Signs You've Found Your Soulmate

by PumpkinDoodles

Summary

Darcy Lewis has the world's most obnoxious soulmark. But she's making it happen, if only so she can take appropriate revenge on the designated speaker. That's her plan, anyway. But the best plans tend to go awry in the Lewis-Foster Platonic Household of Crazy Soulmark Ladies. At least they've got Jane's all sorted. Darcy always knew it was pretty.

Notes

I own nothing!
“You don’t have a soulmark, correct?” the man in the eyepatch asked him. Brock Rumlow was sitting with Nick Fury on a park bench in New York City. In the late fall air, people strolled and walked their dogs. Rumlow didn’t know why the director of SHIELD wanted to meet him here. The message had been an odd one. He’d been recommended for a job at the mysterious federal agency after he became eligible to retire from the Navy at twenty years. He’d planned on staying in the Navy for the full thirty, but the injury had thrown him. His commanding officer in SEAL Team 3 had wanted him to switch to a supervisory capacity. At just 41, he wasn’t ready yet. The joke was that a SEAL was always a SEAL, but he wasn’t keen to be the guy managing the operations without being on the ground, in thick of things. He wanted to be in the operations. Perhaps a law enforcement agency could use him in a more active role, he’d thought. He was fit enough for most LEO positions, despite his shoulder injury. He didn’t care about money: he wanted to feel useful.

“No,” Brock Rumlow said, “no marks, no visible tattoos, nothing like that. Should I?”

“I need a man with your particular qualifications,” Fury said cryptically. “Someone with no visible past and no future destination inked on their skin.”

“And no soul?” Rumlow said dryly. The myth was that people without soulmarks had no soul. “You’ve seen my naval med recs, right? I blew out my shoulder last year.”

“I think, where I’m sending you, sailor, that if you make it out alive, that won’t be a problem anymore,” Fury said.

“SHIELD is gonna fix my shoulder?” he asked sardonically. The best combat surgeons--men and women with grueling experience putting bodies back together after IEDs--hadn’t been able to fix his shoulder. The bullets had fragmented it beyond repair.

“Do you want the job?” Fury asked. “Serve your country in an active capacity, like you put on the damn form or no?”

“Yeah,” Rumlow said, wryly. “I can see you really need me. What’s the job?”

“We got a little Nazi problem,” Fury said.

“Nope,” Fury said. “Not those.”
Several weeks later, Rumlow survived the first rounds of a HYDRA serum trial. He was lying in a cot in an abandoned hospital, feverish, in agonizing pain, and thinking *survive asshole survive*, when he realized his shoulder motion was back at full-range. Unless that was just the convulsions. Difficult to tell, really, he thought.

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2011,

Culver University,

Virginia

Darcy was walking by a large cork board at Culver’s Student Union with a friend from her work study job—writing center tutoring—when she saw the flyer. *Email Dr. Jane Foster to schedule an interview*, it said at the bottom. “Hold my coffee, Mike,” she told Michael.

“Okay,” he said. That was why they’d gone to the Student Union; it was the nearest place that sold coffee and the Learning Center’s breakroom machine was broken. Michael suspected Darcy had killed the machine from exhaustion; she seemed to have a to-go cup glued permanently to her hand.

“You’re mine, baby,” Darcy said, taking down the flyer. It had an image of a desert sunset.

“Darcy! You can’t just do that,” Michael said, “besides this is an internship with an astrophysicist and you’re a political science major.”

“I’m going to get this internship,” she said, shrugging. She’d send an email as soon as they made it back to the Learning Center in Maitland Hall.

“They don’t just give you an internship because you feel like going to New Mexico, you know that, right?” he teased.

“Eh, maybe I want to paint in that palette of color or something?” Darcy said.

“What?” Michael said.

“I think Georgia O’Keefe said that,” Darcy said. She’d been an art history major for two semesters. She was sort of on the extended graduation schedule. She’d had a fall birthday, taken a gap year to waitress and work on her math SATs, and was now on the six-year plan. The difficulty was, *so much* was interesting. Darcy had finally settled on political science because they let her do interdisciplinary things. She could never chose meals in restaurants, either. Anyhow, everyone thought she was younger than twenty-four because she always wore sunscreen.

She and Mike went to their separate appointments when they arrived back at the Learning Center; he had an actual student arriving with a paper, while Darcy had an OWL (Online Writing and Learning)
appointment. It meant she responded to an email with an essay attached. She would read it and leave comments in Microsoft Word, then send it back to the student as an email attachment, and do session notes in their system. That was her job. That and repressing her sarcasm. The OWLs were always messier than what someone brought you in-person. She’d received an entire English 102 essay with you rendered as u once. Which was only cool if u were Prince. But she loved being able to listen to her iPod as she responded to OWLs. She hummed as she shot off an email to Dr. Jane Foster, then switched over to her work email and Microsoft Word. “Oh man,” Darcy said. It was an English persuasive essay.

“What is it?” a passing coworker said. Jennifer, a philosophy and religion graduate student who was, like, a literal genius, Darcy thought. Even PAR undergrad classes gave her headaches; her 101 instructor had always suggested she “take this argument further” on her papers and Darcy had no clue what he meant.

“Another persuasive essay on Forks Over Knives ,” Darcy said glumly. Essay topics seemed to come in waves. The anti-meat documentary was the most popular topic for persuasive essays across the English classes this semester. It depressed the crap out of Darcy--not just because she loved cheese and hated to hear it compared to mucus--but mostly because students got sucked into the emotional nature of the doc’s appeal and wrote the same agitated essays over and over.

“I read fifteen last week because I was in the drop-in lab for a three-hour shift,” Jennifer said. “I think I liked it better when it was all confused essays about Foucault’s Panopticon last semester.”

“Fifteen? All your appointments, too?” Darcy said. Most of them worked ten hours a week, one appointment per hour or shifts in the Writing Lab, where you saw however many people showed up, but had to juggle and couldn’t read a whole essay.

“Uh-huh,” Jennifer said. “Good luck with your snot cheese.”

“Noooooooo,” Darcy moaned. Maybe Jane Foster would email her back.

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Two days later, Darcy had read six more essays on Forks Over Knives and Dr. Jane Foster hadn’t emailed her back. She went to the astrophysics department and knocked on the door of a certain lab. The woman inside cut her off before she could finish introducing herself.

“You’re a political science major,” the petite brunette sitting in the little room said. She was much younger than Darcy had imagined she’d be and was actually assembling something with a wrench and a screwdriver. “I did read your email, but this is a physics lab.”

“Listen--” Darcy said.

“Whatever you’re about to say, I can’t give you this internship, Miss Lewis,” she said, not looking up from her workbench. A small screw flew across the room.

“One, we both know that’s a lie, two, you need safety goggles, and three, please don’t make me disrobe here,” Darcy said.

“Pardon me?” Jane Foster said.
“You’re in my soulmark. I’m your assistant in my soulmark. That’s one reason I took the SAT math section three times to get into Culver and applied twice. I have to meet you before I can meet whoever that person is,” Darcy said, pulling her sweater off.

“No, please, you don’t—” Jane began.

“Don’t worry, it’s nowhere naughty. I just have the world’s rudest tramp stamp,” Darcy explained.

“Oh,” Jane said. “Rude?”

“I need to meet my soulmate so I can throw a beverage at them,” Darcy told her. “It’s been my life dream since I turned twelve and decided what to do about it. I’m pretty sure it’s a drunk dude.”

She turned and lifted her camisole, so Foster could see her lower back. Written in a slashing, masculine-looking hand was one of the rudest soulmarks that Jane had ever seen:

You’re Jane Foster’s assistant? You? I didn’t know that astrophysicists hired ditzy klutzes now.

No wonder she needs a SHIELD job, it’s probably to keep her safe from your coffee spills, huh?

“Hella rude, right? It’s my dream to throw my coffee at him, whoever he is. Will you help me achieve my dream, Jane Foster?” Darcy asked, peering over her shoulder.

“Absolutely,” Jane said. “What an asshole. I’ll even slap him for you.” Jane had strong feelings about soulmarks. Hers was difficult, too.

“Awesome,” Darcy said.

“What’s SHIELD?” Jane said.

“I don’t know, I thought you might know?” Darcy said. “It’s not a division of NASA or something?”

“Nope,” Jane said. “But you’re hired.” She shook Darcy’s hand. “We can be the ladies in the desert with the crazy soulmarks. Oh, and my friend Erik Selvig, but he’s nice.”

“You have a weird one, too?” Darcy said, surprised and delighted.

“Uh-huh,” she rolled up her sleeve. There was a thin line of characters circling her elbow. “Mine’s in an unreadable, unknown language.”

“It’s really pretty, I’m jelly,” Darcy said. Jane smiled. No one was that nice about her soulmark. They always made jokes about Rosetta Stone.

“Erik’s Norwegian, so he swears it looks like archaic Norse runes, but I joke it’s because my soulmate is an alien. I’ve always been interested in space,” Jane said.

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Months later, they discovered both the meaning of Jane’s soulmark and what SHIELD was. Standing under the New Mexico sky, Darcy looked at Erik Selvig. Jane was still watching Thor go
after the battle in Puente Antiguo. “You were both right--it was really old Norse aliens, Erik!” She
gave him a double thumbs up and he laughed.

“You won’t work for SHIELD now?” Darcy asked Jane that night on the roof. The stars seemed
nearer when you realized there were whole other realms behind them. She’d guessed they’d always
been near, but space had felt more abstract.

“No, look Darce, I’m sorry, I know it’s part of your soulmark, but they stole from me. I can’t take
Coulson’s job offer now,” Jane said.

“You realize this locks me in, right? For me to achieve my lifelong dream, I have to stay your intern
until you change your mind,” Darcy said. “Not that I had a formal life plan or anything. That was
kinda it.”

“Hmmm,” Jane said. “Doesn’t the soulmark say assistant?”

“Yeah?” Darcy said. “Assistant, intern, what’s the difference?”

“Culver will let me pay an assistant,” Jane said. “Not much, but it’s something. You can finish your
credits online while we work here, maybe? I’ll need grant application help, anyway. We’re starting
from scratch.”

“We can’t blackmail Coulson for money?” Darcy said. “Or rob a gas station?”

“My luck, Coulson would be in the gas station to foil my robbery,” Jane said.
Sign Two

Chapter Summary

It's like The Birds, okay?

Chapter Notes

I own nothing! Thanks for all your comments and kudos. Y’all are fantastic!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2013

London

Jane’s Mom’s House

“Phil Coulson. Coulson! C-o-u-l-s-. Shit, I think they hung up on me. You assholes,” Darcy said to the phone in Jane’s mom’s house. She was pacing back and forth behind the couch where Ian was sitting. Jane and Thor were AWOL and Darcy was freaking the freak out.

“Who hung up on you?” Ian asked.

“The FBI. They won't give me the number for SHIELD,” she said, glaring at the phone.

"Who?"

"The terrible jackbooted thugs who are supposed to be responding to this stuff, not ignoring it when Dr. Jane Foster disappears with Thor after stuff shoots out of her and everything is all weird like the beginning of The Birds ,” Darcy said.

“*The Birds*?” Ian asked.

“Old movie, Hitchcock, lots of crows, Melanie Griffith’s mom--” Darcy listed.

“Who?” Ian said.

“What do you *do* in your free time?” Darcy asked. He shrugged. He was like a damn owl in an emergency, she thought. All who? Impractical.

“Astrophysics?” he said.

“Ughhh, I need a cop. Or something. Someone who solves things,” Darcy said. “Real things with practical skills and maybe a police scanner.”
“Darcy, isn’t that--?” Ian said, pointing to a television. Erik Selvig was running naked through Stonehenge.

“Oh em gee, just what I need today, more naked Erik,” she complained.

“Is he frequently naked?” Ian asked.

“He says waistbands are too binding. I can’t say I disagree, but I tried to get him yoga pants and he refuses to try them,” she said, sighing.

“Oh,” Ian said.

“Can you pretend to be Erik’s kid?” Darcy said, after a pause.

“I guess?” Ian said.

When they exited the mental health facility with a freed Erik--Darcy mentally noted that she’d have her breakdown here and not in the States because it was super tidy and clean and non-judgy in there--there were birds flying in weird configurations. “That,” Darcy said to Ian, pointing, “is what the movie The Birds is like.”

“Okay,” he said doubtfully.

“I’m sure it’s a sign we’re all going to die,” Darcy said.

“It’s birds?” Ian said.

“You are so innocent,” Darcy said.

“I’m afraid Darcy is correct. I believe the worlds are going to collapse inward and cause total destruction of every realm,” Erik said suddenly.

“When?” Ian said.

“Oh, you’ll believe it when he says it,” Darcy muttered.

“Soon,” Erik said. “Very, very soon.”

