEY! Get back to work, before I kick all of your asses."

They scattered, and Daisy was able to relax a little.
"I want to get a CT and MRI of each of you. Got to be thorough, as we don't know how this altered you exactly. This will get a clearer picture."

"Alright, Steve?" I asked, and he looked over at me confused.

"Pass me the shield?" I asked, and he complied, still unsure of why I needed it. I took it, going over to Daisy.

"If you feel something bubbling up that you don't feel you can control right now, try and direct it to this. It will absorb the vibrations," I assured her. She nodded once, gripping it tight. Bruce was quick about the tests, putting Daisy first so she had less time to grow anxious.

"Have you seen Nat since you got here?" I asked Bruce, trying to keep the mood light.

"No, but the agents that picked me up said she was headed towards Tokyo. I didn't bother asking why, because we know what answer I would get," He smiled wryly.

"Classified," Phil and I answered.

"Elle, that's her choice," Steve spoke softly, and my eyes snapped up to his, seeing him studying me.

"If I can help her... I'll ask her first. Happy?"

"One day you'll heal someone that didn't want it, or had come to terms with their injury, and they'll ask you why you'd do it if they didn't give you permission," Steve spoke lowly enough only Bucky and I would hear.

"Beth, name one person who would rather be stubborn than let you heal them. Three guesses and the first two don't count," Bucky smiled from the doorway, making me snort.

"Hmm, Tony?" I acted thoughtfully as I stroked my chin dramatically.

"Nope."

"Peggy?" I smiled, looking right at Steve.

"Nuh uh," Bucky smiled.

"Steven Grant Rogers," I declared, making Steve roll his eyes as Bucky replied, "Ding ding ding, we have a winner! Your prize is a kiss from your favorite husband."

"That's not fair. I've never been able to choose between you," I chuckled lightly, "You are both my favorite."

"Well, there is the option of both, I guess," He huffed dramatically, giving a teasing smirk.

"Now that's fair," I teased, before looking back at Steve, "I promise. I'll give her the decision."

Bruce took everything he needed from us, telling us we were clear to leave the Bus while he ran the tests in the lab. But Daisy refused to leave the BUS for fear of touching the ground. Bucky and Steve had already gone to find Sophia, eager to see her smiling face after the stress of our mission.

"I can't," Daisy shook her head in denial, "I won't put them in danger."

"If you're sure, we won't force you. No one is scared of you Daisy," Phil gave her a reassuring smile.
"And if they are, they can talk to me," I teased, locking eyes with Bucky, "I know a thing or two about people fearing you."

"No, I don't want them to feel they have to, just because you order them to," Daisy looked sad.

"How about I don't order them to not be fearful, but calmly explain that treating you differently or fearfully isn't helpful?" I offered, with a shrug of my shoulders.

"If you worded it nicely," She teased half-heartedly, before looking at the stairs, "I'm just…"

"Of course. But whenever you feel ready," Melinda smiled reassuringly at her daughter, "I'll go pack a few things for you."

"Thanks, Mom," Daisy nodded, moving to climb the stairs, with Brock looking torn.

"What are you waiting for, a handwritten invitation?" Phil spoke up, "Go comfort her."

Brock looked surprised at Phil's words but nodded, "Yes sir."

"Okay, let's all go relax. Thor, thank you for your help today."

"You are most welcome, Elizabeth," He smiled, "I think I shall take my leave and go find Jane."

"By all means," I nodded, sending him off with a smile.

"Let's give Bruce some time. He'll have answers by the morning," Phil suggested, an odd tone to his voice. I nodded, "I'm going to get started on dinner. We'll talk in the morning."
Chapter Forty Nine

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello my faithful readers! This week, I have a very special update. You are getting two chapters and a little one-shot! It is from Natasha's POV, with its origin point in the story being halfway through Chapter Fifty.

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

Bruce did have answers in the morning. Our cells had mutated to something not quite human, but what we knew as Inhuman. My own cellular regeneration was functioning normally for me, but Daisy and Phil's had slowed down slightly. Bruce theorized that I passed that down through Phil, who passed it on to Daisy. It wasn't as obvious as my own, but they both looked young for their ages.

Daisy's cells were affecting by vibrations, which explained the ground shaking. He was now holding onto Steve's shield tightly, and I was having my spies snoop around for any mention of Vibranium. If I got her a pendant, it would allow her to focus her gift through it, instead of shaking things when she got frustrated or emotional.

Phil wasn't showing manifestations in his own cells though. They were mutated like mine and Daisy's, but it wasn't evident in his cells what his gift was.

And mine had disrupted the process in which I was going to be able to age. Bruce explained it had set Jemma and him back months trying to work around my pregnancy and with having her not around all the time. But now, the serum that they would have used was null and void. He had tested it last night, worried, and his hypothesis turned out correct. It didn't affect my changed cells. He took more samples from all of us, and double from me, to be able to start over when Jemma was finished her undercover assignment.

Once I was back in my office the next morning, with Sophia snuggled into my arms, I took a deep breath. My disappointment in myself was probably written across my face. If I hadn't gotten curious, Daisy wouldn't be afraid of her own shadow, Phil wouldn't look jumpy and I would have been able to age.

There was no doubt in my mind that the Inhuman DNA was hereditary, and just thinking about Sophia possibly getting powers that would put her on the Index, was giving me great anxiety. But I tamped it down, choosing to snuggle her close and open up the dead drop Nick had handed to Brock in Chicago to get my mind off things temporarily. Plugging in the encrypted USB, I watched the green light come up, telling me that it was safe.

"HERMES, bring up everything you have on Carol Danvers. US Air Force," I spoke aloud to the AI, "Cross check with PEGASUS and keep this on my private server for now. What's on this drive?"

"Yes Ma'am," He answered, the holographic screen filling slowly with reports, her military file, next of kin and several photos of her next to an African American woman with a little girl.
"Carol Danvers, born November 8th, 1962 to Joseph and Helen Danvers. Served in the United States Air Force from 1980-1988. It appears she was deemed KIA on an unauthorized test flight, along with the creator of the light speed engine that was lost in the crash, Dr. Elizabeth Lawson. The Doctor's autopsy came back as a match for the specimen in TAHITI."

I paused, looking at the photo of the woman with short white hair, "She was Kree."

"According to the then Agent Fury, its what they turned Captain Danvers into. She blew up the engine core, which was using the Tesseract as a power source. Much more advanced than Dr. Zola's weapons. The cosmic energy attached itself to her, but she was given a dampener to keep her compliant. The report states she was taken by the Kree, and given a blood transfusion to trick her into thinking she was Kree. Her memories did not come back until she was captured by the Skrulls in 1994."

"Threat level of the Kree?"

"Agent Fury ranked the Kree as a Level Ten, for their weapons and warships capability. They can wipe out whole continents with a few long-range missiles, according to Captain Danvers."

My anxiety spiked slightly with that knowledge, before I asked, "Threat level of the Skrulls?"

"Agent Fury ranked the Skrulls as a Level Nine, for their shapeshifting and impersonation abilities. But the data suggests they had not harmed anyone that hadn't first attacked them in their pursuit of Captain Danvers. They were looking for a home, as the Kree were hunting them. The Lightspeed engine would have provided them a way to evade the Kree. Not a particularly peaceful species."

"Sounds about right," I snorted, as Sophia looked up at me with wide eyes.

"She crash-landed on Earth, in the middle of a Blockbuster in LA, before she was approached by Agent Fury and Agent 'Coulson'."

"Phil?" I asked, confused. Why hadn't he spoken up?

"Agent Fury was the only one to have direct contact with her, and Agent 'Coulson' didn't come in direct contact with the Kree. He wouldn't have remembered as the Guest House wiped any memory from him regarding 'blue aliens'."

"We are sometimes a little too thorough," I muttered, stroking Sophia's cheek as she cooed at me.

"They located a woman from Captain Danvers past, Captain Maria 'Photon' Rambeau. Current location New Orleans, Louisiana. Retired Air Force pilot, mechanic. She has one daughter, Monica Rambeau, who is also an Air Force pilot, stationed under Lt. Colonel James Rhodes."

"Of all the gin joints," I gave a half smirk, "I want all the information you can get me of their service records, and reach out to Rhoddy about if he'd be okay with me recruiting Monica Rambeau. Don't want to step on his toes, but I need this girl close if she's important to Captain Danvers."

"Yes, Ma'am. Shall I continue?"

"Please," I agreed, holding Sophia's hand to my cheek and cooing at her.

"They found Dr. Lawson's laboratory, in orbit, where she had been hiding a small number of Skrulls while she developed her Light Speed engine. Agent Fury helped the Skrulls escape back to Earth when the Kree Star Force team invaded the vessel. Captain Danvers fought back the three warships and their long-range missiles singlehandedly, before offering her help to the remaining Skrulls of
finding a home."

"And Nick let her go," I sighed, almost amused at how long Nick kept the details a secret.

"He amended his earlier report to include a footnote, For Your Eyes Only," HERMES added.

"Modified pager was given to Agent Fury for Emergencies Only. The range on it is, "A few galaxies," according to Cpt. Danvers," I read aloud softly, before taking a calming breath and looking down at Sophia, "You're Uncle Nick is going to get his ass kicked the next time I see him. Yes, he will. That would have been so helpful during New York, right my Sweet Pea?"

Sophia cracked a smile as I felt her pass gas, and I chuckled, "You are right, he is a little shit for keeping that from me."

"HERMES, plot a timeline regarding the Tesseract and events involved with it," I instructed the AI after I thought about New York and how many times the Tesseract had come into play. Numerous parties wanted it, but why?

"There are beings far worse than me in the universe," I thought to myself. Loki's words were not downplaying his own sins.

I could hear a warning when it was given.

"Where shall I keep this one Ma'am?"

"My private server. Our latest location of the Tesseract is on Asgard, but my gut is telling me we are missing something."

"A hunch?"

"A hunch or a nightmare that I'm sure is on its way. Loki gave me a warning. At least that's what it felt like, so I'm running with it," I sighed, "Keep it updating for a rainy day. Include all known events of Kree interaction, powered people appearances and any intricacies that influenced events surrounding it."

"The number of events would be astronomical. Shall I narrow it down to within SHIELD, known Hydra intelligence, and post-1940?"

"That might be best for now," I chuckled watching as the timeline formed on the holoscreen.