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Washington, DC

FBI headquarters

“Some crazy college student from Culver keeps calling the public line for the FBI and demanding the number for SHIELD, sir,” the junior agent assigned to fielding calls for her FBI supervisor said.

“Culver? Probably a prank,” the supervisor said. “You know how college students are.”

“So, I shouldn’t pass it onto SHIELD?” the agent said.
“Do you want Nick Fury and his eyepatch glaring at you? I don’t even like saying the man’s name,” he replied. In the nearby cubicles, several FBI agents laughed quietly. The supervisor walked away.

“Bloody Fury, Bloody Fury,” one agent chanted jokingly, just loud enough for his neighbor to hear.

“Hush, Bob,” the woman said.

“You must not say the name!” a third agent intoned. “Woe betides you and all present if you say the name!”

“Bloody Fury!” Bob said again. The third agent pretended to hide under his desk. The female FBI agent finally lost it and started to laugh.

“What are y’all laughing at?” a passing agent said. Bob repeated his impression.

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Presque Isle, Maine

Presque Isle International Airport

“Everything quiet?” Rumlows asked Jack Rollins, sliding into the airport diner’s booth across from him. Rollins was his new partner in undercover SHIELD work. They were on a stopover after a mission near Baffin Island, up within the Arctic Circle. Pierce had sent them looking for artifacts from Cap’s crash; they’d found them and now they were passing them to Fury, not HYDRA. Brock was slightly uncomfortable about having alien stuff in his checked bag, but it couldn’t be helped. This was boring stealth work. He hadn’t even shot anything and Jack had complained about the cold. Like searching for coins on the Jersey Shore with a metal detector, but colder.

“Pierce wants to meet with us when we get back, something about a new project,” Rollins said, looking nervous. He’d lied to Pierce. Did Pierce sense it? Also, he still felt cold from Baffin. He’d never get used to cold.

“It’ll be fine,” his partner said. Brock knew he was nervous. Most people just thought Jack looked frightening. A passing elderly couple looked alarmed at Jack’s expression. The wife held her purse a little tighter, forcing Brock to suppress a chuckle.

“What?” Jack said.

“Grandma thinks you’re a purse snatcher,” Brock said.

“Bloody hell, this country,” Jack said.

“Accent,” Brock scolded. Jack was struggling with his American cover. Brock inwardly cursed Fury for not just keeping things simple and making Jack’s alternate identity from Perth, too. Fury didn’t know how to do simple. He was very into cat and mouse and super complicated.

“It’s just my face,” Jack complained. “Besides, you’re the one with the undercover attitude.”

“Say what?” Brock said.
“Rude, crude, and dangerous to know,” Jack said. “I’m polite.”

“Sure you are, Mr. Thylacine,” Brock joked. Jack had just shaved his head and grown a five o’clock shadow. It made him look like an extinct Australian species.

“Shut up,” Jack said.

“It’s your eyes, really,” Brock said casually. He checked out a woman sitting at the counter. Since he was unmarked and traveled and was undercover, he was a hookup guy. Women were fine with it. They wanted to meet their matches and he was just a temporary stop. He tried to be a fun stop: that crazy mysterious guy they could tell stories about. It wasn’t like he could be anything else. He was trying to catch the woman’s eye when their phones both rang. At once.

“Oh, no,” Jack said. “I’m bloody tired, mate.”


“Elves?” Jack said, eyes widening.

“Grab your bags, Mr. Thylacine, London’s calling,” Brock said. “The elves were apparently real pasty and destructive to her Majesty’s property. Fury’s sending us a quinjet.”

“Not everything in the Commonwealth countries and the UK belongs to the Queen,” Jack said, secretly relieved they didn’t have to fly commercial back to DC as planned. He was so tall and economy was so confining.

“I thought the Crown was a big player in London real estate?” Brock said mildly, as they stood. He was leaving cash on the laminated table. Jack stared. “What? I read,” Brock said.

“When?” Jack muttered.

“Somebody left a People magazine on my plane seat.” They’d sat separately for part of the trip home. “I didn’t know Prince Charles and Prince Andrew didn’t get along.”

“Why would you bother, m–man?” Jack asked.

“Women love princesses, don’t they?” Brock said, winking at the woman he’d been checking out. Jack suppressed a groan.

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London

Jane’s Mom’s House, Again

“Well,” Jane said to another scientist on the telephone in her mom’s kitchen, “thankfully, the world didn’t end. But I wish Thor would come back and Darcy has a really bad case of laryngitis from screaming.” A passing Darcy rolled her eyes. “Don’t roll your eyes, you do,” Jane said. “She can’t talk at all. Ruptured her whole throat because she yelled for so long.”

Bite me, she thought. Darcy made a rude gesture.
“We’ll get you a board or a notepad,” Ian said, coming into the kitchen. He and Darcy had kissed. It had been a good kiss, Darcy thought. But it was definitely a short-term fling. He was too much like a Dude Jane. That would leave too many astrophysicists cluttering up the house and wanting to watch *Frontline* on PBS or Neil Degrasse Tyson. Darcy couldn’t explain why that guy bugged her, but he did.

“I need to go to the SHIELD field office,” Jane said. “Fury’s sent another fruit basket.” Darcy pretended to keel over. Dramatically.

“What?” Ian said.

“She says he should send money, not fruit,” Jane said dryly. Darcy nodded and did big arms, like Jesus in Da Vinci’s *Last Supper*. “That means lots of money,” Jane said.

“Yeah, I got it,” Ian said. “Big money.”

Darcy did the gesture again, just to emphasize her point, nodding firmly. Then she made herself a coffee and ate Nutella out of the jar. She thought it was good for her throat.

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**London**

**SHIELD London Field Office**

Brock shifted into STRIKE Alpha mode as soon as the quinjet landed near the temporary field office. Jack’s description--rude and crude--wasn’t too far off, truly. It was easier for people to believe he was genuinely HYDRA if he played at being a bit of a Neanderthal. Plus, it wasn’t like there was a risk in being rude, really. He had no soulmate. First impressions didn’t matter so much. People who worked with him respected his acumen and work ethic, even if he was abrasive and sarcastic at first. There was something fun about getting to re-live the physicality of his twenties now (jumping out of planes, practicing at ranges, getting all the cool new tech) and pretending to be an extroverted frat boy, instead of the solemn young man he had really been. Brock had been desperate to be a SEAL in his youth, so he had avoided anything-- partying, drinking, being stupid-- that would have counted against him when he applied to train. He had no family connections, no wealth to leverage. He’d had to be exemplary. That wasn’t the case anymore.

Brock looked around as they descended the quinjet ramp. The area they were staging the initial response in was a municipal soccer field. It was very green. People were running around, slightly frantic. That was the aura of a field office doing alien clean-up. Agents scurried, things were loaded on and off trucks, forklifts were sometimes necessary. This appeared to be more of a debris and emergency triage sort of operation. Which was a shame. “What?” Jack said, catching Brock’s frown.

“I was kinda hoping I’ve get to shoot an elf,” Brock said dryly. “After we give these to Hill.” He gestured with his bag of alien gear.

“You have a problem,” Jack said.
“You’re just too peaceable. I have a yen for adventure,” Brock said. “Collins!” He recognized an agent. “Where are the elves? I’ve been promised elves.”

“All gone, Commander Rumlow! Thor and Dr. Foster sucked them back into space. But we’ve got reports—”

“Damn,” Rumlow muttered. “All my fun, gone.”

“--that there’s a Jotunheim beast,” Collins said.

“A what now?” Rumlow said.

“It’s loose in the city,” he said. “An-an animal from the Frost Giants’ realm.”

“How big is it?” Rumlow asked.

“Huge,” Collins said.


“It is?” Collins said. Jack nodded.

“He is going to get me killed,” Jack said in his carefully enunciated American accent.

“Oh, come on, it’ll be fun,” Rumlow insisted. “Besides, it’s not that cold here. Where’s Hill, Collins?”

“The assistant director is in tent number nine,” Collins supplied helpfully.

“Good man,” “Rumlow said, clapping him roughly on the shoulder.

Jack muttered Australian curses under his breath as he followed Rumlow across the field. It was something something bloody man and his Hemingway impression --Jack had taken a few lit courses at U-Syd and actually liked to read--before Rumlow spotted tent nine about fifteen feet away. “Here we are, Jack,” he said cheerfully. “Drop these bags, then the fun begins.”

“What are you planning?” Jack asked finally.

“I’m gonna see if somebody’ll loan me a jeep. You have those, right?” Rumlow said.

“I’m not British. We’re not all the bloody same--” Jack began in a low voice.

“You sound the same,” Rumlow said. “A jeep and lots of guns.”

“I hate you,” Jack said. “You’re my boss and I hate you.”

“Well, that’s very American. Keep doing that,” Rumlow told him.

Chapter End Notes
Sign Three

Chapter Summary

Never Trust That Raven

Chapter Notes

I own nothing! Thanks for all your comments and kudos.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jane’s Mom’s House, Yet Again

“C’mon, Darce,” Jane called. “I want to get these debriefings over with before Thor gets back. He sent a raven that Odin’s sending him to Vanheim for a diplomatic errand, but he’ll be back to help out with the Jotunheim Beast as soon as he can.”

That raven looked creepy, Darcy thought, as she thumped noisily downstairs. It was the only sound she could make. She might start banging pots and pans again, like she had as a baby. It might be satisfying. She stopped in front of Jane’s home whiteboard and wrote: But seriously, it was a creepy raven. I could’ve sworn it had green eyes and winked at me.

“Your vocal condition is making you imagine things. Remember when you watched Rear Window and then thought the neighbor we can see from the patio had murdered someone?” Jane said.

“She did?” Ian said, from near the door. He was carrying the heavy equipment. “What’s Rear Window?” he asked.

He’s really starting to get on my nerves for no reason, Darcy thought. Why is that? The awkward sex? He’s just too tall. I feel like I’m being smothered in elbows and knees. And that’s when he’s not muttering weird equations in his sleep. Is muteness making me too picky? I can’t talk, so I hyperfocus? I wonder---

“It’s a movie,” Jane said.

This is not the same as that, Darcy wrote on the board. I don’t trust that raven.

“Sure,” Jane said. “It’s not like you have a bird phobia or have told me their eyes make you nervous before.” Darcy shook her head vehemently and Ian laughed.

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SHIELD London Field Office
“Welcome to tent city,” Agent Collins said. “I’m excited to meet you Dr. Foster, Mr.--

“Braithwaite,” Ian supplied. “I’m her intern.” He’d stopped calling himself Darcy’s intern after he saw her naked, Darcy noticed. He’d given himself a promotion?

“And my longtime assistant, Miss Lewis,” Jane said. “She has a vocal condition and can’t speak for the time being.” Darcy waved politely.

*Aliens stole my larynx,* she’d jokingly written on her notepad. She carried a notepad because it was faster and left her phone available for Candy Crush or stalking Captain America on Twitter. He was posting about LGBTQ rights and the importance of voting this week. She loved that guy and wanted to meet him; unfortunately, he was in DC still.

“That’s too bad,” Agent Collins said seriously. He led them inside a huge tent. “This is staging area one, with all our regular field agents--”

Unfortunately, Agent Collins’ tour was extremely comprehensive and tent city was, well, practically a city. Like a Burning Man for very straight-laced agent types, Darcy thought. They’d been led through multiple tents, introduced to dozens of people, and walked probably three miles altogether. Darcy--still recovering from the elf battle--was exhausted and cranky. “This is the cafeteria tent,” Agent Collins said brightly. “We also have an on-premise coffee kiosk--” Darcy waved her arms in the air.

“Go,” Jane said, laughing, “she loves coffee. Get us some!”

Darcy was in the very, very long coffee line, virtually wavering on her aching feet, when she realized she needed money, probably. Did they take US dollars or Euros? Which ones did she have? She tried to peer around the line to see if there was a credit-card machine, but it was snaking around, so the register wasn’t visible. *Drat,* she thought. First, she’d check her wallet. She had the change purse out when somebody bumped her from behind and she actually fell, scattering coins everywhere. Her shatterproof travel mug--in her hand--rolled a few feet away. The floor was some kind of slippery material, somewhere between linoleum and tarp.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” the man who’d bumped her said, retrieving the mug for her. The guys just behind him in line--black tactical gear, large guns--turned curiously at the sound of Darcy’s landing with a thud.

“Nice job, Watkins,” one said to the bumper, as Darcy tried to gather her change. The other tactical guy knelt to help her and Darcy mouthed *thanks* and gave him a little thumbs up. He smiled back. This guy was tall and angular and weirdly gorgeous, Darcy thought, momentarily distracted by his green eyes. Her Georgia cousins would have called him *purdy.* He had a killer chin scar that she bet women liked to touch. Or men. Whoever. He helped her up politely.

“There you go,” he said. She gave him her brightest smile and a double-wave and the guy with him--shorter, dark hair, she noted briefly--looked at her funny.

The line took forever. Worse, Darcy couldn’t explain her order or her change question quickly; she could feel the Watkins guy rudely herding her as she wrote things down and passed them to the cashier, who shouted them out and took her travel mug to fill it. Darcy turned back to glare at him when he trod on her heel and he visibly shrunk back at her expression of hostility. She was trying to juggle and hurry when she stepped away from the counter and the too-crowd-y Watkins elbowed one of the cups. Her travel mug. It clattered to the floor and the lid popped off, sending coffee
pouring out. The barista groaned. Darcy set the tray on the counter and grabbed a fistful of napkins.

“Jane Foster’s assistant to tent twenty-four,” someone intoned into the speakers. “Darcy Lewis to tent twenty-four. Jane Foster’s assistant to tent twenty-four immediately.” In the middle of mopping up her spill, Darcy paused to give the ceiling the bird and shake her head. Of course, it had been her caramel macchiato that got knocked over by asshat Watkins.

“That you they’re calling?” the nice tactical guy said, still in line behind Watkins, who was ordering for twelve apparently. Darcy nodded and went back to wiping up her spill. She gathered her empty travel mug. Watkins had finally gone. The barista called them and Mr. Nice stepped forward. “I’ll have two espressos and a caramel macchiato,” he said. “Hold on a sec, Miss Lewis.”

He probably wants to ask about Thor, Darcy thought, looking at Mr. Nice.

“You’re Jane Foster’s assistant? You? I didn’t know that astrophysicists hired ditzy klutzes now. No wonder she needs a SHIELD job, it’s probably to keep her safe from your coffee spills, huh?” a voice said sarcastically. The voice was teasing. It chuckled. Darcy jerked visibly and turned slowly. She looked at the dark haired guy. He looked at her and grinned slowly. He was a wiseass. He was him. She looked at her empty coffee cup and frowned.

Oh, no. she thought. It had happened and she had no coffee to throw. None. And Jane wasn’t here to slap him, either! She looked back at him, totally dumbfounded. He was grinning at her. She was not prepared for this. Not today, asshole. Not today.

“Here take this,” the nice one said, handing her the caramel macchiato. It had been her initial order. “So, you won’t have to wait in line again if you’re wanted, miss. Sorry he’s such an idiot.”

“Hey, I was kidding,” the other guy-- soulmate, her brain supplied and she went a little breathless and strange--

“Shut up, Rumlow,” Mr. Nice interrupted. “I’m sorry about him. Enjoy your drink,” he repeated, clearly trying to paper over the other guy’s rudeness and get her away before he spoke again.

Darcy nodded, blinking, and mouthed thank you. She couldn’t throw his coffee on his coworker. That would be rude and he was lovely. She stepped away, sliding the full cup into her tray, and pausing to look back at them once she was several feet away. The Wiseass Soulmate glanced back for a second, eyes on her.

It had happened and she hadn’t even been able to say anything. This was frustrating.

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Darcy brought the coffees to tent twenty-four, trying to hold it together and not freak out. “Darce,” Jane said excitedly, “you’ll never guess who is coming to help do research here. Dr. Janus Bittendorfer!”

“He’s the best,” Ian said, “besides you, Jane, of course--” Darcy sat the coffees on the table in the tent lab.

“I think we should stay and help, temporarily. Not permanently, you know how I feel about a permanent SHIELD jo--what’s wrong, Darce?” Jane said, looking at her expression and flushed cheeks. Darcy walked over to Jane, hugged her, and then let go. Then she walked over to the tabletop and proceeded to beat it with her hands and silently yell.
“What happened?” Ian said. Darcy waved at him in frustration.

“I think we need a minute,” Jane said.

“Okay,” Ian said. “I’ll find the nearest bathrooms for us.”

“What’s wrong?” Jane said, once he’d closed the tent flap. Darcy silent screamed some more. It took her a minute to get a piece of paper.

_He’s here. It happened. I couldn’t say anything back. The soulmate._

“Oh, Darce,” Jane said. She hugged her for a full minute. Then she drew back. “What’s his name?”

_Rumlow. He’s a tactical guy or something. All black clothes, weaponry. Coffee shop tent._

“I’ll be back--” Jane began. Darcy grabbed her arm and scribbled frantically.

_You can’t tell him! No!!!_

“I can still slap him, though,” Jane said grimly.

_Okay_ , Darcy wrote, giving her a double thumbs up. Jane kissed her cheek joyfully and flew out of the lab.

She sat, drinking her Mr. Nice latte, while Jane went off to slap somebody. Her somebody. It was all very weird and distressing. This was the perfect occasion for a very nice _fuckshitdamn_ and she couldn’t do it. Her whole life had been planned around the effective comeback or the thrown latte! Her destiny! _Fuckshitdamn_, she thought.

Ian came back. “Everything okay?” he asked. She nodded and wrote _Jane’s got it_ on a piece of scrap lab paper. He nodded back.

***

“What was that about?” Brock said to Jack, as they exited the tent.

“Why are you such an asshole at work?” Jack replied in a low voice. “That was embarrassing. I’m embarrassed.”

“What?” Brock said.

“You clueless dolt, that’s Foster’s assistant,” Jack said. “Don’t you read your memos from Hill?”

“We had a memo about her?” Brock said. “I mean, she’s very cute, but not the brightest bulb--”

“She has severe laryngitis from fighting elves, you moron. She can’t talk and she’s probably exhausted, she’s a twenty-something civilian who survived New Mexico, too.”

“Oh,” Rumlow said. “Shit. I’ll apologize somehow. Would roses do it, you think?”

Jack shook his head sadly.
They were walking across some of the field when Jack realized someone was calling. He turned towards the noise. “Rumlow! Rumlow!” a female voice yelled. A tiny woman was stomping towards them at a fast pace. Jack took a guess, then stepped back. He read all his memos. He’d just read the Loki one this morning, too.

“Yeah?” Rumlow said, raising an eyebrow. “We know each other?”

“Nope,” she said. Then she smacked him across the face. Her hand made a loud sound in the open air. He listed back slightly. “But nobody talks shit about Darcy, you got it? When Thor gets back, I’m gonna make sure you meet the hammer, too,” she vowed. She turned on her heel and stomped away.

“Wait a second,” Rumlow said. He handed his coffee to Jack and went after her. Jack shrugged. The espresso here wasn’t too bad, at least. He watched them get ten feet or so away.

“What?” Jane said, turning back again and getting in his space.

“I’m sorry--I didn’t mean. It was stupid. I had a moment of stupid. I have those,” he said.

“Evidently,” Jane said sharply.

“Does she like roses?” he asked. “I was thinking of roses.”

“What?” Jane said, raising an eyebrow.

“Sending them as an apology,” he said. “Red? Pink?”

“You know who she is?” Jane said.

“Yeah, your assistant,” he said. “Darcy Lewis.”

“I don’t understand,” Jane said. She thought he’d realized Darcy was his soulmate-- wait, she can’t speak. She hasn’t said his words yet! “Oh my God,” Jane said slowly. “Oh my God.”

“I’m really sorry,” he repeated. “I had a dumb moment.”

“Red,” Jane said, her face splitting into an oddy canny grin. “She loves red lipstick, she’d probably like red roses best.”

“Okay,” he said. “Red it is.” He thought Foster was actually smirking at him now. “I’ll send two, okay?” he said, wondering why the tiny scientist with the strong right arm looked so knowing all of a sudden. Like somebody with a good secret or leverage over someone else.

“You better,” she said, turning and walking away.

“Everything all right?” Jack asked, catching up.

“Maybe,” Rumlow said. “I feel bad, man. I really didn’t mean it.”

***

Later, Jane explained it to Darcy. “So, it’s all up to you, really. You can acknowledge it or just move
on, he’ll never know. You’ll just never say his words.”

Oh, Darcy thought. She got up and wrote on the whiteboard at Jane’s mom’s house. *That seems wrong. Also, sad.*

“But it puts the ball in your court, Darce,” Jane said. “And you get to know him without all the soulmate pressure, too.”

Yeah, Darcy wrote.

“You’ll see his true personality, not a put on for a soulmate,” Jane said. “That’s rare.”

The next morning, there were two dozen very red roses and a card with an apology note on her new SHIELD desk outside Jane’s lab. The apology actually began, *I’m so sorry, I’m a stupid dipshit and I have issues.* It would have made her roll on the floor normally. She heard through the grapevine that he was out hunting that Jotunheim Beast at Windsor Castle, so it gave her time to think about the weird feelings she was having. On one hand, it was all over and she still felt pissed, on the other, the instant apology was surprisingly effective.

Chapter End Notes

Windsor Great Park looks like an excellent place for a Jotunheim Beast to chill: https://goo.gl/maps/Nt7etqNcT7k
“I can’t believe you haven’t caught the thing yet!” one of the STRIKE guys said. “It’s bigger than a rhino and it’s been four days!”

“We’ve got it isolated in one of the royal parks, but it’s forested and the palace won’t let me set the trees on fire!” Rumlow yelled back. “Better luck tomorrow!” He drank a vodka shot.

“Imagine that,” Jack said dryly. “They don’t want a fire at Windsor Great Park.”

“Huh?” the STRIKE guy said.

“There was a fire there in the 1990s! Almost burned up the castle!” he replied. The music in the nightclub was very loud.

“What is this?” Rumlow yelled at Jack.

“EDM!” Jack yelled back. “It’s very popular in Europe and...other places.”

The STRIKE agents they were with weren’t to know about Australia, of course. Brock nodded. His eyes scanned the crowd of dancers. Suddenly, he stopped. Dancing at the edge of the floor was Jane Foster and that skinny assistant. The male one. He caught Jack’s eye and telegraphed a look, mate in her direction. Jack did a fractional eyebrow raise. Brock nodded. Jack departed their table to keep watch over her, in case anyone who was a HYDRA mole got ideas. Brock wondered where Darcy Lewis was. He’d been thinking about her constantly, for some reason. He felt guilty. He’d planned on stopping by her desk, but they’d been chasing this damn frost beast and he hadn’t had time. Brock was scanning the perimeter when he realized that Darcy was sitting at the bar. She had a sight line on Jane, too, he realized. Not dumb after all. He decided to go over, apologize again. He watched her shimmy gently in time to the music on the bar stool as he walked over. Cute, he thought.

“Hello,” he said, sitting down. “I saw you and, uh, I wanna say I’m sorry agai—”
She looked at him, frowned, took out a pen, then looked back down at her little napkin. *Do I know you?* she wrote. She knew perfectly well who he was, but it gave her some small vindictive pleasure to pretend he was forgettable, if she couldn’t cuss him out. *Hard to do right on a napkin,* Darcy thought.

“Oh, no,” he said. “You still can’t talk?” She shook her head no. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I’m the asshole from SHIELD who was shitty to you a few days ago. Sent flowers.”

She clasped a hand over her mouth in faked realization, letting herself smile wickedly. *Whoops, I remember,* she scrawled in a tiny curlicue. *In that case, bite me, asshole. But the roses were pretty.* She grinned at him.

“Yes,” he said, smirking back. “Sorry. I had no idea you couldn’t talk then, either. Drink?” She nodded. He gestured to the bartender. “Another for her, vodka for me,” he said. She arched a brow. “We’re celebrating not being dead, we’ve been chasing that frost thing,” he explained. *God, she’s pretty,* Brock thought. *Incredible looking, really. Great mouth, wonderful smile.* He was sure it wasn’t the vodka. *And I insulted her like a schmuck.* “Listen, I’m a schmuck,” he announced.

*Oh yeah,* she wrote.

“No question mark, huh?” he asked. She grinned and shook her head. Her expression was mischievous. She bit her lip and he did something crazy. It was an impulse. “Have dinner with me?” he asked. He felt pulled towards her. She had charisma or something. He didn’t know why he hadn’t realized it before.

*A date?* she wrote, doodling a little.

“Absolutely,” Brock said, leaning closer under the pretext of reading the napkin.

*Where?* She’d put a smile under the question mark.

“Wherever. Here, your next conference, DC, anyplace,” he said. She smirked at him. “Yeah, I’m that desperate to see you again,” he admitted. “Is it freaking you out?”

She wiggled her mouth a little, seemingly thinking. Then she scrunched her nose, like Samantha on *Bewitched.* It was cute and sexy at the same time. *What?* He thought. His mind was suggesting opinions that were definitely not typical for him. He wasn’t a guy who was into cute as a thing. Or actual dates. He felt like something was happening that he didn’t quite understand. He had weird butterflies in his stomach. He never got those, not even before missions.

*No,* she wrote. *Bad idea. I’m still sorta seeing Ian.*

“Him? I can take him,” Rumlow said, looking over at the dance floor. “He’s tall, but a beanpole.”

*You’re ridiculous. Besides, I have to wait until I can talk--* she turned the napkin over-- *to break it to him gently.*

“Do it on paper,” Brock said.