Schmidt finding the cube, Howard finding the cube, Captain Danvers and Fury finding the cube again during the Kree invasion, Loki, New York, Thor taking it back… Kree using humans, Kree wanting the Tesseract, Kree artifacts unlocking alien DNA in Phil, Daisy and myself. Everything came back to this stupid blue cube and my gut was screaming at me that something was very wrong.

"Loki, for what it's worth, you opened my eyes," I muttered.

"Ma'am, Captain Rogers and Sergeant Barnes are outside. Shall I let them in?"

"Shut the program down first, with Omega Level Restriction on the file. Rogers, Elizabeth H.," I gave my vocal security code while touching a space on the screen with the flat of my palm, holding my eye still for the retinal scan.

"Affirmative. Restriction complete," HERMES responded before the door unlocked. Bucky's face was the first I saw, as I schooled my face into a welcoming smile, "Hey."
"Hey," He smiled, coming to greet me with a soft kiss, with Steve behind him. I genuinely beamed into the kiss, nibbling on his bottom lip teasingly before he pulled away. He blushed a little, giving me a lopsided grin before Steve gave me a kiss in greeting.

"So, we've got about twenty minutes before this one needs a nap," I sighed, looking down on our daughter, "Any ideas for what to do after? Other than eating, because I am starving again."

"Well, we thought you might want to… go see Peggy," Bucky gave an encouraging smile.

My own smiled dropped as I thought of my Alzheimer ridden friend. After my realization yesterday that I could get her back, at least to the point where she knew everything that had happened in her life, the thought had been put on the backburner. I nodded, swallowing thickly, "She hasn't met Sophia. And it's still early enough that she hasn't had lunch. We could grab something and bring it to her."

"She'd like that, a picnic indoors," Steve agreed, caressing Sophia's cheek softly before moving backward, "I'll go organize one of the armored cars with her car seat."

"And I'll go get the diaper bag," Buck offered, Zeus perking up and following Steve at his beckoning hand gesture.

"I'll come with you," I suggested, "I've got to let Phil know anyway so he can cover."

"I wish we knew what his gift is," Bucky mused, as I left the office with them, locking up behind me, "I know he's worried. At breakfast, he looked… off."

"We all are. I highly doubt its anything like Bruce, where you get his heart rate pumping and the wrong kind of adrenaline with it. But ever since his little cat nap on the plane, he's seemed a little on edge," I frowned; nodding good morning to a few agents we passed on the way to the elevators.

"I would think that was just the trauma from your transformation," He suggested, "You were trapped in there, covered in stone and then came out different. That will change a person, just like coming back from the dead, or losing someone you loved."

I smiled cheekily at him, "When did you get so smart?"

He snorted, "Therapy."

"I might ask Andrew to talk to Daisy. Or we do some family counseling, the three of us that went through it. The girl is stubborn like her grandfather," I grumbled.

Bucky chuckled, wrapping an arm around me as the elevator opened on our floor, "They sure are."

The short drive was lengthened slightly, as we had to give a fake trail in case we were being followed. We did pop into Panera Bread quickly around the corner from the retirement home, and Bucky was inhaling the scent of food like a starved man for the rest of the drive. Steve and I had one close by in New York, and we'd sometimes have our Saturday lunches there, so he had already tried their food. But he was also taking a few deep inhales of the aromas wafting from the takeout bags.

"Colonel Rogers," Jeanette smiled at me in greeting, giving a little gasp of surprise when she saw the baby carrier, "I keep forgetting you were so far along at the Senate meeting."

"It's alright, most people do. I didn't give everyone six months to register that I was even pregnant," I chuckled as she peeked her head over the counter to see Sophia, "Is she having a good day?"
"Very good, and I suspect it will get much better seeing you. Hello little one," She teased, cooing over our little darling. Bucky was looking around, sticking close to Steve, who was signing us in on the visitor log.

"Steve, why don't you go in first with Bucky? I'll just be a second," I promised, giving my husband a reassuring smile, "One surprise at a time."

"Makes sense," He chuckled, putting a hand on Bucky's shoulder, "Come on, she's been anxious to yell at you."

"Yell at me? Peg's loved me," Bucky teased.

"You fell off a train," Steve deadpanned.

"Ah, right. Why didn't she yell at you then? You crashed a plane, Punk," Bucky argued, "We're a couple of idiots in her eyes, I'll bet."

"I got my yelling at after Elle went off the grid. And yes, 'idiot' was one of the less colorful words she used to describe me," Steve laughed, "Your turn, jerk."

As they got further away, their bickering became background noise as I turned back to Jeanette, "I'm going to need you to set up a CT for her later."

"Why?" She questioned, curious.

"Because we have developed a treatment that may reverse her Alzheimer's," I spoke softly. Jeanette's eyes widened as she whispered, "How?"

"I have to leave it at that, but please, set it up quietly," I asked, taking a look around covertly.

"Yes Ma'am," She nodded, as I grabbed the carrier again and gave her a nod in return. I walked down the hallway, hearing Peggy's laughter echoing. Sophia was still sleeping peacefully, but I was growing antsy to see my friend and attempt to heal her mind.

If it were anything like Fitz's brain damage, it wouldn't be pleasant.