*I’m not dumping someone on a Post-It. *I* have manners.*

“I was thinking a letter,” he said. “You know, Dear John, that kind of thing.”

*You’re SO old.* He pretended to clutch his chest as if she’d wounded him.
“When you can talk again, I’ll take you out,” he said. She rolled her eyes.

I never said yes, she edged onto the napkin corner.

“Technically, you haven’t said anything,” he told her.

She seemed to find that especially funny for some reason. She actually leaned against his shoulder and shook with silent laughter.

***

Jane’s Mom’s House

Darcy poked a drowsy, post-clubbing Jane. Jane lifted her head from the pages of equations on her mom’s kitchen table. I want to play a prank on him, she wrote on the whiteboard in the kitchen.

“A prank?” Jane said, tired from dancing. Ian had crashed on the couch after Arabella’s. “Who?”

Rumlow. It’s only fair, Darcy wrote.

“Good point,” Jane said. She leaned forward and whispered. “Are you going to dinner with him—whenever it happens?” She meant when Darcy said his words, whatever they were. She didn’t want Ian to hear. Darcy hadn’t told Ian she’d found her soulmate. Darcy shrugged.

Maybe. But I want revenge first.

“I’m in,” Jane said. “But I think you could just promise him sex and then leave him tied to a chair naked or something?” She’d seen how Rumlow was looking at Darcy. He was attracted. Jane thought Darcy might be feeling a little soulmate sparkle, too. She was listening to swoony music and dancing a lot and wearing her favorite red lipstick everyday. Ian didn’t seem to notice, but she was getting checked out in the street. Jane thought it was because she was putting out a certain energy.

Jane, I think that’s a sex crime, Darcy wrote, frowning. Like revenge porn.

“Oh,” Jane said. “My bad. I don’t think I knew.”

Ignorance of the law is no excuse, ma’am. At least I think so. Ask Ian if that works here, too? I want to see if Mr. Nice will help us. Anyway, this is my plan......

***

SHIELD London Field Office.

STRIKE dormitory

Not only did Jack want to help, he did recon, distracted Rumlow for them, and agreed to rope the prank-friendly members of the STRIKE dorm into their plan. Darcy received the all-clear email on a
Tuesday and snuck with Jane to the dorm. They left Ian as their fake alibi in the lab. One of the STRIKE guys--Hernandez--opened it and let them in, grinning. “What y’all doing?” he asked. “This is exciting.”

“Swapping out his underwear with pink ones, where’s the drawer?” Jane asked.

“Over here,” Hernandez said, clapping his hands together. “What’s she doing?” Darcy was wedging a walkie-talkie within Rumlow’s cot.

“We’re going to play cat noises,” Jane said, changing the underwear sets. “Where’s his toothpaste?” Jane asked. “Can you show her?”

“Here,” Hernandez said, leading Darcy over to the tube. Darcy pulled the food coloring gel out of her messenger bag. “Oooh,” Hernandez said.

“It’s not harmful, it’ll just make his teeth a little blue,” Jane said. Hernandez threw back his head and laughed.

“This is just the beginning,” Jane vowed. “I want access to his autocorrect. Our next attack will be cyber.”

_The CYBER!_ Darcy wrote on her notepad. Hernandez laughed again.

Then they stopped at his official SHIELD vehicle in the parking lot and stuck a note under the wiper: _Sorry about the damage._

There was no damage, of course.

***

“Did you hear something?” Rumlow said that night. He’d been tossing and turning. It was a weird day. First, he’d been randomly paged on the PSA system multiple times and run all over the tents, then someone had changed his display name in SHIELDMessage to “Old Stallone.” He’d had to call five people to get it changed back again and come back to a weird note on his work vehicle about a dent. But he couldn’t find a dent. Now, the nighttime noises.

“I don’t hear nothing,” Hernandez said. “What is it?”

“It sounds like a cat,” Rumlow said. “A tiny cat.”

“Nope,” Jack said. “I don’t hear it, either.” Jack rolled over and winked at a silently laughing Hernandez.

“Will you all shut up,” Jones called from the far cot. He was a light sleeper and hated being disturbed.

“Does the water here make your toothpaste look a little funny?” Rumlow asked quietly. “Mine tastes fine, but it looks...bluer?”

“Maybe,” Jack said.

“Who knows?” Hernandez said. “Could be hard water?”
“Yeah,” Rumlow said. He’d been so preoccupied, he hadn’t had time to go ask Darcy Lewis to lunch. *Screw the beanpole*, he thought, struggling to sleep. *I totally don’t mind if somebody calls me a homewrecker.* Somewhere nearby—it sounded practically under his bed—the kitten did another tiny meow. “Okay,” he said, “I’m gonna find the kitten. What if it’s hurt?” He sat up and put his shoes on, grabbing a techlight. “Anybody coming with?”

“Nah,” Jack said. “I’m sure it’s fine.” Hernandez pretended to snore.

“You two are heartless,” Rumlow said. “It sounds small.”

When he left, Jack got up. “What are you doing?” Hernandez whispered.

“Switching out his regular gum sticks with wintergreen and spearmint ones,” Rollins said, taking off the exterior wrapper and putting it around the new sticks of gum.

“That’s cold,” Hernandez said.

“We decided on this instead of switching his coffee to decaf. I don’t want him shooting somebody,” Rollins said.

Out in the dark, Darcy was playing a kitten noise app on her phone into the walkie-talkie. She heard someone. “Here kitty, kitty-kitty,” a man’s voice called. “Where are you?” She stuffed both items into her messenger and was trying to sneak away with a flashlight caught her in the eye. She was blinded. *I’m sooooooo busted,* she thought.

“Lewis,” the voice said. “What are you doing here?” It was Rumlow. She waved her arms. “Oh, sorry, didn’t mean to blind you, honey,” he said. He walked over. “Did you hear a cat?”

*I thought I heard a kitten. I was looking for it. Jane’s still working,* she wrote on her notepad.


*Maybe you frightened it away?*

“What?” he said. “Don’t tell anybody I couldn’t find a damn kitten, though. They’re already giving me hell about the Jotunheim Beast.” Darcy nodded solemnly. She felt a weird pang of guilt when he looked around and said, “I hope nothing’s wrong with that kitten.” Worse, he insisted on walking her back “just to be safe.”

***

“Where the fuck is my underwear?” Rumlow asked, shirtless and yawning. It was 5am. He’d barely slept. And when he did sleep, he dreamed about her. It was fucking awkward. Him and his smart mouth. He stared down at his dresser drawer.

“In the drawer, right?” Jack said.

“What is this shit?” Rumlow said, holding up a pair of pink men’s briefs with little conversation hearts.
Jack shrugged. “Laundry mistake?” he offered.

“Uh-huh,” Rumlow said. “I know this is those STRIKE Charlie assholes.”

“They are assholes,” Hernandez said.

"I'm gonna find that Esposito asshole at breakfast," Rumlow vowed. He went to go brush his teeth. He was moving the toothbrush across his teeth when he realized the usually white foam was a little blue, too. He spit it out, splashed some water in his mouth, and smiled. His fucking teeth were slightly blue. "All right," he yelled, "who dyed my damn toothpaste?" There was no response. He stepped out of the bathroom and looked around the dormitory. It was empty. "Where the fuck did everybody go?" he said out loud.

Once he'd gotten fully dressed, he grabbed a stick of gum. Maybe that would help with the teeth situation? He popped it in his mouth as he laced up his boots. "Motherfucker," he said suddenly, grabbing for a napkin, a paper towel, anything, "spearmint?!" He spat the gum out in his palm. He loathed spearmint. It was disgusting.

***

“Um, Darce?” Jane said, the day after kitten search. Darcy looked up from her desk. She was still a little sleepy. They were waiting on the arrival of what Darcy was already calling The Nerd Squad to work with Jane on Convergence stuff. Drs. Janus Bittendorfer, Takumi Mizuki, Michaela Lee, Monica Thompson, and the alliteratively named Richard Reston-Royce.

Yeah? Darcy wrote down, trying for a smile and succeeding in a half-smile, half-yawn.

“I think we have to dial down the prank war. Rumlow accused STRIKE Charlie of replacing his underwear, apparently,” Jane said.

Whoops, Darcy wrote on the whiteboard. Was there a fight?

“No, but it almost happened at breakfast, we should chill for a bit. Jack thinks the kittens at night made him cranky in the daytime,” Jane said. Darcy nodded. She felt tired, too.

***

Brock wasn’t expecting to see Darcy so soon, but that afternoon he spotted her in the coffee line. It was cold out and she was bundled up in a red coat and a bonkers-looking yellow hat. It looked like it had bees knitted onto it. Even a little pair of antennas? She was a crazy girl, he thought. Bee hats.

“Can I cut in front of you?” he asked the people between them.

“Yes?” an agent said. Rumlow had a reputation for craziness, so nobody argued with him. The agent stepped aside helpfully and gestured.

“Thanks,” Rumlow said. He moved forward and came to stand behind Darcy, hoping the blue had worn off his teeth. “Nice hat, Dayna,” he said in her ear. He didn’t want to appear too emasculated
after the kitten thing. He wasn’t some wimp. The beanpole assistant, British whatshisface, was probably one of those guys who bicycled everywhere and wanted to raise his own damn bees “for the environment.” Maybe that’s where she’d gotten the hat? He needed to distinguish himself somehow, not be boring. She turned and glared at him, scrunching her little nose fiercely. He laughed. “What?”

*That is not MY name*, she wrote on her notepad.

“Daphne?” he said. “Oh, no, wait, it’s *Dixie*, isn’t it?” He flicked the little antennas on her bee hat.

*I’ll tase you if you keep doing that*, she wrote.

“Really? Cool. Any change in your relationship status?” he asked. She shook her head. He felt disappointed, but tried not to let it show. “What kind of coffee do you want?” he asked. “I’ll order for you, it’s safer.” She glared at him, looked up ahead at the line, and looked back doubtfully.

Watkins was several people ahead. “Just let me,” Rumlow said, “Watkins is a total jinx, Daisy.”

*I actually wouldn’t mind being named Daisy. I love them*, she wrote. *Two sugar cookie coffees with cream and sugar, one plain coffee with almond milk.*

“The beanpole drinks the almond milk, doesn’t he?” he said. She nodded and then pulled a little face. “You smell nice, by the way. It reminds me of something—”

Fiori by Vince Camuto. *I bought it because it reminds me of Mr. Bubble*, she scribbled. *I loved Mr. Bubble.*

“Oh, yeah, Mr. Bubble,” he said, chuckling. “My sister loved that when she was little, too. That’s it. Fallon was always putting it in her hair before school. Drove my ma crazy.”

Dry hair? Darcy wrote, looking puzzled. *Dry hair wouldn’t bubble.*

“Sometimes she used the sink to make bubbles, sometimes not. It really depended on her mood. You’d like Fallon, she has a bakery.”

*What does THAT mean?* she wrote.

“She makes unicorn-themed cookies and shit? Like bright green Rice Krispies? She’d love your crazy hat, Dora,” he said, chuckling.

*I love Rice Krispies and unicorns*, she wrote.

“I bet you do,” he said wryly. He’d get Fallon to overnight some. She tried to stop him when he paid for everything, but changed her mind when he told the cashier she was suffering from “some sort of Elf-related delusion, she thinks her clothes match.” Then he slipped a wrapped biscotti in her coat pocket. She could find it later. It would be a surprise.

Chapter End Notes

The Windsor Castle fire overlapped with the messy Charles & Diana split, actually, so it usually gets mentioned in that context in the USA:
They’re selling little Jotunheim Beast stuffed animals at all the London tourist spots now.

I know nothing! Thanks for all your comments and kudos! You are SUPER!

“Why can’t I have more bullets?” Rumlow said to Hill. He’d talked his way into tent nine again.

“I gave you a jeep, a team, and two weeks’ worth of bullets,” Hill said calmly. “You’ve failed to kill it.”

“It’s ice-skin is thicker than a rhino’s hide, I need armor-piercing bullets from that new project. The really good ones,” he said.

“Those aren’t cleared for field use yet and you know that,” Hill said.

“C’mon, Maria,” Brock said. “We’ve gotten reports there might be another one in the Cotswolds, what if I need the bullets?”

“Unconfirmed reports,” she said.

“That tip was reliable. They sent me photos,” he said.

“Go clean up debris. The public is starting to rally around the thing, it might be a public relations issue if you actually kill it,” she said.

“That’s because they haven’t seen the ugly fucker’s frosty scales up close,” Rumlow groused.

“Those aren’t on the little stuffed animals.” He scrunched his face. It was such an uncanny impression of Darcy Lewis’s nose-scrunch that Hill almost laughed.

“I’ve asked Buckingham Palace for permission to leave it in the forest game area, we’re negotiating. If negotiations fail, then you can shoot it. Then it’ll be the British government’s problem,” she said.

“You’re the best, sweetheart,” he told her.

“Shut up,” Hill said. “Tell Darcy Lewis I want to to talk to her.”
“Why do you want to talk to Lewis?” he said.

“That’s none of your concern,” Hill said. “Now get out of my office and shut the door.”

“It’s a tent flap,” Rumlow said. She arched an eyebrow. He left.

***

A bored Darcy was stuck in tent twenty-four as usual now, reading Hello! Magazine and trying to figure out why some naturally pale British celebrities self-tanned until they looked like teak furniture. The Nerd Squad—including Ian, who was starstruck—spent all day and night sciencing on the Convergence, while Darcy was mostly aimless. She amused herself by collaborating on more innocent Brock pranks with Jack: suggestions for changing his autocorrect words to funny things (“Director Fury” autocorrected to *Motherfucker I’m Furious* now), taping photos of the Jotunheim Beast to his rearview mirror, and signing him up for daily informative texts about peanuts from the Georgia Farmers Association. Jack said he was actually reading the peanut emails, weirdly. Rumlow liked peanuts? They’d snuck back his correct underwear, toothpaste, and gum, just so he wouldn’t kill anyone on STRIKE Charlie. Darcy was slightly disappointed she hadn’t gotten to Nicholas Cage him, put saran wrap over his shampoo bottles (under the lid), or swap out his regular deodorant stick with cream cheese. She’d read about those pranks. But it wasn’t like she didn’t see him, either. She would have felt neglected by her exclusion from the Sciencing!, but Rumlow was a daily visitor.

“So, aliens, elves, what are you going to do next, Debbie?” he’d teased one afternoon. That had been a porn reference, of course. Some old man naughty film called *Debbie Does Dallas*. He called her by the wrong name constantly because he knew she couldn’t correct him. But he also left a box of overnighted cookies from a Williamsburg bakery called *We’re Baked* so she pretended not to hear him. The confetti cookies were amazing. These must be his sister’s cookies.

Ever since she’d rebuffed his attempts at a date because of Ian, he’d started, well, *bugging* her whenever he was in the field offices. He swung by to do it on purpose, she suspected. Like a preschooler. At first, she’d thought it was because he knew she was prankng him, but he seemed to be hiding the pranks from her, not accusing her of them. He still had no idea she was involved, Jack swore; he thought they were all Jack’s idea of a joke after STRIKE Charlie had started the prank cycle.

“Oh, look, Dina, you’ve spilled coffee on your shirt,” he’d said last Tuesday. When she looked down, he’d flicked her nose.

*Are you twelve?* she’d scrawled.

“I wish. More like nine, ten inches on a good day, honey. That enough for you?” he’d said, winking. She swatted at him angrily and he’d laughed and gone. Fifteen minutes later, another SHIELD assistant had arrived with lattes.

“Someone sent these? Said you’d spilled yours?” he said.

Yesterday, he’d literally walked up behind her and playfully yanked her ponytail. “New haircut, Dolores?” he’d whispered in her ear. Darcy had gotten bangs—they called them fringes here—from a SHIELD tech who’d learned to cut them because her sister was a cosmetologist. In response to the
hair pulling, she decided to set a relationship boundary, though.

No hair pulling, she’d written on her whiteboard and reached into her purse. He’d been behind her and was busy reading the sign. Darcy had tased him. She heard him drop with a thud. Got it? She wrote on a Post-It and handed it to him.

“Nine out of ten, honey. I’m knocking off a point ‘cause that thing’s too tiny to render me unconscious. You gotta make sure I’d be somewhere where I’d crack my head on the way down. Or my jaw. You hit the jaw hard enough, people pass out, too. That’s why boxers have to learn how to take a hit to the chin,” he’d said from the floor. He’d grinned up at her, seemingly unruffled.

Thank you, she’d written sarcastically. I feel so accomplished.

“I could teach you how to box,” he’d said. “Add to your self-defense toolkit?”

Jane says I shouldn’t hit people, Darcy replied in marker.

“She slapped Loki up there, I saw it in her report,” he scoffed. “She hits me. Why can’t you hit people? Why are you just stuck here? Any news on the beanpole?” That was how he asked if she’d dumped Ian yet. He’d sat up and jerked his thumb in the direction of the Nerd Squad in the adjoining room. They were crowded around a monitor.

No change, she’d written. Still can’t talk. He’d frowned.

“I’m gonna go shoot at the ice rhino. You don’t want to come with me?” he’d asked.

Nope, Hill says I can’t go places with STRIKE Alpha after you took me out in the Humvee the other day. Mom won’t let me come out and play.

“Okay,” he’d said glumly. “I’ll be back later.” That had been her one escape from 9-to-5 (5am, she joked internally) in tent twenty-four. Ian, of course, had chosen that moment to look for her and Hill had put out an internal APB, since they thought she and Jane still might be a hostage-risk for any lingering elves. It sucked. Darcy had watched him depart and sighed. It was boring being in her own office and unable to crack jokes. She'd been half-asleep when he brought her back fish and chips last night.

Today, she’d gotten up for coffee and come back just as she heard him say her name. “Where’s Lewis?” Rumlow was saying into the Nerd Squad’s room. “Whaddya mean, you don’t know?” Then he spotted Darcy. “There you are. Hill wants to talk to you, Demi.” Darcy rolled her eyes. “You want me to walk to you Hill’s office?” Rumlow asked. She shrugged.

Whatever you want, she wrote on a Post-It. He grinned slyly.

“Anything?” Brock asked, leaning against her desk a little. “I can think of lot of things.” He smirked.

Not that, she added to her purse Post-It. Ian. She tossed it in the trash and reached for the orange ones on the desk she used for Jane. Orange was bright enough to get her attention. Usually, Darcy looked down at her keyboard. There was a box of Cadbury Dairy Milk chocolates sitting in the middle of a copy of British Vogue. That was one reason that she’d only tased Rumlow once. He was the person sneaking her magazines, coffee, and weird European candy. If she tased him too much, she’d lose her source for free chocolate and tins of their potato chip thingies and nobody would visit her in Nerdlandia.

“I hate that kid,” Rumlow muttered. Darcy looked up, surprised. “He doesn’t even pay attention to you, you realize that? You should leave him a damn Post-It. He doesn’t deserve something classy
like an actual letter or an in-person breakup talk.” His expression was so irritated that Darcy would have laughed out loud, except she couldn’t. She shrugged elaborately—all her gestures were elaborate now, like a mime—and he huffed. She wondered if he’d learned the huff from the Frost Beast. “You ready?” he said. She waved the orange Post-Its and started to write. “You want your scarf? It’s cold today,” he asked. She nodded and didn’t flinch when he came over with her coat and scarf and helped her put them on. Darcy sighed inwardly. It would be easier to resist Rumlow’s dumbass behavior if she didn’t get strange electric tingles all over her body whenever he touched her. Really, if her soulmark had been about ten percent less obnoxious, she would have jumped him on a conference table by now. Repeatedly. It felt great. It was really too bad he was, well, so him.

They started for Hill’s office in tent nine. “Have you ever been to the Cotswolds?” he said, as they walked outside. “I’ve heard it’s nice.”

No, Darcy wrote. She shook her head.

“Yeah, I hear it’s pretty. You wanna go with me if I get approval to follow up on some second Jotunheim beast reports?” he asked. Darcy arched an eyebrow at him, trying to do a Really, dude? facial expression. “What?” he said. “It’s not like you’re doing anything exciting or important here,” he said. That pissed her off.

She pulled out her notepad, wrote I have a real job, jerkface, underlined it twice, and stomped off. He trailed her.

“I didn’t mean it like that. I can see you’re bored. I don’t know how you stand it. Do you know what Hill wants?” he asked.

She shook her head. They’d reached tent nine. Hill was standing outside, waiting. “What I want,” she said, “is to speak with Darcy alone.”

“Fine,” Rumlow said, turning on his heel and leaving.

Inside Hill’s office, Darcy sat in a chair. She got her real notebook, Post-Its, and planner out. These were for Jane-related things. “It’s not about Jane,” Hill said. Darcy looked up, surprised again. “This is awkward,” Hill continued, “but I’ve seen your file, so I know—” Hill paused.

About my soulmark? Darcy wrote on a Post-It and flashed her Post-It clad palm at Hill. Hill nodded.

“I don’t usually meddle. At all. But, I’ve seen it and now I feel responsible if things go badly,” she said. “He has no idea he actually has a soulmate, not consciously. Thinks he’s unmarked. Since you couldn’t talk to him when he said the words...”

Oh, Darcy wrote, sadly. She’d assumed he might be marked with her future words once the vocal condition had healed, something like I’ve broken up with him, now get me a mocha latte and kiss me, asshole.

“There’s someone in our Phoenix science field office doing research into soulmark anomalies, if you’d like to participate,” Hill said. “I suppose it could be that you never speak to him again and that’s what worries me. He takes serious risks at work and, uh, well, I think there’s a good chance that he could be killed in action, never knowing. But it’s up to you. Yours to tell.”

Okay, Darcy wrote, nodding.
“Subconsciously, he feels it, though. The pull of the bond.”

No way, Darcy wrote. Impossible.

“He’s paid multiple people to call in fake tips about other Jotunheim beasts. Always in the prettiest parts of the country,” Hill said dryly. “I know he could kill that thing in Windsor Great Park, but that means he’d have to go back to DC, not hang around here flirting with you.”

Sorry, Darcy wrote.

“Why are you apologizing? It’s not your fault,” Hill said. “He’s the idiot with soulmate fuzzies who can’t recognize them. He should just ask you out.”

He did, but I feel bad breaking up with Ian via Post-It.

“Have Jane do it,” Hill said crisply. “Like an interpreter.”

Good idea, Darcy scribbled.

“I have those,” Hill said. “Frequently.” Because Hill didn’t have an eyepatch or Fury’s glare and trenchcoat, people tended to forget how essential she was. It was sexism, she thought, but she never let it get her down. She was too competent to waste the time. She did, however, like a good chardonnay. As much as their careers allowed, at home with Sharon Carter. They had coordinating soulmarks on each hip:

Agent Hill? Can you unlock this door? The guard rotates every fifteen minutes.

Agent Carter, I presume? I have a key and a Sig Hauer. It’s nice to meet you.

It had been very useful and clear-cut and Hill had asked Sharon out on a date as soon as they escaped that Bolivian prison. Which was a relief to Hill. She would have quietly stressed about an ambiguous, unpleasant, or complicated soulmark. She wasn’t like Fury, who’d been visibly pleased that his platonic—actually, it was rather paternal—soulmark with Romanoff was in a language he couldn’t read. The man enjoyed complications.

***

Jane Mom’s House

“Ian,” Jane said, “I need to talk to you with Darcy. She has something to tell you.”

“Okay,” Ian said, looking between them.

I met my soulmate, Darcy wrote on the whiteboard.

“Oh,” Ian said. “I’m sorry. I’m sure that was no fun.”

Yeah, but— Darcy paused and frowned. But what? she thought to herself. She scribbled more. Ian
stared.

“You like him? I thought you hated him?” Ian said. Darcy shook her head.

*It’s complicated. Total cliche, I know.*

“Now that she’s met him, they have chemistry,” Jane said. “A soulmate bond is intense, difficult to fight.”

*She waited for Thor for two years,* Darcy wrote.

“I did and I was miserable, but I couldn’t see other people,” Jane said. “It was like he was all I could think about.”

*Yep,* Darcy scribbled. *I’m sorry, Ian. You’re a really good guy, but he’s my soulmate.*

“I gotcha,” Ian said gently. He’d picked up the expression from the Nerd Squad. “I don’t think we have enough in common, really. You and him must be more alike?”

*Sure,* Darcy wrote.

“Ih-huh,” Jane said, hiding her laughter behind her hand.

They’d assumed Ian would crash with one of the Nerd Squad, but he stayed on Jane’s couch that night. Snoring like bear.

*Why is he still here?* Darcy wrote.

“Shhh,” Jane said. They peered at him from the kitchen. “He still works for me.”

*I hired him!* Darcy wrote. Jane laughed.

“Hhhhm?” Ian said, waking up. “What’s funny?”

“Nothing,” Jane called. Darcy erased frantically.
Darcy saw Brock across the field the day after she told Ian. She was torn: how could she tell him about her soulmark? She walked towards him, then turned back when she saw him stopped by Hernandez, and decided she’d get coffee first. She was nervous. Which was weird. She never got nervous, but now she had butterflies. “Hey, Delores!” he yelled.

*Ughhhhh, she thought, busted again!* She turned and put her hands on her hips, hoping that projected *Yeah, what?* He started jogging towards her.