I paused outside of her room, collecting my emotions with a few calming breaths, and gently walking in. Peggy was holding Bucky's cheek and blubbering over lost time before her gaze floated past him to me. Her smile grew exponentially as she took in the car seat and gave a shout of joy, holding a hand to her mouth in shock.

"Hey there, Aunt Peggy," I teased, as I set the seat down and started pulling Sophia out of the carrier.

"Oh, look at her! She's just darling," She held a hand to her heart, "How are you both? No complications?"

"Well," I sighed, "It wasn't the most painful thing I've ever gone through, but it was up there with Phil's birth. She's as healthy as a horse though."

"And her name? I've been waiting on pins and needles here, literally," Peggy huffed, attempting to shift herself on the bed, "Sharon has kept it quiet on her few visits."

"Sophia Rebecca Rogers-Barnes," I smiled, winking at Bucky as I brought her over to see Peggy. Peggy cooed, eyes watering at the sight of my little girl.
"She's perfect," She beamed at me, gently rubbing along one of Sophia's arms.

"Peg," I swallowed, "I'd like to do something to you, but I need you to not get startled. Okay?"

"What on earth are you talking about? Gonna take me out to the backwoods and shoot me already?" She asked teasingly, as I handed Sophia to Bucky, "Thought I deserved a bit more of a dramatic exit from this world. I didn't think you'd get sick of me this quick."

I didn't answer, only reaching out to hold my palms against her temples. She gasped but I was already closing my eyes in concentration. If I focused my mind hard enough, I could see the damaged parts of her brain and watched as they healed. Next, I focused on her joints, her spine, anywhere I saw weakness was healed as I felt my body taking on her pain and reversing the damage. I released her as I collapsed backward, the ache of old joints and failing organs running through my body.

"Elle!" Steve exclaimed, running to catch me as Peggy tried to reach for me. I held my head in agony as I felt the Alzheimer's killing my brain and then healing slowly from my own healing factor. Gasping for air as my body and organs healed, I leaned against Steve in comfort.

"Damn. If I ever complain about not growing old again, slap me. That sucked," I chuckled, as Steve watched me curiously while setting me on my feet.

"What?" I asked him when he didn't speak. Bucky was looking at me as well, an odd look in his blue eyes. I looked over to Peggy, seeing her examining her hands before she shrieked as she took me in.

She looked younger, healthier, but part of me wondered what they were all staring at. I turned to find a reflective surface and I watched in morbid curiosity when my hair turned from greying, back to dark brown.

"Well, that was weird," I commented, seeing my own skin wrinkled and slowly regaining its elasticity.

"Weird doesn't begin to cover it, Eliza," Peggy asked, an edge to her tone, "What was that?"

"Something happened to me yesterday. Banner says it's not contagious, but since then, I developed the ability to heal others. I take their pain, injuries as my own. I healed Bucky's mind from trauma, Phil's chest from the scar of Loki's attack, Dr. Fitz's brain damage, Robert's damaged leg. I take it as my own, giving them my whole of that specific area, and them my body heals from the pain or trauma I've taken."

"You… you took it didn't you? The Alzheimer's?" She asked, subconsciously touching her temple.

"Yes. And I healed a few other things. Take it for a test drive," I encouraged her, stepping back a bit.

She let out a small laugh, sitting up straighter, before throwing her covers off and gesturing for Bucky to grab her robe. As he turned his back, she swung her legs over, testing her feet first on the ground. She looked up at me as I came to steady her. She smiled at me, as she stood up, walking easily compared to the last time I saw her walk. She needed a walker up until about three years ago, and since then she was wheelchair bound for fear of breaking a hip again.

"Peg, you're walking!" I exclaimed, tears beginning to fall in happiness for my friend.

"I haven't felt this good in years," She laughed, throwing her head back as her feet carried her over to Bucky and Sophia.
"Hello, little one. I wonder if your Mum will let me hold you now that I feel stronger," She teased to the baby in his arms.

"Of course! Sit first though. I don't think you'll drop her, but you may fall over," I teased her back. She rolled her eyes, plopping into the nearest chair and beaming as Bucky handed her Sophia.

"She's precious," She whispered, looking up at us. Jeanette came in, dropping a small laundry basket in shock. I held a finger up to my lips and she nodded mutely, gazing at Peggy sitting easily in the armchair, looking younger.

"We like to think so," Steve teased at her side, smiling up at Bucky and I. Jeanette began putting away Peggy's things, and I could see the questions forming in her eyes, as she remained quiet. I snuck over to her and asked, "Did you call about the scan?"

"They can get her in at 2 pm," Jeanette nodded, "What did you do exactly?"

"I should clarify. I may have developed an ability on top of my own regenerative healing factor. This ability I developed revolves around healing. I take on their pain, physical trauma, wounds… I healed someone just yesterday with brain damage, and that's what Alzheimer's is, essentially. And then it was just taking on the pain of her body, healing it to the point of her last healthiest point. I'd say I reversed her age by about fifteen years, give or take," I explained, watching Peggy gently swaying with Sophia in the chair. "And then my own regenerative healing kicks in and heals me."

"That's a dangerous thing to have. People would be knocking down your door to make them younger," Jeanette looked worried.

"It won't be public knowledge. But I hope you keep it under your hat, or Peggy would be the first person they try to leverage if the wrong people found out."

"You have my word, Colonel," She nodded, more for the people in the room. "Thank you," I gave her a small smirk, before whispering the last part, "… Agent 23."

She smiled mischievously in return, turning to leave and giving me a view of the gun holstered at her back through her scrubs.

Steve and Bucky were both looking at me and then back to the empty doorway in confusion, but I shook my head minutely, sending them little glares to keep quiet about what they just overheard.

"There, there, little one," Peggy smiled as Sophia stirred in her arms, "I'm your Aunt Peggy. You don't know how wonderful it is to meet you finally. Your mother is quite a brat, not telling me she was pregnant, and hiding all this Hydra business from me. And then she went and got superpowers!"

"I wouldn't call them superpowers," I grimaced at the term.

"You can heal people, even reverse the aging process. If you don't bottle that up and sell it, you should be smacked upside the head by every woman alive today," She snarked.

"No one outside of SHIELD will know, other than Jeanette. You keep it quiet too, Peg," I teasingly threatened.

"What are you going to do? Make me even younger?" She snarked back, looking back down at Sophia, "Maybe then I'd stick around a couple of years longer, to see this little darling grow up."

"You really want to live past 100? So far, I can tell you it has its downsides," Steve teased.
"You've barely lived 30 years, Sleeping Beauty," Peggy quipped.

"Same here," Bucky pointed out, "Elle and Peggy are the only two that actually got this far by being active the whole time."

"It would be nice to have a little longer with my family, now that I might be able to travel to them easier," Peggy mused, "But I have lived a rather long life. More than… most."

I sniffed, holding back tears as I thought of my guys, of Howard. It exactly what Peggy was thinking, as her eyes met mine and I gave her a sad smile.

"Do you know, I always thought I was going to be the last? For obvious reasons, as I wasn't aging like the rest of you. I didn't want to be the last. And I'm not saying I want you gone, but living for so long gets to be too much some days."

"I was thinking the same thing," Peggy smiled sadly, "I miss Daniel. Now that I remember everything, I remember thinking about how I'd live without him. And then the Alzheimer's kicked in and I'd forget for a while."

"Eliza," She spoke softly, "The next time I'm getting close, let me go."

I shook my head, holding back tears, knowing if I spoke I would sob. She took my hand with her free one, "I've lived my life, and I got so many wonderful years. But I want to be with my husband."

"I can't lose you too," I whispered, "I've had you my whole life. You're my best friend, my sister."

"And now you have two handsome men, a family… everything you ever wanted. Everything you were denied for so long. Don't be selfish with me. You let me go, or when I finally do go, I'll come back to haunt you with misplaced paperwork so you're forced to do it a second or even a third time," She teased.

"You know how much I hate paperwork," I grimaced, as Bucky gave a small chuckle.

"Paperwork is the enemy," He smiled at me.

"I'll do it," She threatened, "You make me a promise, right now Elizabeth."

I stubbornly folded my arms, giving her the stink eye as I set my jaw. Her gaze never wavered from mine, before I rolled my eyes and groaned, "Fine, you win, you old bat."

"Warhorse," She teased, asking for my hand. I begrudgingly took hers, "I can't promise I'll be gracious about you choosing to leave me."

"I'm not leaving you, you brat," She chuckled, "Just popping off to the Waiting Room with Howard and the Commandos. I'll be sure to say hello to Abraham and Chester for you as well."

I turned my head away as I thought about the men from my younger years, tears springing to my eyes.

"Eliza, don't cry. We've had many happy years together. That does make us sound like an old married couple, doesn't it?" She teased, before continuing, "It might not be for a while, but eventually we all pass on. You just promise me you'll not take a single day for granted."

"You know I won't," I nodded at her, looking up to Bucky and Steve. They were smiling at me, despite the glassy eyes they both were sporting.
Chapter Fifty

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hello faithful readers! We have one more chapter and then a little one-shot for you. Posting it as a separate story to not mess up the chapters here. Song used in this chapter is I Love It by Icona Pop feat Charli XCX.

Disclaimer: I do not own Marvel, Disney, ABC or the Avengers.

A week later, Daisy was feeling confident enough to come out of the BUS. Brock gave her breathing room, which was more than I could say for Melinda and Phil. The parents of our youngest InHuman were on her like flies on a pig. Fitz had made a heart rate monitor for her at Melinda's request, seeing as how her powers were tethered to her emotions, at the moment.

I had another building bought, one where Daisy could practice with her powers while we figured out her limitations. Daisy was the one who came up with the catchy name; the Cocoon. It was a nod at our transformation, but it would allow us to practice while keeping Olympus a secret; And to prevent any of our agents from feeling nervous about the roof caving in on them, due to Daisy getting frustrated.

Peter and May were still at Olympus, getting cabin fever, but surviving the wait. Peter had convinced me to let him train a bit so that he could help protect himself and May. Melinda was more than willing to oversee said training, giving Peter the basics in jujitsu, karate, and taekwondo. Apparently, he was doing well, as I didn't have the stomach to watch my nephew being attacked.

It was Daisy's birthday, and we were also celebrating Steve and Phil's in a giant party as theirs were also around the same time. Sophia was almost two months old, more alert during her waking hours and smiling at everyone. Our Academies reopened, with increased security, and Olympus was feeling a little quieter. We had all gotten into a routine post-Hydra-gate, as Daisy called it, and tonight was the one night we all had a few hours to relax.