“Got another sighting in the Cotswolds,” he said. “I thought I’d do some recon alone. You want to go with?” Darcy looked at him and did some mental classification: *Arrogant jerk. Frequently rude. Buys good flowers and chocolate. Wanted to find that kitten. Probably looked very good in the joke underwear. Appealingly boyish sense of fun and play. Definitely interested in me, not freaking science, socialist podcasts, or anything else annoying.*

*Yes,* she wrote. He actually smiled then, a genuine beaming smile. They left as soon as she could tell Jane and grab a bag.

***

Darcy has assumed that Jotunheim Beast the Second was just something Brock had made up to get her alone, in a jeep, in a very beautiful part of England. The villages were stunning; they looked like Disney cartoons come to life, almost. *This is not a bad way to spend time,* she thought. She was under a blanket, with a cup of coffee, listening to music while he drove them around and peered through binoculars. Other than asking people at a petrol station--Darcy loved the phrase “petrol station,” it sounded way classier--about sightings, it was just like a regular roadtrip with a guy.
Actually, better than most of those. Brock was fun to be around: he told crazy stories, surprised her with M&Ms, and hadn’t even tried anything yet. She thought that would be the biggest surprise.

Wrong! Darcy’s brain supplied, when they’d gotten out of the jeep to look at a view of a picturesque stone village in the distance and then something really big and snuffly came lumbering out of the nearby woods. It was closer to Darcy than him. “Don’t run,” he said quietly. “Just walk, very, very slowly and calmly back to the vehicle, baby. I’m going to slow him down a little, but the gun that would stop him is still in the goddamn jeep. Fuck.” His voice was lethally serious. The beast sniffed the air. To Darcy, it sounded like a very large hog.

_Hunhhk hunhhk hunhhk._

“Go, baby,” Brock said quietly. He had a handgun.

_Very large. Fuckshitdamn_, Darcy thought. She took two steps. A third.

_Hunhhk hunhhk hunhhk._

Darcy took another three steps. The jeep seemed very far away. So far, in the beautiful, still dusk.

_Hunhhk hunhhk hunhhk._ A rustling sound, then a _thump-thump-thump_ that was the sound of it picking up speed.

“Darcy, run!” Brock yelled. He must have fired. As Darcy ran, she heard a _thump-thump-thump_. Then she heard gun go off behind her. _Pop-pop-pop-pop-pop-pop_. It sounded like he’d emptied an entire clip by the time she got to the passenger door. The Beast shrieked. It was an oddly frightening sort of squeal that echoed in the open air.

_Be unlocked, be unlocked_, she prayed. She threw the door open and dived in. She crawled immediately to the backseat. He’d shown her the gun. It had an excellent sight on it. She turned back to the open passenger door just in time to see him be thrown backwards a good ten feet.

_Fuuuuuuuuuuck_, Darcy screamed internally. She couldn’t see Brock on the ground, but she could see the Jotunheim Beast. She looked through the gunsight and made a split-second decision. She fired.

_Crack. Crack._ Her shots made contact. The Beast reared up, did that ear-piercing squeal again, and started moving towards the woods. Darcy fired again. She still couldn’t see Brock at all. The Beast disappeared into the underbrush.

_He’s dead. This is how he dies. This is why he’s unmarked_, she thought desperately. Darcy jumped out of the jeep and ran towards him, panicking. She took the gun, too. She was going to kill that fucking thing herself, if it came to that. She ran so hard she almost stepped on Brock in the dusk. She threw herself on top of him thinking, _please don’t be dead, please don’t be dead._

“Ouch, Diana,” he said. She was so happy to hear his voice, she threw her arms around his neck and started to cry in relief.

“What are you doing? Scaly Ice Bastard just grazed me,” he said, laughing, as he sat up. “You look frightened. Are you crying?”

She swatted at him, thinking _arrogant risk-taker_. 
“Hey, I’m not totally unhurt,” he complained. She started trying to haul him to the vehicle before the creature came back. He laughed and pried her loose, standing and walking to the vehicle. She gaped. “I heal fast,” he said, pulling her along. “Let’s go. Better luck tomorrow.”

Once they were back in the vehicle, Darcy leaned over and kissed him thoroughly.

“What would the beanpole say,” he said dryly, when she sat back.

She grinned. Single girl now, she wrote on her notepad.

“Good,” he said. “You feel like staying here for a few days?”

She nodded.

“I know a place,” he said, grinning. As they drove away, he looked at her. “You hit him. I’ve got STRIKE guys haven’t hit him yet.”

I did! Darcy wrote, smiling and wiggling her notepad. She added a line. I was pissed, I thought you were dead.

“I should almost die more often, it makes you more friendly,” he teased. Darcy elbowed him.

Her desire to smack him had faded by the time they got to the very nice hotel. As they went to check-in, she reached for his hand and he grinned at her.

The room had a great view, too, but she felt her eyes stray to the bed as soon as they walked in. Darcy decided to make the first move. She was still high on adrenaline. He was saying, “Um, did you want to go to--” when she walked over and kissed him. “Ah, dinner?” he repeated.

Nope, she wrote, don’t want dinner. She waggled her eyebrows suggestively. You having sex with me or what? she wrote.

“God, you’re fantastic,” he said. He kissed her, slipping his tongue in her mouth gently. Darcy felt a spike of arousal between her legs. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders, pressing her chest against him.

So good, she thought. She let him lean her back onto the bed. He felt very warm and solid on top of her. They’d been kissing for several minutes—he was very into her top lip, she guessed—when he reached for her shirt edge and she stopped him.

“What’s wrong?” Brock asked. She got her notepad.

Can I ask a question?

“Yes,” he said, nuzzling her softly.

How do you feel about soulmarks?

“Don’t have one,” he said quietly.

I have one.

“Oh,” he said. “Lucky guy.”
I’ve been waiting to meet him for awhile. Would you want one? she wrote.

“ I don’t know. Why?” Brock said. He looked all hot and bothered. Pupils dilated, mouth damp from kissing.

You don’t know? she wrote.

“In my job, no. Too dangerous—”

Oh, that’s sad, she scribbled.

“Okay, yeah, it would be nice. I envy him. Your guy,” Brock said.

Do you? she wrote. Her smile was teasing.

“Don’t rub it in, I already want to steal you,” he said. She flashed him a big smile and took her shirt off. “Jesus,” he said, kissing her again. His hands went immediately to her boobs. They’d kissed for awhile when she felt him reach around to unhook her bra.

No good, she thought.

She pulled back. “Wha—?” he said.

Bra help, grabby hands? Darcy wrote. He smirked.

“Of course,” he said. She turned. “Oh God,” he said, reaching for the clasp. “I’m so fucked up right now,” he said in a warm voice. His hands slid down. He froze.

“This is your soulmark?” he said. She heard him swallow and turned to look at him. He was blinking down at it, expressionless.
Sign Seven

Chapter Summary

I irony, right?

Chapter Notes

I own nothing! Thanks for all your awesome, hilarious, and delightful comments!

The Cotswolds

“I’m your soulmate?” he said, sounding dazed. She nodded and moved so she was facing him. She bit her lips nervously, then grinned at him, trying to get him to smile. “I’m unmarked because you ruptured your larynx yelling at Dark Elves?” he said. His voice had done this thing where it moved from surprise to delight. He started to laugh, then pulled her close to him. “This is fucking incredible,” he said. He clasped her face with his hands and kissed her passionately. Darcy was really enjoying the kiss, so much so that she was startled when she felt his tears. “Oh, baby,” he whispered. “I’ve fucked everything up so badly.” He started to cry in earnest in, weeping against her face. “I never knew, I never knew,” he repeated. She scribbled him a note, nuzzling his face.

It’s okay, I forgive you for being such a rude pain in the ass, she wrote, trying to cheer him up. Even if I’ve had to live with the world’s most asinine soulmark for my entire life.

“I wish that was all,” he said in a choked voice. He kissed her intensely. Brock pulled back for a second and looked at her. His eyes were wild. “I never had a plan for this. This is one thing I’ve never planned for,” he said.

He’s afraid, Darcy realized. He’s afraid now and he wasn’t afraid of a Jotunheim Beast. She slid up against him and tried to put as much comfort into her expression as she possibly could. They stared at each other for several long breaths. She kissed him, mouthing I’m here, I’m here, I’m here, against his lips. He looked at her and they both started stripping each other’s clothes off frantically.

Holding her in the bed later, he explained about HYDRA. “I never realized I even had the hope—” he said, then stopped. He sounded bitter. “But if I’d never taken the job, we’d have never met. That’s why Fury wanted me, you know that? Because you can’t use a soulmate as leverage against an unmarked person or trace their real identity. It’s a good plan. Fuck. Fuck.”

Fuckshittdamn, she wrote and pointed with her pen. He squinted in the low light from the lamp on the night table and chuckled. “Fuckshittdamn,” he repeated.

Nazis, really? Darcy wrote.
“Real ones, too, not those online seventeen year old dickheads,” he said, huffing out a sigh. “I’ve got to figure out how I can keep you a secret until we get these assholes.”

Yes. Darcy nodded solemnly.

“You’re not pissed I can’t quit my job?” he asked.

Darcy stroked his hair. I can wait.

“You’ll wait?” he said, smiling and palming a little bit at her boob. The man was obsessed.

I’m a lot younger than you, Boob Freak, I have plenty of time, she wrote. He barked out a laugh.

“Jesus Christ, you are so mine,” he said. “Why am I unmarked?” His voice sounded strained. “Your vocal chords are going to be fine, right?”

They think so. Darcy nodded.

“So, why don’t I have ‘I can talk now, dipshit’ on my ass?” he wondered out loud.

Hill says there’s a guy in Phoenix who studies soulmark anomalies. We can call him. She emailed me a phone number--

“Maria knew?” he said. “That sneaky little--” he began, but Darcy elbowed him.

No, no. Bad Brock, she scribbled.

“You ain’t the boss of me yet, woman,” he said, flicking her earlobe.

Wanna bet? she wrote.

He smiled. Then he flipped her over gently and kissed the lines of her soulmark. “I’m sorry I made you carry that around,” he murmured, running a finger over each line, as if he was writing it himself. “I always thought that I never had anybody, so I never worried about first words.” He put his cheek against her lower back. “I think it became a defensive mechanism.” He sat up and she looked at him. “I’d give anything to have any words from you, though. Any words at all.” She flashed him the notepad.

Shitfuckdamn?

“Even that,” he said. Then his face split into a grin. “We’d have a great story for parties.” Darcy nodded firmly.

I’m totally ratting you out as Mr. Terrible Soulmark when we go to parties, she wrote. And to all of Jane’s Nobel committee.

“I’m game,” he said smirking. “Are you game to go again?” He arched an eyebrow and shifted closer to her, sliding his hand between her thighs.

Uh-huh, she wrote. You want to look at the damn soulmark while we have sex, don’t you?

“Yeah,” he said.

Perv, she wrote. But she leaned over and kissed him anyway. He flipped her on her knees and teased her, squeezing her ass and then touching her slowly.
“You want me inside you?” Brock said, when she leaned back into his touch instinctively. She nodded and he entered her, then gripped her waist—at either side of the mark. He moved in and out of her until she was shaking and silently gasping. Darcy loved this position, especially being able to watch him in the dresser mirror across from the bed. It thrilled her to see him and feel him from this angle. He pushed her to the edge of orgasm, then slowed down to kiss her shoulders gently, and then cycled back to being more forceful. Soon she was trembling and quaking, slumped forward and breathing heavily. Jane had been telling the truth: soulmate sex was incredible. She was a little pissed that she couldn’t give him verbal encouragement. When she finally felt apart silently, he slumped next to her a few moments later. “You like that?” he teased.

*You’re such a child,* she scribbled in response. He proceeded to pinch and tickle her until she writhed and kicked at him. But the way he kept looking at her all night—as if he couldn’t quite believe his luck—was really, weirdly sweet. It made Darcy feel all the feelings.

They were both feeling warm and fuzzy when Hill telephoned in the morning. Detaching himself from Darcy’s lips, Brock picked up the burner phone. “Yeah, Maria?” he said, laughing as Darcy nibbled his earlobe.

“That’s very polite,” Hill said coolly.

“Sorry--Jesus Christ, Darcy,” he said. She had her hand down his boxers.

“Please tell me you’re not having sex?” Hill said.

“How wide is your definition of sex? Pretty wide, right? Hey, can you answer a question for me? How do lesbians define infidelity? Is kissing just as bad as below the waist action when you’re both girls? Smith and Hernandez had this debate on the quinjet once--” Brock asked. He was trying to get her to hang up. A call meant they wanted him back in London, probably.

“Dear God,” Hill said. “I’m letting Sharon shoot you next time.” Darcy was shaking with silent laughter at the foot of the bed, stark naked. “Just tell me if you’ve shot it yet?”

“No,” he said. “Darcy did wound him though. I was gonna track him whenever we’ve stopped--”

“Don’t say it,” Hill said. “Darcy shot it?”

“You say that like she didn’t tase Thor? My soulmate is a little tiger, really, you should see--”

“Spare me,” Hill said.