Bucky was playing with Sophia on the mat in the lounge, while Zeus watched over them. Steve was currently showing Sam around the base a bit more and getting him in the system after his session in the Chair. The man had finally made up his mind, coming on as a stand-in for Daisy while she got control of her powers, and then would transfer to STRIKE. Needless to say, I was very smug about finally convincing him to put his talents to use while he still could.

I was busy making the perfect cakes, a blend of each of the three birthday celebrants. Daisy's was a salted caramel cake, as she was sweet with a small pinch of saltiness. Steve's was more of a gag cake, a regular vanilla cake with the American flag decorated on top. And Phil's was a Banana Foster Butter cake, his personal favorite after years of Maggie Dugan's famous brioche French toast. The sauce had been a special order with Tim's daughter Anna, who was happy to gift it to her 'little cousin'.

"And done!" I beamed as I put the finishing decorations on the three cakes.

"It looks beautiful Doll," Bucky smiled, "Aren't we a bit early on the 4th of July celebrations though?"
"That's Steve's," I chuckled, cleaning up my mess quickly and finding the number candles.

"Oh, he's gonna punish you for that later," Bucky teased.

"Crossing my fingers he does," I suggested with a suggestive eyebrow raise, as Sophia cooed.

"If he doesn't, I will," He winked at me.

"Promises, promises," I laughed freely, "How does the new arm feel?"

Fitz and Mack had put the finishing touches on it only yesterday and Bucky was eager to have it done first thing. So I put the cake decorating off until after he had it officially attached. Steve and Sam had come in as it was just finished being attached, complimenting him on how badass it looked.

The metal had been shaped to mimic the other metal arm, giving the appearance of muscle mass that hid the complex wiring and interface system underneath that controlled new sensors. Bucky was happy they didn't have to connect any new wires to his nerves for them to work, as they piggybacked off of the original hookups.

The arm was a sleek muted gray, with shinier details where the plates moved. Bucky asked that the star not remain, which I would understand why. Any reminder fo the Winter Soldier would be erased and Bucky could forge himself a new identity. A specific request I had made was a buffed out ring around Bucky's ring finger. He had beamed when he saw that, physically holding himself back from mauling me apart in the lab, especially in front of the scientists.

"Good. Doesn't hurt, feels much lighter though. Going to need to relearn how to shoot and balance the gun," He shrugged, as Sophia cooed at him, "Yes I will, Soso, yes I will!"

"Why do I feel like that nickname is going to stick with her?" I sighed.

"Just because you don't enjoy nicknames," Bucky smiled at me teasingly.

"I like my nicknames when it's family. If a random person on the street called me Elle, Beth or Liz, I'd probably punch them. Mainly the last one."

"No, you wouldn't."

"You're right. I'd just ignore them," I shrugged.

"Peter was very proud of his nickname choice," Bucky teased.

"Ugh," I sighed dramatically, "You twisted my arm, it can stay. Using my nephew's happiness against me..."

"It wasn't going anywhere anyway," He teased, running a finger over Sophia's cheek, "Isn't that right, Soso?"

She gave a little shriek of joy, making us chuckle.

"Colonel Rogers Ma'am," HERMES spoke up as I covered the cakes.

"What's up H?" I asked the AI as he brought up a holographic screen showing Natasha on base.

"You wished to be alerted when Agent Romanoff arrived back from her mission in Tokyo."

"I did. Where is she heading?"
"Training rooms. She told Agent Carter she hasn't been able to keep up her daily regimen while on assignment. She was also brought up to speed on your recent trip to San Juan," He explained.

"I'll give it a few minutes. Thank you HERMES," I smiled, moving to lay down beside Sophia's mat.

"You're welcome Ma'am," He replied, before it was quiet once more. Sophia gurgled and cooed as Bucky showed her a plush toy, making us both chuckle.

"How are you?" I asked Bucky, propping my head on my hand to study him.

"The arm or..." He trailed off and I raised a brow at him seriously.

"I'm doing a lot better than I was," He shrugged, a small grimace tugging at his lips, "I just don't know where I fit into the world now."

"What do you want to do?" I asked seriously.

"Well, I could start taking on a few missions, if you think I'm ready-"

"No," I shook my head, giving him a gentle smile, "Not what I want, or what you think I want. What does Bucky Barnes want from the world, right now?"

He pursed his lips, looking off in contemplation.

"I want to start training again. I want to be able to use this arm and the knock-off serum they used and turn the tides in our favor. I want to make them crawl back into their foxholes when they see me back fighting for the side of freedom, and not their twisted version of it. I want Sophia to grow up in a world, free of Hydra, free of tyrants that would try to dictate her future. That would try to dictate our future," He spoke softly as he gazed at Sophia, his gaze flickering up to me as he finished.

"I want you and Steve. I... I want to see you swollen with my child. When you found me... There was an emotion I couldn't place at the time, knowing that you and Steve had made a baby. Two children, but Phil wasn't conceived in the normal way," He teased, playing off his jealousy. I smiled softly at him but remained silent, as I sensed he wasn't done.

"I want the life we always said we'd have after the War. Raising our brood, spending our days together as a family," He replied honestly, reaching up to pet Zeus, who was snoring softly.

"Then we make that happen," I smiled, "Do you want me to go back under the knife?"

"It's too soon. That's not fair to Sophia," He shook his head, "But, maybe in a year?"

"Square deal," I smirked, "But for now, we can still practice as much as we want."

"Well, practice makes perfect," He teased back, leaning over Sophia to capture my lips.

"Mmm, that is does. But right now, I need to go talk to a redhead about me healing her," I sighed, "Want to join me?"

"Why not? Let's take a walk," He agreed.

It was a short elevator ride down to the training rooms, where Natasha was wailing on a training dummy. She'd changed her hair again, no longer past her shoulder and straight, but chin length and curly. Ever the chameleon, she'd change it up every few months, either her part or the body and shape. It rarely changed color.
"I can't leave you alone for 5 minutes, can I?" Nat cheeked as I walked into the training rooms. She looked as if she had been training hard, despite her most likely racing mind. Bucky was behind me with Sophia in his arms, cooing to her as I moved to stretch lightly.

"I can get up to a lot of trouble in five minutes," I teased, and she looked at me with mixed emotions in her eyes. I didn't need to hear her speak to know what was on her mind; it was written in her expression and body language.

"Let's spar and talk it over. Because once it's done, it can't be undone; not without a procedure," I ordered and she nodded. Grabbing the bow staffs, we faced off, moving fluidly in the dance we had perfected over the years.

Block, hit, spin, strike.

"Pro: You'd be able to have children," I spoke, as we kept moving.

"Con: Not always doable in our line of work," She gritted her teeth.

"Pro: We'd vet a nanny, and the potential child would be protected with Sophia as well," I pointed out.

"Con: We aren't working with normal office hours. And no daycare."

"Pro: You'd have very willing Aunts and Uncles to help you," I teased.

"Con: I'd be a single parent," She countered.

"Pro: You wouldn't be alone, considering the potentials for your baby daddy." "Potential baby daddy, singular," She corrected, "Still not sure if this would be the best option. All I've ever known was this…"

"But you are not a tree," I quipped striking down hard on her staff, "If you aren't happy where you are, move."

She stopped fighting back for a moment, and asked me, "What if I get called out on a mission and I don't come back? I won't leave another orphan in the world."

"Not an orphan, and you'll come back. I will move heaven and earth, healing your grievous injuries too. No one is dying. We are talking about a very serious decision, but it doesn't have to be scary. What is the loudest protesting point in your head right now?"

She was quiet a moment, before whispering, "What if I'm not a good Mom?"

I dropped my bow staff, moving towards her to take her hand as I smiled, "You will be the greatest Mom. I see how hard you've fought for Clint… for my family. I see your nurturing side with Sophia, and my heart aches for you because I know how much you desire to be a mother."

She took a brief glance over at Sophia, who was cooing as Bucky rocked her in the corner.

"Just… give me some time to process this. Fitz just got better, and we haven't really had a chance to… define the relationship," She spoke softly.

"Take all the time you need," I smiled, "It's a lot of work having kids."

"Seriously? The reverse psychology isn't going to work," Nat smiled.
"Go talk to him. If he's as half as smitten with you as you are with him, he'll listen to what you want and tell you what he wants. Be an adult, and if he can't, then you know he isn't the one," I sighed, "Go now. He might be a little distracted by your attire, but it may just reinforce the caveman instincts of finding a woman with childbearing hips."

"What's your excuse?" She teased, and I laughed heartily.

I smiled, shoving her off the mat, "Go, now!"

She chuckled, dropping a kiss to Sophia's forehead on the way out and saying goodbye to Bucky.

"You think she'll take the offer?" Bucky asked me as I put the bow staffs back.

"Hard to say. I think she'll figure it out," I shrugged, "Once she talks to Fitz."

"For the record, I think you are gorgeous," He smiled at me.

"Oh, that 'hips' comment? It's a running joke with Natasha and I. We are the same size for everything and sometimes we switch suits," I chuckled, as I straightened my shirts, reaching around his waist to slip my hand in his back pocket as we walked out of the gym.

"Really? I can't picture that," He looked puzzled.

"It's very odd, but it really confuses the enemy," I chuckled, "Actually, I'd use a Photostatic veil on most missions anyways. It's too bad I can't turn invisible. That would have made half of the assignments I went on so much easier. Howard used to say he designed my suit so that people recognized me, and knew their doom was approaching. Nat's suit has the same effect, so why not have a little fun while we're kicking ass?"

"Work isn't supposed to be fun," He teased.

"Oh, but kicking ass is fun," I beamed, "At least for me."

The party was a success, celebrating all three birthdays before we had any big missions come up.

The girls were excited to dance, and it gave me a memory to hold onto of all our July birthday people finally celebrating together. Daisy was able to relax, which was my main goal.

As I watched Nat and Fitz that night, I noticed their body language and the soft looks they were giving each other, schooling my face to not give away the pure unadulterated joy I was feeling upon watching them. Nat found me at the drink table, pouring myself a small cup of water.

"How exactly would we heal me?" She asked softly.

"So I take it the warning I gave was well used," I smirked at her, and she tried to hide her smile.