“Can you get me the soulmark anomaly scientist soon? We got questions,” he said.

“Yes,” she said, sighing.

They spent the afternoon tracking the Jotunheim Beast. Brock taught her how to use the cool SHIELD gunsight that could see through trees and walls. “Cool, right?” he said.

She nodded, grinning. *Awesome,* she wrote.

“That’s my girl,” he said. “I just wish we could find this thing.” They’d lost the blood trail near where Darcy had shot it before.
Climb a tree? Darcy wrote.

“Nah,” he said. “Let’s go back to the hotel instead, have some room service and sex.”

I approve of this plan, she wrote, grinning.

***

It was the post-sex telephone conversation with the scientist in Arizona that brought them back down to Earth with a thud that afternoon. Brock had been scant on details--Maria had patched them through anonymously and Darcy was listening on speaker--but explained that he was unmarked and his soulmate had laryngitis. “So, doc, is there a time limit on the initial conversation and that’s why I don’t have one?” Brock asked.

“I’m afraid not. In all the cases I’ve looked at--soulmates who met when one stepped onto transportation or an elevator or where one party was temporarily mute--there were still two soulmarks, even if the second soulmark represented a delayed conversation,” he said, sighing.

“Why are you sighing?” Brock asked carefully.

“I think it’s more likely that the reason you’re unmarked is that one of you passes away before she says the words. I’m very sorry, son,” he said. There was a long moment of silence in the hotel room. A suddenly-hurt Darcy could hear the radiator hiss and the sounds of the other guests. It felt like something inside her was bleeding.

“Yeah,” Brock said quietly. “I appreciate your help, doctor.”

“If anything changes, let me know,” the scientist said.

When he’d hung up the phone, Brock looked at Darcy. “It’s me,” he said. “My luck’s gonna run out soon.” His expression had gone blank again.

You don’t know that, she wrote, underlining the third word fiercely.

“Sure I do. I never had anything that I cared about losing before. It’s ironic, isn’t it? Like one of those Greek plays. Guy lives because he believes he has no soulmate, meets his mute soulmate, dies immediately. Shakespeare would love that shit. C’mere,” he said, holding his arms out. She curled up around his chest and he rubbed her back.

I don’t believe it, she wrote stubbornly.

“Yeah, you do. You do believe. Why’d you stay with Foster?” he asked. Darcy blanched. “Uh-huh,” he said. “For me. I wonder how long we have?”

Maybe it will be years, she said.

“What you going to do, maintain your laryngitis by injuring yourself?” he asked. She narrowed her eyes thoughtfully. “Baby, no,” he said, shaking his head. They were still laying there when he froze. “If it’s them”—them meant HYDRA—”then I want you as far away from wherever I am as possible,” he said. “They’d kill us both.”

I’m not leaving you, she wrote.
“Yes, yes you are,” he insisted.

It was difficult to have a fight on notepaper, but they did it.
They stayed at the hotel for a week, alternating between wild fights and passionate sex. On the sixth
day, they found the Jotunheim Beast in a field. He’d been lightly injured by Darcy, but was
essentially frolicking in a field. *He looks like Ferdinand the Bull,* Darcy thought. If she’d been
speaking, she would have *awwww’d.*

“Look at him,” Brock said, shaking his head. “No idea what’s about to happen.” They were on a
slight hill, yards and yards away. Brock was funny about her taking risks now. Darcy and Jane had
been exchanging texts about his paranoia. He had the gun on his shoulder when he stopped and
sighed. “I can’t do it,” he told Darcy. “I can’t shoot him. I’m going to call Maria and get the tranq
gun. We’ll put them in a nature park somewhere.”

They ended up moving both beasts to Scotland by truck. Once they were safely sedated, Brock let
Darcy pet one. It snored. It was going to make a great Highland tourist attraction, just like that hot
dude from *Outlander.*

***

Darcy looked at her own hot dude when they got back to London. They weren’t disclosing their true
relationship, since anyone could be HYDRA. He looked miserable. On a micro-Post-It, she wrote: *I
[heart] u.* Then she passed it to him as she left the coffee line.

“Shut up, I should have never taught you the pass a flashdrive trick,” he muttered, pausing for a
second. “Don’t make me cry in front of Jack.”

*Jane’s mom’s tonight?*

“Yeah, yeah,” he said. With the beasts contained, he and Jack were being recalled to DC tomorrow.
He and Darcy were pretending to be hooking up casually, but nothing more.
That night on the air mattress in Jane’s mom’s junk room, he sighed. “I hate that I’m leaving. I want you and Jane to get as far away from DC or any major SHIELD office, all right? No SHIELD guards, either. I don’t trust anybody but Thor.” Thor had returned while they were in the Cotswolds, to Brock’s evident relief. They could talk freely because he and Jane and Darcy had turned the house over looking for bugs and found two. The bugs were currently on the flowerpots in Jane’s mom’s garden, so they were picking up cricket sounds and faint television sounds, but nothing of importance.

"Got it. I know the rules: no guards, no phone calls, no discussion of marks," she wrote. They had a whole plan. He was returning to DC to stop a weaponized surveillance program called Project Insight. If everything went well, he’d come back to her once HYDRA had been routed. She had been very definite on that. It was their primary source of fights. He’d wanted her to give him up, find someone safer. She’d insisted that wasn’t how having a freaking soulmate worked.

“Good,” he said. “Jane told me you might go to Hawaii? To my knowledge, they’re not doing much there, but be careful. I’ll have someone else ship you a crate once you’re settled in,” he said. “Put some Sig Hauers in it, a few knives, Smith & Wesson, that sort of thing,” he said, sighing.

"Why can’t we talk by email? Burner phones? Something?" He’d made it clear that they might no see each other for a year or more. Source of fights number two, really.

“No,” he said firmly. “Too dangerous for you. You’re already a target as Jane’s assistant. I want you to go to a range—"

"Yes, yes, I know. Shoot all the things, trust no one, be a badass. I did tase Thor, you know? Have you seen him? He’s big.

“Uh-huh,” Brock said flatly.

"If you believe Jane, very big, she wrote, grinning.

“Sure,” he said dryly. “I better not hear you’re stepping out on me with your friend’s guy, woman—"

"You cannot expect me to be faithful. I have needs," she joked, but one look at his face had her scratching it out and writing, kidding, kidding. He’d looked miserable.

“Goddammit," he muttered, kissing her forehead. “I, uh, I--shit--I”

"You love me. Jesus, I know that.

“Good,” he said.

"A really manly guy would be able to say it, thought.

“Shut up,” he said, pulling her close. “I love you,” he whispered.

"I like you okay, she wrote. The abs are a very good selling point.

She had to pretend to care about Science! and helping Jane pack up at the field office when he left the next day. There was no in-person goodbye. She wouldn’t be able to speak to him for months,
best-case scenario. It was incredibly miserable.

***

2014
Hawaii
Haleakalā Observatory

“Please can we get froyo?” Darcy asked. “Today’s flavor is Crazy for Coconut. When you add almonds and chocolate sauce, it tastes like Almond Joy. You love Almond Joys.”

“Nope. Work,” Jane said. It was a sunny afternoon and Darcy wanted to go for ice cream. Unfortunately, Thor was off-planet and so couldn’t be used to bargain with Jane--Jane had trouble denying Thor things when he pouted. She had no such qualms with Darcy. Darcy had had to pull the “My Soulmate and I are Tragically Separated, I Need Chocolate” card a few times in the eight months they’d been in Hawaii.

“Excuse me?” a voice said.

“Please tell me you want froyo, my dude?” Darcy said to the cute stranger.

“Um, no. I’m with SHIELD,” the man said, coming up to Jane and Darcy in the observatory parking lot. “Grant Ward,” he said. “Fury sent me to act as your temporary security...we have a situation in DC.”

“Oh, no,” Darcy said, with false alarm. Jane had talked to Fury the week before; no mention of Ward.

“We probably should go inside,” Jane said frowning. “Wouldn’t want to be overheard discussing...situations outside.”

“Yeah,” Ward said. “Lead the way, ladies?”

“Would you mind helping us with these bags?” Darcy asked, smiling.

“No problem,” Ward said. As soon as he had his back turned towards the station-wagon’s hatchback, Darcy tased him. He jerked and went down with a groan. Darcy tased him a second time, then rolled him over. Jane used the handcuffs from Brock’s safety gear crate to restrain his arms behind him, then they took his cyanide and his weapons.

“Oooh, Jane, good time,” Darcy said. On the ground, Ward groaned.

“How long?” Jane asked.

“We’ve got it down to two minutes, fifteen seconds,” Darcy said. They’d both learned how to stash things--knives, tasers, guns, zip-ties disguised as recycled plastic bracelets--on them in case of emergency over the last six months. Darcy was on a first-name basis with the local gun range and had taken up kick-boxing on Wednesdays and krav maga classes on Saturdays. For Jane, she
recommended yoga because, well, Jane hit people enough.

“Oooh, is this a new sight? Sweet,” Darcy said, pulling it out of Ward’s coat. “I’m keeping this.”

“Improvement on the old one,” Ward muttered, his face in the oil-slicked asphalt.

“Why are you here, Grantie?” Darcy asked casually.

“Yeah, asshole,” Jane said, her foot making contact with Ward’s ribs. “Why are you lurking outside my lab?”

“Jane, what have I told you about kicking? Besides, this is technically a public street,” Darcy said.

“He’s HYDRA, you know he is,” Jane said.

“You know?” Grant said.

“Duh,” Darcy said. “We’re smart girls, asshat. She has a PhD.”

“What was your plan?” Jane said lethally. “I can have you tortured on Asgard.” Ward swallowed.

“It’s the most extraordinary sort of rendition there is,” Darcy said sweetly. “They can keep you alive for eons in agonizing pain with Loki’s magic. Well, I mean, you’ll be alive, but they start with your fingers and toes. They’re really into knives and medieval-ish torture up there. How attached are you to your ears and nose, by the by?”

“I was gonna pretend to be taking you to Fury, there would be an emergency, we’d reroute you to a base,” Ward said flatly.

“Is this anything to do with Project Insight?” Darcy said.

“You know about that?” he said, sounding shocked.

“We know everything, asshole. Everything,” Jane hissed. “Flash the sign for Heimdall, Darce.”

“Ah, Jane, why’d you have to go to ten?” Darcy asked a few minutes later. They’d attached a purple weather-proofed sign to the top of the car-- **THOR PHONE JANE**-- and gone back to check on Ward, still on the ground. “He’s peed himself and fainted.”

“Great,” Jane said. “You’re not getting in my car,” she told the prone man.

“He can’t hear you. I’ll get the lab tarp,” Darcy said. “Zip-tie his legs.”

They were trying to wrestle him into the tarp when Jane made a horrified sound. “Did he pee again?” Darcy said. She looked at Jane. Jane had gone pale. “What, Jane?” Darcy said, tugging at her tank top where it had ridden up as she wrestled a prone Ward.

“Your soulmark is--is changing--it looks funny,” Jane said.

Darcy ran to the side mirror of the station wagon and yanked her shirt off. She was standing in the parking lot in her sports bra trying to crane her head around at the right angle. Jane stood in front of her. Even Jane looked frightened. “What’s happening?” she asked Darcy, trying to peer over her
Darcy looked at her soulmark. It hadn’t changed. It was slowly vanishing, leaching out of her skin, like ink being spilled in reverse.

As she watched in horror, her soulmark disappeared altogether. “Jane, it’s gone. It’s gone. He’s gone. He’s gone--” Darcy said, shaking. Jane had to catch her as she stumbled and turned incoherent, wept, then went totally silent. It was like she couldn’t speak again. Her eyes were glassy and unseeing.

Thor arrived fifteen minutes later, while Jane was trying to get someone at SHIELD. No one was answering the phones. Thirty minutes later, CNN began showing footage of a burning Triskelion as Jane and Thor watched in horror. Darcy had not spoken since the parking lot. “What do we do?” Jane asked.

“I shall take you both to Asgard for safety. The healers will see if there is anything they can do for her. The shock of losing a soulmark--” Thor stopped. Jane had raised an arm to stop him from continuing.

“Don’t say it,” Jane told him sternly. Losing a soulmate was often fatal to the surviving partner. They wasted away. “Darce, do you want to go?” she asked gently. Darcy was sitting upright, but showed no signs of true consciousness. Her open eyes were expressionless. Jane sighed. “It reminds me of my cousin’s grand mal seizures. He would be out for hours like this,” she said. “It took him time to come to--I think we should take her soon.”

“We will go,” Thor agreed. “The healers are quite skilled, Jane.”

“Let’s get him to the damn police station,” she said, gesturing to a terrified and duct taped Ward. He tried to wiggle away in his rolling chair. “Stop moving or I’ll hit you again,” Jane said.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry. So sorry, like, super sorry, my bad. Sorry, sorry, sorry.
Bethesda, Maryland

Walter Reed National Military Medical Center

“He’s alive?” Steve said, sitting up in his hospital bed. He could see Phil Coulson in the hallway. At least, it looked like Phil. Sounded like Phil, too.

“Who?” Sam asked.

“That man, that’s Phil,” Steve said. “Phil!”

Phil walked away. “Where’s he going?” Steve wondered. “I thought Phil was a big Cap fan?”

“Yeah, I’m sure he likes baseball caps,” Sam said dryly.

“That’s not---” Steve said.

“There’s no way that sentence can end that won’t make you sound vain,” Sam told him. “Can I eat this Jell-O?”

“Yeah,” Steve said. “I hate the green Jell-O.”

“Let’s get some Marvin Gaye up in here, you ain’t dead yet, Grandpa,” Sam said, fiddling with his phone.

“Don’t call me Grandpa.”

“Pop-Pops?” Sam suggested.

“Nope.”

“My cousin is from Georgia, they saw Paw-Paw, how you feel about that?” Sam asked curiously.
“I want my Jell-O back,” Steve said.

“No take backs once my mouth has hit the spoon, Paw-Paw,” Sam said.

***

Phil met Maria in Rumlow’s room. “He’s going to pull through?” he asked. He looked over. In a plastic chair, Jack Rollins was snoring.

“Probably,” Maria said. “That’s what they told Rollins. Have you heard from Foster and Lewis?”

“No trace,” Phil said, shaking his head. “I assume they’re with Thor on Asgard, because he left Grant Ward with Maui Homicide, but I don’t have access to Asgardian communication.”

“Ravens,” Maria said, shaking her head.

“Hey, hey--” the burned man in the bed said in a cracked whisper.

“Rumlow?” Phil said, leaning in close to the man’s face. “Can you talk? Do you know what day it is?”

“Oh, nope. I’m not Spiderman now, right?” Brock asked, sounding utterly serious.

“You were half-dead when they pulled you out of the building and then you died twice on the operating table. You were gone for nine minutes total,” Phil said, almost sternly.

“I came back twice? I’m badass,” he said.

“Be serious,” Maria said.

“Sorry, Dad, I would have been home in time for dinner, but that building just went whoosh. I want to be a really badass superhero now that I’m back from the dead, though. Better suit. I’m thinking black with a skull--”

“Brock, really, be serious,” Phil said. Brock’s eyes moved around the room.

“Hi, Mom,” he said to Maria. “Are you crying?”

“No,” Maria said, blinking. Rumlow chuckled dryly. He’d breathed in dust and debris that had left his throat aching.

“She’s crying,” he whispered to Phil.

“You made Mom cry,” Phil said. “Are you proud of yourself?”

“Oh, yeah,” Rumlow said, nodding. “Big day.”

“You’re ridiculous, you asshole,” Maria said.

“I agree,” Phil said.
“Can I get some water?” Brock asked. Phil went to the plastic water pitcher. Rollins snored and stirred again. He’d been keeping watch in Brock’s room since they pulled Rumlow from the collapsed building and realized he was barely alive.

“You’ve been badly burned,” Maria said in a rushed, weepy voice.

“You don’t say?” Rumlow said. “Where’s my girl? I wanna see my girl.”

Phil sighed and brought him the plastic cup and straw.

“We think she’s on Asgard, but we don’t have a raven,” Maria explained softly.

“Well, get her back,” he said. “Send Kangaroo Jack to the bird store, his people talk to koalas and shit.” He sipped through the straw. “Can I get something stronger than this?” he asked, after a pause.

“No,” Phil and Maria said in unison. Jack stirred and woke up.

“What’s going on? Brock, you’re awake?” he said.

“Good news, Jack, you can talk like Crocodile Dundee again. I need you to go get me a raven, though, or a good-sized parakeet—” Brock said.

“A what?” Jack said.


***

Asgard

The Royal Palace

“Darce, please talk to me,” Jane whispered. Darcy had been revived from her catatonic state within minutes of arriving, but she was a shadow of her old, lively self. The healers had tried all kinds of things: tonics, herbal rubs, the Soul Forge, yet nothing worked. The kitchen staff—remembering her as the jolly girl who loved their desserts—had stepped in and tried to weave their magics, too: Asgardian plum cake, puff pastries, tarts, cookies, mousses, even the mead cakes normally served at weddings. But Darcy still lost weight. She was pale and listless. It was like she was fading, Jane thought in horror.

“What would you like me to say?” Darcy said, looking out the window. Outside, rain fell. Even the weather on Asgard seemed to be under a spell of gloominess and despair.

“Anything?” Jane said. She did not know what to do. Finally, Jane stood up. “I think we should stay for awhile, what do you think?” she asked Darcy.

“Whatever you want to do,” Darcy said in a dull voice.
“Is there somebody you’d like to see?” Jane asked, then realized her mistake and cringed.

“It’s okay, Jane,” Darcy whispered.

Everyone in Asgard had tried something for Darcy. Thor had given hugs and taken her to pet all the Asgardian horses and semi-domesticated wolves. Loki had been briefly freed and attempted magic and then stomped off to the jail cells when he failed, muttering in frustration. He did not take failure well. The Warriors of Asgard plied their respective skills: Fandral had tried flirtation, Volstagg had tooted her around and tossed her like a five year old, and Sif had attempted to engage her in polite conversation about her taser, even though Sif regarded it as a lowly, unworthy sort of weapon. Only Hogun, who sat quietly and said nothing at all, merely rearranged stones in her chamber’s bell jar, seemed to make any headway. She asked to see him again and they sat together in the afternoons, silent and still. Jane—used to activity—was practically mad with anxiety. Hogun shook his head at her and tsk-tsk’d. He thought Jane needed to pace herself.

They had made one mistake: no one had thought to ask Heimdall. Darcy’s soulmark was very firmly gone, so no one had queried the all-seeing guard about what he saw. And he had so much to see, after all, that it was easy to miss one man if you were not particularly looking for him. Midgardians tended to slip through the cracks at the best of times, much less when buildings collapsed and everyone had secret identities and bases.

***

Temporary SHIELD facility

Undisclosed Location

“Hey, Maria, what do you think of Crossbones as a new name?” Brock asked. His SHIELD therapist was teaching him stretches to ease his tight skin. He’d lost muscle mass in the hospital, but would make a full, if scarified, recovery. He was doing physical therapy in the new temporary facility where they were deciding what to do next with all the surviving agents and organizational resources. SHIELD’s funding had been yanked, so some agents were being farmed to different agencies: Homeland, CIA, FBI. Brock was in limbo; his burns made him too injured to work right this second, but he was pushing for a future identity as an undercover agent, half-seriously. He’d been very dedicated to his PT, but he pestered Maria about Darcy or his new alter ego, she knew, just to pass the time. They hadn’t been able to contact Asgard. It had been weeks. Rumlow bugged everyone, everyday, calling Hill, Fury, Phil. Maria suspected he’d even phoned a few members of the diplomatic community, trying to figure out how they managed their Asgardian diplomatic cables.

“I’m not letting you tell people you’re an insane, scarred mercenary now, that’s just stealing from Deadpool,” Maria said.

“Hey, I’m much tougher than him, he’s a pretty boy,” Brock insisted. “I heard he was from Canada.”
“I think you’re prettier than Deadpool anyway, mate,” Jack said from the corner. He was reading an Australian sports magazine.

“Thank you,” Brock said politely. “My hair is still good, too.”

“Duly noted,” Maria said, rolling her eyes.

“Send Carter down to play with us, Maria?” Brock asked. “I want to use her CIA clearances to shoot some stuff. I’m bored.”

“No,” Maria said, getting up.

“Can you get me Tony Stark’s number?” Brock asked suddenly.

“He does not have a rocket to Asgard,” Maria said firmly. “Do not let him put you on anything, he hates us.”

***

Paris, France

The Louvre

A raven with a distinctly naughty expression landed on IM Pei’s glass pyramid, then flew into a window that was mysteriously left open by a museum cleaning crew on the night shift. The raven made a sound that was oddly like laughter.

“Where are you, beauty?” Loki queried. He was looking for the Midgardians’ famous Mona Lisa. He was going to steal her and hold her for ransom. Things were entirely too boring on Asgard. Even Darcy—Darcy!—was just dull these days. Poor thing, he thought. Perhaps some art would make her rooms in the palace more cheery? He wondered what she would like, then consulted his little pocket guide to Paris museums. All the pretty Monets and Degas ballerinas were in a different museum. “Must everything be so drearily complicated?” he said, sighing, as he turned a corner into the proper gallery. She should be here. He shined his light. “Oh,” he said, deflating. “You are both smaller and less attractive than I imagined. What a letdown,” he told the Mona Lisa.

***

A SHIELD Quinjet

Somewhere near NYC

“So, what you’re fucking telling me is, we can’t get a damn phone line to Asgard, but he can get out and go on a fucking shopping spree at the most famous art museums in the world in one night?”
Brock asked Maria.

“Language,” Steve and Jack said at once. They were going to apprehend Loki. He’d stolen the
*Mona Lisa*, several Degas ballerinas, and a Seurrat in Paris, and was allegedly last spotted in New
York, casing the Museum of Modern Art.

“I think he will go for something edgier now,” Natasha said. “His other choices were
terribly...comfortable.”

They landed the quinjet in Central Park and then sped by cars and motorcycles to the museum
several blocks away. Everything *looked* quiet, but it felt wrong to Brock. “I want to go in,” he said.

“Rumlow,” Cap said. Steve thought Brock was itchy. He understood it, of course, because of Peggy,
but it could prove dangerous on a mission.

“Oh, let him in,” Natasha said. “I broke in three minutes ago.”

“You never follow orders,” Steve groused.

“You are a skilled liar, but I know no such bullets exist and you would be a terrible lot of trouble if
you damaged these priceless works of art,” Loki said. He disappeared with a *whoosh*. *Starry Night*
clattered to the floor.

“Shit,” Brock muttered. “She thinks I’m dead?”

“I’ll pick up the Van Gogh,” Jack said. Only he pronounced it “Van Goff” in the European style.

“What?” Brock said.

***

Asgard

The Palace Complex

“Where is Loki? His cell is empty,” Thor asked the guards. “Men?” he said. He poked them. One
snored, the other fell over. “The Eyes Awake Sleep Spell,” Thor grumbled. “Not again, Loki!”
He went to Heimdall. “Can you see my brother?”

“Yes,” Heimdall said. “But I have other news of greater importance. Your Lightning Sister’s soulmate lives.”

“What?” Thor said, nearly dropping Mjolnir. “I do apologize,” he told the hammer sweetly. Thor loved Mjolnir with the tenderness most men reserved for a favorite, elderly dog.

“He is at present trying to apprehend your brother in New York alongside Captain Rogers and the others,” Heimdall said.

“How did you not know he lived until tonight?” Thor asked, dumbfounded.

“Perhaps someone should have asked me? It is not as if I watch everyone as they use the facilities, either. I am a polite man,” Heimdall said mildly. Thor swung the hammer. It was the fastest way to Jane and Darcy. “Not through my walls, please,” Heimdall said.

***

New York City

MOMA

There was a crack of thunder as they emerged from the building. “Is that Thor?” Jack called. There was a small courtyard with tables and pools of water outside the museum. They had lost Loki.

“Yes!” Brock yelled. “Motherfucker, let this be him,” he said hopefully.

“Language,” Steve said over comms. He was still sweeping the building with Natasha.

There was no response on the other end. Thor had landed with Mjolnir, but he was carrying a tiny passenger. Her dark hair blew in the wind. Brock started to run. He had his arms around her before he could even find his words. He had already decided what he wanted to say. Thor chuckled; then swung Mjolnir again. He had seen Loki a few blocks away, but been looking for Rumlow.

“You asshole,” she yelled. “Why didn’t you send a raven? I thought you were dead!”

“I love you, too,” he said.

They both stared at each other for a long moment. He smirked.

“Oh, no,” she mouthed, without sound. He grinned and then turned her around and lifted the edge of her shirt. Where his old soulmark had been, there was a neat line: I love you, too.

She helped him scramble out of his shirt in the dark and scanned his back. No mark. She felt a pang of disappointment, then he turned and she saw it. His was on the back of his forearm, in an elegant cursive. “That’s badass, everyone will be able to see it,” he said cheerfully. “Hey, come check out our new soulmarks!” he yelled to Jack. He turned back to Darcy. “I’m still not used to you talking,”
he said slyly. “What kind of sex noises--wait, no, don’t tell me, I want to be surprised.”

“You’re such an asshole,” she said, crying and kissing his face and neck.

“That’s why it’s the perfect soulmark, baby,” he said. “They’re perfect.”

Chapter End Notes

I think Troll!Brock is my new favorite Brock, honestly. He's so fun!

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