"Yes, it was well used," She quipped.

"I'd like details about that later," I smiled, before letting out a breath, "We'd do it in medical, where Dr. Fine could watch over both of us. I've figured out that I can consciously not heal someone if I touch them. But this would be something for the medical journals for sure."

"What's he going to do, record the ultrasound?" She teased.

" Probably. My uterus might detach itself, reattach or regrow. If I need to have the extra organ removed, he wants to be prepared. Anything they can use to show how my gift works to the
government," I shrugged.

"Wait, you're actually going to tell them about this?" She asked.

"It might not be public knowledge, but I'd like the CIA at least to know, in case they see movement in Puerto Rico."

"Liz, you know how they get about unexplained powers," She frowned.

"No, I know how we get. This is our area of expertise, not Langley's," I reminded her, "I'm just giving them a heads up instead of an afterthought if Hydra figures it out. Director Rider will keep his ear out, but otherwise, keep the information to himself. They haven't gotten all of their agents through the Chair."

"Any word from Jemma?" Nat asked.

"Not much. They are tracking Donnie Gill. Still looking for the Obelisk, but we're getting our decoy ready. They had been tracking down Agent 33 for a while, but we got her back last month. They are still trying to find her, why, I'm not sure. She's good, but not a key player. Reinhart/Whitehall is getting sloppy."

She nodded, looking out over the party, "And our friend in Europe?"

"Was back here last week before heading to Siberia," I smirked into my cup.

"Siberia?" She questioned with a smile, "Why?"

"Five reasons. Bucky… after Howard and Maria's crash, the serum Howard had made, was used on five other Winter Soldiers."

She was quiet for a moment before asking, "Recon?"

"No, execution. They were all frozen in cryo," I explained, seeing Bucky laughing as he held Sophia. Sam must have said something funny because he nearly doubled over in laughter.

"No rehabilitation for them?" She questioned with a raised brow.

"They were Hydra's elite team, the worst of the worst. Overturning governments overnight. They volunteered for it, already in Hydra's ranks," I spoke plainly, and her eyebrow dropped, giving a curt nod in understanding. Bucky was strong enough that he and Steve were evenly matched. Another five would be more than we could handle at once, especially when they were firmly on the enemy's side.

"He also has a few names to track down in Europe, so we won't be seeing him for a while," I added, "Rats that didn't go down with the ship."

"Strucker," She guessed, "He's the one that petitioned to work on Loki's scepter."

"Dr. List as well. And anything related to the Tesseract, I want on the next Slingshot into the sun," I nodded, "Hydra tech of the '40s and anything Phase Two, off this planet."

"So, if we set a date for a year from now?" She spoke quietly, "Give or take a month. Leo wants to spend some time together so I can convince him, get to know each other better and what not. He wasn't sure he wanted kids, but... He likes to think I'd convince him otherwise."

"Perfect," I smiled, "If we play our cards right we can be pregnant at the same time."
"That would be fun. Already talking about baby number three?" She teased.

"Yes. But Bucky had dibs on the next two," I smiled, watching Bucky pass Sophia to Steve, sharing a soft look as I heard her coo.

"Grams, come dance," Daisy called as I heard our song.

"Want to join?" I challenged Nat.

"Why not?" She smirked, moving to follow me.

I got this feeling on the summer day when you were gone.
I crashed my car into the bridge. I watched, I let it burn.
I threw your shit into a bag and pushed it down the stairs.
I crashed my car into the bridge.
I don't care, I love it.
I don't care.

We were jumping and singing along, laughing freely. I knew when I was able to leave Sophia a little longer, that Daisy and Natasha would be dragging me out to dance.

I got this feeling on the summer day when you were gone.
I crashed my car into the bridge. I watched, I let it burn.
I threw your shit into a bag and pushed it down the stairs.
I crashed my car into the bridge.
I don't care, I love it.
I don't care.
You're on a different road, I'm in the Milky Way
You want me down on earth, but I am up in space
You're so damn hard to please, we gotta kill this switch
You're from the 70s, but I'm a 90's bitch
I love it!
I love it!
I got this feeling on the summer day when you were gone.
I crashed my car into the bridge. I watched, I let it burn.
I threw your shit into a bag and pushed it down the stairs.
I crashed my car into the bridge.
I don't care, I love it.

I don't care, I love it, I love it.

I don't care.

You're on a different road, I'm in the Milky Way

You want me down on earth, but I am up in space

You're so damn hard to please, we gotta kill this switch

You're from the 70s, but I'm a 90's bitch

I don't care, I love it.

I don't care, I love it, I love it.

I don't care, I love it.

I don't care, I love it, I love it.

I don't care.

I love it.

As the song ended, I huffed, seeing Steve and Bucky beaming over at me.

"Sorry," I gave a teasing smile as I joined them, "Haven't been dancing in almost a year. Forgot how much fun it was."

"It looked like fun," Bucky smirked, "The music is still…"

"Yeah, EDM is nothing like what we grew up on," Steve commented, making Sam choke on his drink.

"What's wrong?" Bucky asked the newest recruit.

"You've been trolling me, Rogers," Sam jokingly confronted Steve, "You know what EDM is but not Memes? You knew damn well it was memes, didn't you?"

Steve just barked out a laugh, startling Sophia.

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